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READING WITH BELIEF: LITERARY ROMANCE IN GOETHE, SHAKESPEARE, AND HITCHCOCK

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Introduction. Reading with Belief

The kinds of literary works that it is possible to categorize under the heading of "romance" are extraordinarily diverse. Something that links many of these works together, however, is the following: it is on some level assumed of them that they enable their readers temporarily to escape from reality. A case in point is of course the modern-day industry of the Harlequin romance, which presents its readership with what has indeed been described as a form of escape.[1] Yet the canon of more prestigious literature offers numerous examples as well. Most famous in this regard is undoubtedly the knight of La Mancha: Cervantes' Don Quixote reads so many "books of chivalry" that he begins to live more in them than in the world around him. Something of a distant cousin to him is Flaubert's Madam Bovary, who similarly tries to find in reality the passion and excitement she has encountered in love stories. Another example would be that of Paolo and Francesca in Dante's *Inferno* - two lovers led to commit the sin of adultery by following the lead of characters in an Arthurian romance. And all of these examples would be supported by the peculiar role that romance literature plays in the *Reminiscences* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The young Ignatius "was much given to reading worldly and false books, which they normally call 'tales of chivalry;' the first indication of his saintly calling, however, is that he recognizes the vanity of such books: he is given "a life of Christ and...the lives of the saints" to read, and begins to prefer them to *Amadis of Gaul*.[2] Over and over again, what is suggested is that romance beckons its readers to accept as real a world that is actually just imaginary or made-up. And the implication is generally that readers who answer romance's call, so to speak, are engaging in some sort of questionable behavior. For they are essentially ignoring, it would seem, that which really exists in order to indulge themselves in wish-fulfilling fantasies.

[1] Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1991).
[2] Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 14-15.

When it comes to talking about romance, however, the above paragraph is far from the final word.[3] For, while the above examples might suggest that romance literature is tantamount simply to "bad" literature, or that the experience of reading it is somehow puerile and second-rate, other sorts of examples present a very different picture. Cervantes may not have liked "books of chivalry," yet his own *Persiles and Sigismunda*, the book he most prided himself on, is just as much a romance as is *Amadis of Gaul*.[4] And when it comes to the example of St. Ignatius, it has to be remarked that the line between "worldly and false" romances and the lives of the saints is sometimes surprisingly thin. The story of St. George slaying the dragon, after all, is in some sense the model upon which many chivalric tales are based.[5] In addition to this, there are certain works that we tend to think of as romances, yet for which the above characterization of romance is clearly insufficient. What is one to make of a work like Shakespeare's *Tempest*, or of

[3] There would be another way – in addition to the one suggested in this paragraph – to demonstrate the truth of this sentence. It is a surprising fact, namely, that, at least according to one commentator, the "first author [of *Amadis of Gaul*] seems to have been…very possibly a cleric. In fact, his work quite obviously was intended originally to be a moralizing admonishment to the nobility and to the crown itself." Edwin B. Place, "Preface," in *Amadis of Gaul: Books I and II* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 13. To be sure, this is perhaps not all that surprising when one just takes the book alone into account. Considering the status this book generally has when it is talked about in *other* books, however, it is astonishing. And truly even more striking is what Montalvo, the author of the Spanish *Amadis* published in 1508, writes in his preface. For, first of all, he explicitly points out that the events in the book are partly fabricated – so apparently Don Quixote skipped the preface. And, secondly, he thinks the book is supposed to help readers to their "salvation," and that it contains "good examples and teachings" (19). Yet this is somehow a description of the same book that almost prevented Ignatius from becoming a saint! On the one hand, it is probable that Montalvo describes the book as so morally edifying in order to ensure it was well received. He closes by saying he "firmly…believe[s] in everything the Holy Church holds to." At the same time, however, what seems to be coming to the surface here is a kind of inherent ambiguity. These stories really can be seen as *both* morally edifying *and* as condemnable.

[4] Thomas Pavel, *The Lives of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013), 110-111. See also Celia Richmond Weller and Clark A. Colahan, "Introduction," in *The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda, A Northern Story* (Berkeley: U of California, 1989. As Weller and Clark write: "From the popularity of the books of chivalry the rule makers did learn to appreciate the role of attention-getting but frankly unbelievable (and so unacceptable) details: magic, exaggerated combat heroics, dragons…and the like, all of which were referred to as 'the marvelous.' These strategies…were certainly effective. Could there not be a way to legitimize them, that is, to keep their impact without the blatant reminder that fiction is basically a lie – a recounting of something that never happened… (6)?

[5] Jocabus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Selections* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 116-120.

a majority of the films by Alfred Hitchcock? To be sure, both *The Tempest*[6] and Hitchcock[7] have at times been criticized for being something like second-rate art or mere entertainment. Yet the abundance of critical literature on these works is enough to suggest that this is not what readers usually think of them. Evidently, if works such as the lives of the saints, or *The Tempest*, or Hitchcock films enable - like typical romances - their readers to indulge in a wish-fulfilling fantasy or to inhabit the world of make-believe, the way in which they do this must be special. It seems, in other words, that there must be a certain aspect of romance literature which somehow beckons to its reader's imagination without thereby becoming merely a temporary means of escape from the ordinary or necessary. Yet when romance manages to do this, how exactly is one to explain what is happening?

This dissertation is an attempt to answer this question. And, while the specific answer it suggests will need to be clarified and argued for over the course of the following four chapters, the basic idea of this answer is easy enough to summarize. In a word, romance enables us, not to escape from reality, but rather to arrive at a new sort of conception of what reality is. To be more specific, what romance enables us to see is that reality is in a certain sense infinite. Or, to formulate it a bit differently, it enables us to see that reality is inexpressibly unique, in the sense that it would be impossible for anything ever to replace it or to stand in for it. Naturally, this may seem like an ironic thing for any work of art to be saying. As an imitation, or representation, in some form or another, what art perhaps inevitably seems to be doing is standing in for

[6] The *locus classicus*, as it were, is "The Induction on the Stage" in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). We are told here that the author of this play "is loth to make nature afraid in his plays, like those that beget *Tales, Tempests,* and such like drolleries." *Ben Jonson, Volpone and Other Plays* (London: Penguin, 2004), 334. The references, it seems, are to Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* and *Tempest*. This passage comes of course from another play, yet there are many examples of critics shaking their heads over these late works by Shakespeare.

[7] It is worth recalling that the very first sentence of Robin Wood's 1965 *Hitchcock's Films* is "Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?" Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films* (London: The Tantivy Press, 1977), 29. We have since been given ample reason to take him seriously. Part of what I am arguing here, however, is that the impression that these films might be seen as trivial should really never go away, is intrinsic to the films themselves.

something. Yet the distinguishing mark of romance is precisely that it attempts to imitate reality only in order to showcase the impossibility of ever actually doing this. Romance, one might say, *knows* that reality is unique and thus cannot be imitated. It joyfully tries to do so anyways, however, out of a kind of love for reality. The point is that its failure in this regard is the best indication of what reality is like, or that this failure gives rise to a new-found sense of reality's uniqueness. By drawing attention to its own inability to imitate reality, therefore, one might say that romance *does* convey reality – or *is* true to it. Being true to reality here, however, essentially means showing that the world which romance most directly presents is not what reality is.

To be sure, the claim that romance literature fails to imitate reality should initially strike one as obvious. For, though the word "romance" is difficult to pin down, what it generally refers to is a kind of literature that is imaginary, unbelievable, and thus patently unreal. In his series of talks, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, Northrop Frye frames his discussion by reflecting more precisely on what it is that words such as "reality" or "imagination" mean in the context of literature. According to Frye, "the imagination…is the constructive power of the mind, the power of building unities out of units;" and the means by which it carries out this "building" are what Frye refers to as "formulas" or "conventions": "the formulaic unit…is the cornerstone of the creative imagination." Reality, on the other hand, is "whatever the imagination works with that is not itself…the sense of otherness, the resistance of the material, the feeling that there is something to be overcome, or at least struggled with." Reality, in short, is something like the "material" which the formulas and patterns of the constructive imagination hold together.[8] Regardless of how basic such notions of "reality" and "imagination" might seem, they do offer one explanation for why it is that some works of

[8] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976), 35-37.

literature appear to be more "imaginary" than others. On Frye's account, if romance literature is characteristically imaginary, what this means is that it is conspicuously formulaic and conventional.[9] At this basic starting point, in other words, the notion of romance refers, not to anything as specific as a genre, but rather simply to works of literature in which the same sorts of formulas or patterns can easily be seen to recur. Because of this feature of romance, one might say that, if romance appears to be imaginary or "made-up," the reason for this is that what it presents to us are the ways in which the human mind typically makes or orders things. What we see in romance, that is, is transparently a human creation or the product of human convention. And it is certainly telling, in this respect, that romances are sometimes thought of as being mere copies of each other, as if what happens is that many authors simply reuse a given pattern until it becomes conventionalized.

A central claim of this dissertation, however, is that, when it comes to romance and conventionality, there is a somewhat different way in which the relationship between these terms can be construed. For, if conventionality is understood only in the sense just described, it is clear that, if romance literature is conspicuously formulaic and conventional, all this means is that it is not very interesting. Yet the crucial thing to note is that there exists a sort of conventionality which, when it is recognized, causes a given work to appear, not boring or predictable, but rather excitingly and unexpectedly complex. For the thing about this other sort of conventionality is that it questions the status of the picture of things which a given work most ostensibly seems to present; or it suggests that the actual content of this work is somehow other than what it initially seems to be. The following four chapters will illustrate this phenomenon in various ways. It will

[9] A similar idea is implicitly articulated by Frank Kermode in his chapter on "Literary Fiction and Reality" in *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 127-152. As he writes: "[The history of the novel] is an attempt to evade the laws of what Scott called 'the land of fiction' – the stereotypes which ignore reality, and whose remoteness from it we identify as absurd…a 'realistic poetry'…cannot work with the old hero, or with the old laws of the land of romance…" (128-129).

be helpful, however, for the sake of introduction, to have a preliminary example to draw on. And a sufficiently well-known one that might serve for this purpose is a scene from Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959). Everybody knows the scene in the center of this film, in which Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) is attacked in an Illinois cornfield by a rogue crop-duster. For our present purposes, the scene is already of interest due to what Hitchcock says about it in his interviews with François Truffaut:

> I'll tell you how the idea came about. I found I was faced with the old cliché situation: the man who is put on the spot, probably to be shot. Now, how is this usually done? A dark night at a narrow intersection of the city. The waiting victim standing in a pool of light under the street lamp... Now, what was the antithesis of a scene like this? No darkness, no pool of light…Just nothing. Just bright sunshine and a blank open countryside….[10]

According to Hitchcock, in short, a primary goal of shooting this scene in the way that he did was to avoid a cliché or convention. What he is doing here, it seems, is purposefully not imitating the sorts of cinematic models that would have most readily presented themselves.

Strictly speaking, in light of the notions of imagination and reality outlined above, if Hitchcock thus avoids using trite conventions in this scene, the result of this should be a scene that to some degree strikes us as real. Certainly, a person getting attacked by a crop-duster is not exactly an everyday occurrence. The point, however, is that the scene should strike us as real in the sense that it clearly is not just rehashing an old formula, or in the sense that it actually makes contact with reality, so to speak, in such a way that it is not transparently motivated by the imagination. Yet, if this is so, then there is something remarkable about this scene – the fact, namely, that, though it evidently leaves trite conventions behind, it does this, not simply by presenting "reality," but by picking up on conventions of a somewhat different order. For, to anyone familiar with Baroque iconography, the images of the crop-dusting airplane in *North by*

[10] François Truffaut, *Hitchcock : Revised Edition* (New York : Simon and Shuster, 1984), 256.

Northwest are potentially evocative of something. The head-on shots of this airplane, namely, potentially bring to mind images such as the one below:[11]

[11] The image is of a "broadside" that can today be found in the collection of the British Museum. It is titled "Fleuch wa du willt, Des todtes Bild, Staetz auff dich Zielt," which are the words written across the top edge. What follows are the comments on the piece provided by the curator in the British Museum's online catalogue: "Death aims his crossbow at you, with a bolt labelled Heute (today); a used one labelled Gestern (yesterday) lies at his feet, another is in his quiver for Morgen (tomorrow). Your hour-glass is running out. Death wears a shroud, and the roses and ears of corn on his skull are symbols respectively of transience and resurrection, themes developed in the verses. The sheet counsels Christian preparedness for death at all times. Unusually, it also carries (at bottom left) an instruction as to how it is to be displayed: high up, so that the crossbow is aimed at your head. The image is copied from an engraved broadside by Jakob von der Heyden (1573-1645) with German Bible texts rather than verses, published in Strasbourg ca.1615. This version by the Cologne engraver and publisher Gerhard Altzenbach (active 1609-1672) reverses the image, so that his Death is left-handed. (David Paisey). There is a related print in the Blanton Museum, University of Texas, Austin" (http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1419706&partId=1

Figure 0.1: image from the online catalogue of the British Museum. “Fleuch wa du willt, Des todtes Bild, Staetz auff dich Zielt.” Engraving by Jakob von der Heyden

Figure 0.2: crop-dusting airplane in *North by Northwest*

It is certainly a stretch to say that this airplane simply looks like a bow and arrow. When one considers the larger contexts in which these images appear, however, the sense that there is indeed a similarity between them becomes difficult to deny. Regarding a possible context for the Baroque image, a work that proves helpful is Andreas Gryphius' 1657 play *Cardenio und Celinde*, in which there is an episode that goes roughly as follows. Cardenio, a young student in Bologna, is in love with Olympia, a newly married woman. As he stands outside of her house one night, waiting to ambush her husband, it suddenly seems to him that Olympia herself steps out of this house and confesses her love for him. Cardenio is naturally delighted by this, and the two of them walk off to what is described as a desolate garden. When they arrive in this garden, however, and Cardenio attempts to remove a veil from Olympia's face, he catches sight, not of his beloved, but rather of something quite different. As is written in the stage directions:

> Der Schau-Platz verändert sich plötzlich in eine abscheuliche Einöde / Olympia selbst in ein Todten-Gerippe / welches mit Pfeil und Bogen auff den Cardenio zilet.

> [The stage suddenly transforms into a hideous wasteland / Olympia herself into a skeleton / which aims at Cardenio with an arrow and bow.][12]

Turning now to the context of the airplane scene in *North by Northwest*, it is clear that the basic outlines of this context resonate in a few ways with the play. What is most obviously important to note is that, on the night before this scene takes place, Roger Thornhill too has a kind of unexpected meeting with a beautiful woman who seduces him: he meets Eve Kendall on the train who invites him to spend the night with her. Just like in the play, however, it seems here as well that Thornhill is in a certain sense punished for doing this, or that he ultimately proves simply to have fallen for an illusion. For, just as the image of Olympia gives way to that of a "Todten-Gerippe," it turns out that Eve Kendall, in seducing Thornhill, is actually just doing the behest of the film's villain, Vandamm. And, when this fact eventually dawns on Thornhill the next day, one might say that this indeed begins to happen as he too is seeing his own sort of bow-wielding skeleton – as he is seeing, that is, the airplane.

When one looks a bit more closely at these two works on the basis of such resonances, there are even more interesting parallels that suggest themselves. In the play, for instance, when Olympia rejects the advances of Cardenio, there are two authority figures in whose name she does this. First, she belongs to her husband; and second, it is obliquely suggested that, when her image gives way to that of a skeleton, this happens because God is in a certain sense using this image for His own purposes, i.e. to convert Cardenio. Yet in the film it is of course also for two authority figures that Eve Kendall works. While she initially seems to work only for Vandamm – who indeed is figured as a sort of (bad) husband – we learn that she is also an agent of the American Intelligence, i.e. of the organization that to some extent saves Thornhill. In the same vein, now, it is also worthwhile to consider a few more details from the crop-duster / "Todten-

[12] Andreas Gryphius, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2010), 238. The English translation given here is my own.

Gerippe" scene. What happens here in the play is of course that, where Cardenio expects to see a woman's face, he sees instead the skeleton. In the film, then, it is interesting in this regard that the desolate landscape of the cornfields first appears at the exact same time that a medium close-up of Eve's face dissolves – as if, here too, it is a woman's face that, in a certain sense, turns into this desolate landscape.[13]

Figure 0.3: dissolve from the cornfield
to Eve Kendall in *North by Northwest*

Or to consider a few more such details: it is Olympia who leads Cardenio to the desolate garden, just as Eve tells Thornhill how to get to the cornfields; in both works, when this is happening, the man asks the woman why she "seems tense" (Hitchcock) or why she isn't speaking (Gryphius); and regarding the question of landscape here, is it not the case that what we see in Hitchcock –

[13] Stanley Cavell, in the article referred to in the next paragraph, also notes this. "…a close-up of Eve's face at the Chicago train station dissolves into the establishing aerial shot of the road and fields of the plane attack. That conjunction of color and mood I claim asks for an allegorical identification of the woman and this stretch of land." Stanley Cavell, "North by Northwest," in *A Hitchcock Reader*, ed. Deutelbaum and Poague (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1986), 256.

i.e. a dusty, rocky expanse with a few withered cornstalks – is also a sort of desolate garden like in the play? Surprisingly enough, finally, even an aspect of the airplane sequence that is arguably a reference to the medium of film finds something like a counterpart in Gryphius. Stanley Cavell, in his essay on *North by Northwest*, understands the crop-duster "as a figure for a movie camera: it shoots at its victims and it coats them with a film of something that both kills and preserves, say that it causes metamorphosis."[14] Obviously, the play knows nothing about movie cameras. Something that it is obsessed with, however, is the idea of eternity, "Ewigkeit." Might it not be the case that what so startles or "shoots at" Cardenio in the garden is the perspective of eternity, or a viewpoint that sees things *sub specie aeternitatis*? His encounter with the "Todten-Gerippe," after all, indeed both "kills and preserves" him, and brings about a true "metamorphosis" of his desire: "Ich flieh was flüchtig ist / vnd such ein höher Gut" [I flee the transitory / and seek a higher good].[15] The parallel here would need to be developed at greater length, but the main idea already begins to shine forth: when the movie camera is thematized in Hitchcock, it is assuming the same role that the viewpoint of eternity has in Gryphius.

Just to be clear, the point here is not that *North by Northwest* is somehow a remake of *Cardenio und Celinde*, of all things.[16] The point, rather, is simply that there are certain formulaic or conventional elements which both of these works seem to employ. And the question is what exactly one is to make of this. For, on the one hand, when two works of literature seem to draw

[14] Ibid., 256.
[15] Gryphius, 253.
[16] The essay by Cavell, referred to above, finds in the film numerous parallels to a far more famous work: *Hamlet*. At first glance, it might seem like this could be at odds with the claim that the film recalls the Gryphius play or the death's head image - as if Cavell's observations would force us to concede that, no, the film is *actually* about *Hamlet*. When we're talking about *Hamlet*, however, we're talking about the play in which the protagonist holds discourse with a death's head! In a word, we could easily incorporate *Hamlet* as well into the present discussion. For it and the Baroque works referred to would *also* talk to each other, in a sense. Actually, therefore, Cavell's stunning observations about the parallels to *Hamlet* do not refute, but rather strengthen, the claim that it makes sense to think about the film and the Baroque works together.

on the same patterns or conventions, we in some cases react to them not unlike how, in the above interview, Hitchcock reacts to predictable films: we write them off as being not very interesting, or as being nothing more than unthinking imitations. *North by Northwest*, if we take Hitchcock at his word, is not an unthinking imitation. And, even regardless of what Hitchcock's word is, anyone who has seen the film has empirical evidence that is shouldn't be written off as uninteresting. Yet, if this is so, what does it mean that, as was just shown, even the airplane scene from *North by Northwest* adheres to a certain sort of established pattern? How are we supposed to react to this? Should we say, for instance, that, though Hitchcock might seem not to be imitating anyone in this scene, we have actually just found him out? Should we conclude that the airplane scene is actually just as boring and predictable as any scene at night "under the streetlamp"? Obviously not! Even when one sees the parallels to Gryphius, the scene here remains just as "real" or "unconventional" as ever. Yet, if *this* is so, then the new question becomes what exactly the payoff of seeing these sorts of parallels is. What exactly is it that they show us? And the answer which this dissertation will argue for is the following. They show us that there is a certain sort of conventionality that is inherent within reality itself, a conventionality that, if one could put it this way, is more than merely conventional.

Undoubtedly, such a claim needs to be clarified and qualified in a variety of ways. First of all, it may be helpful to say from the start how it is that this claim is *not* to be understood. The idea that there are conventions or formulas inherent within reality, for one thing, might naturally seem to point in a kind of structuralist direction. Simply in terms of literary analysis, for instance, it might seem that the above comparison is meant to lead to conclusions like the following: the scenes from *North by Northwest* and *Cardenio und Celinde* overlap in enough places that they arguably follow something like a common underlying pattern; and with a little

bit more work, it might be possible to determine exactly what this pattern looks like, or to distill a basic set of structural moments that could then be identified in other literary works too. It must be emphasized, however, that, in the present study, comparisons like the one above are not intended to lead down this path. In the first place, when it comes to works as different as, say, a Hitchcock film and a Gryphius play, a comparative approach of too strict a nature would obviously be misguided. We are not dealing here with works of a common genre, the basic features or "functions" of which might simply be listed.[17] Beyond this, however, it seems that an attempt to catalogue definitively the kinds of similarities that were hinted at above would misrepresent the very nature of these similarities. For the thing about them is that they are to some extent just intrinsically difficult to hold onto. The structural link between the film and the play, for instance, is often manifested by what might seem to be rather unassuming details in these works, like the fact that Hitchcock gives us a head-on, "subjective" shot of the airplane - if this same story about a man being chased by a plane were not shot this way, there would be no parallel - or the fact that, in both film and play, there in one way or another happens to be rocks– "raue Steine" – on the ground. If one were to elide such seemingly minute or technical details in an effort to arrive at a greater level of abstraction, the structural link we are talking about here would essentially vanish – it would be unclear why we are even talking about these two works in the same breath. And what this means is that, at least in this case, the study of the works in question could never somehow turn into the study of the underlying structure that these works embody.

[17] I am referring, of course, to Vladimiar Propp, *Morpohology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1968). It is important to stress the point here, since it has indeed been argued that romances might be analyzed along Proppian lines. Janice A. Radway suggests that "the narrative structure of the ideal romance" takes the shape of 13 functions: "1. The heroine's social identity is destroyed. 2. The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male…[etc.]." Janice A. Radway. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1991), 134.

Yet if it is not simply an identifiable structure that accounts for the possibility of the present comparison, the question remains as to what exactly does account for it. Certainly, another conceivable approach to this question would go something like this: though we don't see a structure in these works, what we do see are traces of influence or of a literary genealogy; in this case, we see something like the artistic ancestors of a Hitchcock film, or the fact that these films draw on a long tradition of image-making. To be sure, there is no doubt that such statements are true. We indeed see here that Hitchcock creates within the larger tradition of European art. The problem with this sort of an approach becomes apparent, however, whenever one tries to make questions of influence or source material the end of an analysis. For, if an artist like Hitchcock draws on traditional models, we need to know, not only *that* he does this, but also *why*. What effect is this supposed to have on how we read or view a work? For there indeed seem to be cases in which we are supposed to notice something like the presence of models in the background. One answer to this question, the following pages will argue, is that certain formulaic or conventional resonances are present in works of art because they are meant to teach us, in a sense, how it is that we are to relate to these works. More specifically, what such resonances show us is that, in order for the proper object of certain works to be recognized, the reading or viewing of these works must be guided by a particular kind of belief. For, on the one hand, the conventionality in question suggests that a relationship between various works does indeed exist. As was just suggested, however, the nature of this relationship is intrinsically hard to determine: nothing like a describable structure ever emerges; and it is clearly not the case that artists are merely imitating, or being influenced by, each other. What all of this shows, it will be argued, is that, though there is evidently something that mediates between various works, it is not anything that we could ever see or identify directly. The point, however, is that, if we view these

works in a certain way, this unseen mediating instance is indeed something that we can begin to believe in.

Such a statement begins to indicate why it is that, when literary works of various sorts – i.e. works written in different time periods, different media, separated by questions of genre etc. – are discussed in the following chapters, romance is the notion that all of these discussions will ultimately be about. For romance, to say it again, is in some measure almost defined as the kind of literature that demands from its readers a capacity for belief. Romance, that is, tends so much towards the "improbable," or so accentuates the presence of stock formulas, that it is sometimes thought of as requiring readers who are especially naïve; or it is supposed, to put it differently, that romance elicits in its readers an ability to believe in things that they know are not true. In this sense, there is a natural link between romance and the notion of a way of reading or viewing that is guided by belief. Yet, while this dissertation is certainly drawing on this natural link, the crucial thing to note is that it is also fundamentally rethinking it. For, in the following chapters, if the idea is that one should read with belief, what this of course does not mean is that one is just supposed to be gullible. The idea, in short, is not that we should find it within ourselves to believe in obviously formulaic stories. What is at stake in the following chapters, rather, is a more general concern with what exactly the nature of the formulaic or conventional even is. What is to be believed in here, in other words, is not simply that some story is true, but rather that a certain kind of conventionality is possible – a conventionality, that is, which is not merely the product of people imitating each other but that actually has a hold in reality, one might say. In the following chapters, if a work of art teaches us to believe in this kind of conventionality, the fact that it does this is what makes it a romance. As will become clear, it seems that some works of art teach us to do this more than others, such that romance and art, or literature, are of

course not meant here to be synonyms. Construing the relationship between romance and belief in this way, however, indeed means that the word romance now possesses a range that is greater than that of a typical generic label.

Yet if this dissertation will thus make reference to a certain notion of belief, there is one more implication that this has for how romance will be thought of in this dissertation. For to say that romance calls for belief is in some sense to say that it calls for faith. And what this observation begins to pick up on is that the phenomenon of romance, as the following chapters define it, unmistakably mirrors, or runs parallel to, a number of aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition. On the one hand, the fact that this is so is perhaps already somewhat apparent. For there are indeed a number of superficial similarities between romance literature and this tradition. In reference to St. Ignatius, for instance, the sense of overlap between tales of chivalry and hagiographic literature was already mentioned. And, as one scholar has noted, the rise of courtly romance in the twelfth century was indeed mirrored, in the popular sphere, by the proliferation of popular "miracle stories" about religious figures.[18] Yet there are a variety of things that one might bring to bear in this context. One thing that it is impossible to overlook is that certain literary-critical accounts of what typically happens in romance stories can easily sound like descriptions of the Gospels. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye first describes the hero of romance stories as someone "whose actions are marvelous" – i.e. like those of a god – but who is

[18] R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1953), 241-249. The exact nature of the relationship between Christianity and twelfth-century courtly romance is naturally a topic about which much more could be said. In his now classic study of *Love in the Western World* (*L'Amour et l'Occident*), Denis de Rougemont puts forth the view, held by others before him, that the twelfth-century troubadours were perhaps secretly followers of Catharism, an ascetic, Manichaean-inspired form of Christianity that the Church deemed a heresy. Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), 75-91. Yet even a figure such as St. Francis is noted for having had a "passion for the French poetry of the Troubadours." G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (New York: Image: 2013), 29.

at the same time "identified as a human."[19] He then describes the "three main stages" of such stories as quest, death, and resurrection.[20] And, nuances of the typical romance plot structure aside, it is quite simply the case that what the Bible from beginning to end most fundamentally recounts is a sort of love story:

> For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name…For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth…(Isaiah 54:5-6).
>
> Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you (Jeremiah 3:14).
>
> Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine (Song of Songs 1:2).[21]
>
> And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them (Mark 2:19)?
>
> Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem… (Revelation 21: 9-10).

As such quotations suggest, the relationship between God and His people Israel is consistently figured in the Bible as that between "husband" and "wife." And a consequence of this is that the

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[19] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 33.

[20] Ibid., 187. Obviously, it is not as if Frye does not realize how similar to the Gospels this structure is; the Gospels are rather one of the texts in the corpus he is analyzing. Yet this fact too - this way of categorizing the Gospels - is noteworthy.

[21] It deserves to be mentioned that, regarding the ambiguous status of romance, the Song of Songs is maybe the most famous example. As Origen writes in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*: "…if any man who lives only after the flesh should approach [this text], to such a one the reading of this scripture will be the occasion of no small hazard and danger. For he, not knowing how to hear love's language in purity and with chaste ears, will twist the whole manner of his hearing of it away from the inner spiritual man and on to the outward and the carnal; and he will be turned away from the spirit to the flesh and will foster carnal desires in himself, and it will seem to be the divine scriptures that are thus urging and egging him on to fleshly lust!" Origen, "Commentary on the Song of Songs," in *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 8. A more recent example is presented by Pedro Almodóvar's 1990 film *Atame! (Tie me up! Tie me down!)* Because of what the film literally depicts, it was rated X in the United States. Yet the film is full of hints that we should not take what it literally depicts at face value. Most notably, it begins by having us look for over two minutes at paintings of Christ and the Virgin Mary. In a recorded conversation, Almodóvar indeed insists that, in his own mind, the film is just a "romance," a love story. See the Criterion Collection edition of the DVD.

Bible can often be brought into productive conversation with stories that more straightforwardly seem to be about such a relationship.[22]

The relevance of the Judeo-Christian tradition for the study of romance, however, rests on the basis of far more than just such vague parallels. It has its seat, rather, in the very notion of a real, or more than just human, conventionality with which this dissertation is in large part concerned. When it comes to suggesting how it is that this notion manifests itself in the Christian tradition, a text that proves helpful for the purposes of this introduction is Augustine's massively influential *De doctrina christiana*. What makes this text relevant to the study of literature in general is the fact that it is essentially a theory of "signs" and the "things" to which they refer. Book I of *De doctrina* takes up the latter element of this pair – i.e. things – and might be summarized as follows. According to Augustine, there are basically just two types of things: "There are some things which are to be enjoyed, some which are to be used…".[23] And what it means here either to enjoy or to use something is a function of how it is that this thing should be loved: "To enjoy something is to hold fast to it in love for its own sake. To use something is to apply whatever it may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love – if indeed it is something that ought to be loved".[24] When it comes to determining to which of these two categories a given thing belongs, now, Augustine makes it easy. For a central point of Book I is that the first of these two categories really only consists of one (or three) thing (s): "The things which are to be enjoyed…are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit…".[25] The only thing that one should enjoy, in short, is God, which technically means that everything else is to be used. Certainly, one should still love and enjoy other people; yet the point is that one's love for them should

[22] The extent to which the Bible can be read as a love story has recently been explored in depth by Brant Pitre. *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told* (New York: Image, 2014).
[23] Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 9.
[24] Ibid., 9.
[25] Ibid., 10.

ultimately be related to the love of God – so that "the idea of enjoying someone or something is very close to that of using someone or something together with love."[26]

"Signs," according to Augustine, are, strictly speaking, "things" as well: they are "things which are employed to signify" other things. Yet, whereas some of the things that are signs *always* signify something else– "words," for example, do this – other things might signify something else or not. While a sheep is usually just a sheep – i.e. usually signifies nothing– "the sheep which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son" has a meaning.[27] In Books II and III of *De doctrina* Augustine's concern is to show how it is that things which can either have a meaning or not come to mean the things that they do. His claim is that there are two basic ways in which this happens. The first possibility is that the meanings of things are "instituted by humans."[28] In some cases, a thing starts to mean something as a result of "each individual's agreement with a particular convention."[29] A thing starts to mean something, to put it simply, if enough people say that it does. One example of this are "the books of haruspices and augurs," which claim to show how the future can be seen in the entrails of sacrificed animals.[30] As for the second possibility, however, what happens in other cases is that the meanings of things are not simply agreed upon by humans, but rather are "observed" or "discovered" by them.[31] The meanings of some things, that is, have absolutely nothing to do with any "convention," but are simply a function of "the way things are." And the examples that Augustine cites in this regard are the more respectable branches of learning. The calculations in a book of astronomy really *do* refer to, say, the orbit of the moon; or historical narrative really *does* refer to things that happened in the past.

[26] Ibid., 25.
[27] Ibid., 8.
[28] Ibid., 47.
[29] Ibid., 52-53.
[30] Ibid., 48.
[31] Ibid., 47, 54.

The ultimate goal of *De doctrina* Books I-III, now, is to teach us how to read the Bible. And it is in the following way that all of the above observations contribute to this goal. For, on the one hand, there is a tendency when one is reading the Bible to stop, in a sense, at the things to which words refer. There is a tendency to overlook that some of these things are actually signs themselves referring to yet other things. And it is helpful to remember, therefore, that the way in which one should relate to all things, with the exception of God, is by using them, so that it is never right to "interpret…a useful sign…in a useless way."[32] At this point, however, the other problem that arises concerns how exactly it is that one should then determine what these things in Scripture refer to. For a danger is that the meanings of things could become established solely on the basis of convention. In order to prevent this, what Augustine argues is that, in a certain sense, we already know what everything in the Bible means: "scripture enjoins nothing but love;"[33] it is to be "interpreted according to the aim of love, whether it be love of God or love of one's neighbor."[34] The point here is that, when one is reading the Bible, one's "faith" should actively influence how one does this. "[T]he rule of faith" tells us, in short, that God is love.[35] And the practical implication for reading is that, if a given passage literally says this, we know it does not mean anything else: it already, in a sense, refers to God, and thus could not possibly be used to arrive at still another meaning. Yet if a passage seems to say something other than this, we know that its literal meaning must be transcended – we know that it must be read figuratively, one might say, so that it no longer appears "contrary to the faith."[36] While certain passages in Scripture might seem to condone violence, for instance, it would be wrong to take them at face value. For reading Scripture in this way would amount to giving it a meaning that it does not

[32] Ibid., 74-75.
[33] Ibid., 76.
[34] Ibid., 79.
[35] Ibid., 69.
[36] Ibid., 71.

really have, or failing to see the object to which, when it is read through the eyes of faith, Scripture has to refer.[37]

Regarding the phenomenon of romance that this dissertation is pursuing, it goes without saying that not every aspect of *De doctrina* is immediately relevant. What the above sketch will hopefully enable one to see, however, is that, in light of the sorts of readings this dissertation will perform, Augustine's text can at least be thought of as a helpful model to have in the background. Let us consider again, for instance, the introductory comparison between *North by Northwest* and its apparent Baroque counterparts. What exactly happens to our understanding of these works when we see that there are similarities between them? Or, to put it differently, how exactly must one be reading or viewing these works in order for the comparison between them to become convincing? With the above sketch of *De doctrina* in mind, a possible answer to such questions might look like this. To begin with, when we are reading or viewing any one of these works, what we on some level initially have to be doing is just reading for the plot. We are taking the signs – that is, the words or images – presented to us, and trying to figure out what it is that they refer to, i.e. what exactly we are seeing or what exactly the story is. Once we have done this, however, what are we then to make of the fact that some of the things to which these words or images refer are remarkably evocative of other things, signified by the words or images in

[37] The account of *De doctrina* presented here closely follows an essay by William S. Babcock. As he writes: "In effect, Augustine has used his discussion of things to stipulate what is signified in Scripture. Some may think that they have understood Scripture, he observes, but they have not yet understood if their views do not build up to this *geminam caritatem* of God and neighbor. In contrast, those whose views do build up to this double love will escape serious error even if they mistake what the biblical writers actually had in mind. Anyone who knows that love is the end of the Law, Augustine assures us, can approach the *tractatio* of Scripture with confidence. If we already know what the signs signify, there is no danger that we will ultimately associate them with the wrong things or give them the wrong *termini*." William S. Babcock, "Caritas and Signification in De doctrina christiana 1-3," in *De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, ed. Duane W.H. Arnold and Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 148. Another wonderful account that agrees with, and expands upon, the account I have given is Rowan Williams "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's *De Doctrina*." *Journal of Literature & Theology*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (July 1989): 138-150.

other works – of the fact, in short, that a crop-duster in a cornfield is somehow reminiscent of a death's head aiming to kill? To put it simply, what this fact most basically indicates is that the things to which the various signs in these works refer are *themselves* to be thought of as signs. The way in which these things are similar, in other words, suggests that there is certain kind of a relationship between them, such that, when they are viewed or thought of in conjunction, one might say that they begin to constitute something like a literary language. This is simply to say, of course, that, when viewed in a certain way, the things in these works can themselves be understood as acquiring a sort of referential capacity.

Yet, if this is the case, an obvious question arises: what is it that these things refer to? It seems that there are a few possible approaches to this question. On the one hand, if it is indeed true that the things in these works are also signs, this must first of all mean something about how we should generally relate to these things. Speaking with Augustine, it must mean that we should not accept these things as the object which the works in question are most fundamentally about; we should use these things, rather, in order, in a sense, to get beyond them. Clearly, however, the question still remains as to what other object one could possibly arrive at by doing this. To a certain extent, now, this question is perhaps really a sort of trick question. For, when the things in a work of art are viewed as signs, it is not as if these things can now refer to anything beyond themselves in a straightforward sense – which is just to say that, even when these things are viewed as signs, *all* we see are these things. One might say that contained within this observation itself, however, is already the beginning of an answer: if the things in a work of art are viewed as signs, it seems the content they refer to is actually invisible. This content is apparently such that it allows the signs referring to it to have the status of an image, i.e. to be seen, to remain *things*. Naturally, this would be one way to describe why it is that the object we're talking about here

needs to be an object of belief: one needs to believe in this object because seeing it directly is not an option, it can only be seen in the things referring to it. Yet there is another way of thinking about why belief is important, a way that picks up on something suggested in the preceding pages. It is possible to explain or justify belief here, namely, not just by saying that what is being believed in is invisible. We could also say that the belief in question pertains to the notion of a certain kind of conventionality. What is being believed in, in short, is the possibility of a conventionality that has something real about it.

The basis for this claim lies first of all in the fact that there is a necessary element of discovery to all of this. For, when it comes to the things in works of art, the fact that they mean at all, or that they can be "used," is something that one must learn or observe. To take the example at hand, the reason to focus on the crop-duster is simply that the relationship between it and the Baroque works can be pointed to. Obviously, there are many other things in the film one could talk about. In the case of any of them, however, the fact they are meaningful is something that one can only discover by reading and allowing oneself to be surprised. Yet what is interesting about this is that, though the meaningfulness of these things must therefore be observed, it cannot ever be *completely* observed. For this would amount to nothing less than being able to identify what these things refer to. If one could do *this*, however, then literature would be no different from the other branches of learning mentioned by Augustine. For the things of astronomy refer to celestial bodies; the things of logic to structures of argument; the things of history to past events etc. The link between things and what they mean here, in short, is something that exists regardless of whatever people might say or think about it. In the case of literature, however, the same sort of link could only ever be drawn with the help of one's belief. In order for the things of literature truly to be "used," in other words, what people or readers

think about these things – i.e. whether or not they believe in them - *is* actually of relevance. And what all of this should begin to indicate is the remarkable extent to which the patterns of meaning in literature are at once both real and conventional. For, on the one hand, it is discoverable or objective that the things of literature have meaning; we are not dealing here with "the books of augurs" in which everything is nonsense. At the same time, however, some sort of activity is still required from the readers of literature in order for this meaningfulness to be realized.

Yet there is another way in which this notion of a real conventionality might be thought of. As Augustine notes in *De doctrina*, among the "institutions" established solely by humans, some of them are "necessary." "Society would function less smoothly," for instance, if we did not agree upon certain "coded meanings" pertaining to things like "coinage and currency."[38] Generally speaking, however – and the example of "the books of augurs" already shows this – Augustine's view is that man-made institutions lead to nothing but trouble.[39] Against the background of this view, now, it is helpful to consider more carefully the role of belief or faith in the present context. For, if "human institutions" generally prove, as Augustine puts it, "futile and harmful,"[40] the reason for this is clear: the conventional meanings they establish have nothing to do with how things really are. Yet what if there were conventional meanings that relied in part on belief? What exactly would this amount to? It seems that, first of all, if the meaning of a sign could only be known on the strength of belief, one result would be that the conventional nature

[38] Augustine, 54.

[39] Augustine's claim is actually that, when humans create worlds totally by themselves, they really only do this by means of "contracts and agreements made with devils" (51). In passing, it deserves to be noted that contained in this claim is a staggering explanation for why the myth of *Faust* exerts such a fascination in modernity. For modernity *is*, in some sense, an attempt to ground institutions on the principle of human autonomy. If this is so, however, it's as if the haunting question in the background becomes: how can this be done without making pacts "with devils"? The *Faust* myth, it seems, is one of the privileged means of wrestling with this question.

[40] Ibid., 51.

of this sign would become impossible to ignore. If we could not even entertain this sign's apparent meaning without feeling our belief being tested, that is, we could never lose sight of the fact that we are to some extent helping to create its meaning. Yet, as was just noted, when "human institutions" fail, it is because they do lose sight of this fact, i.e. they mistake conventional meanings for real ones. And, from this perspective, one can begin to see that, if conventional meanings were based on belief, they would attain a level of stability unprecedented for something conventional. For, if the conventional nature of these meanings is always front and center, it would never be possible for them to eclipse reality, so to speak. On the contrary, the fact that they are sustained by belief would imply that they always make room for reality, or take reality into account. The result of this would be a kind of conventionality that would not simply fail, or prove "futile and harmful," when confronted with what things really mean. And, in this sense, it would be, one might say, a real conventionality.

Now there is of course nothing novel about stressing the role of belief when talking about art. Indeed, it is on some level intuitive that certain works of art naturally require belief, or a "suspension of disbelief." It must be noted at this point, however, that, if belief will play a role in the following chapters, the nature of this role will be quite a bit different from the one it is usually assigned. For, to take *North by Northwest* again, it might seem that, when we are watching this film, belief is generally at work in the following sense: we believe that there is a man named Roger Thornhill who, due to a case of mistaken identity, is kidnapped by a pair of henchmen, seduced by an undercover agent, attacked by an airplane in a cornfield etc. – all of which is simply to say that we go along with the story; or, in Augustine's terms, that we take the various "signs" presented to us and simply accept what it is that they are supposed to mean or refer to. In the following chapters, however, it is not exactly to help us go along with any story

that belief is necessary. It is rather to help us go along, if you will, with the notion that any given story is actually not the final object for belief to work on. Another way to put this might be to say that the role of belief here is to transform a given story into a sign that refers, in a sense, beyond itself. And the extent to which this differs from how the relationship between belief and art is often thought of becomes especially clear when one considers some examples from the secondary literature.

One particularly interesting example is Kendall Walton's 1990 study *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. The central thesis of this book is that "works of art," or "representations," might be thought of as "props…to be used…in games of make-believe."[41] In the present context, what is noteworthy about this thesis is not only its reference to "make-believe," but also, in light of the discussion of Augustine, the fact that it is so prominently concerned with how works of art are to be "used."[42] According to Walton, what it means that a work of art is a "prop" is that it "generate[s] a fictional truth."[43] The particular "pattern of paint splotches" that we call Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte*, for instance, makes it fictionally true "that a couple is strolling in a park."[44] Walton's account of how exactly such a truth is generated, now, is again remarkable in light of the earlier discussion. For his claim is that props do not make something true "entirely on their own," but "only because there is a certain convention…[or] agreement in the game of make-believe."[45] To be sure, the point is not that a painting will depict whatever its viewers happen to agree it depicts. It is rather that, in order to "play a game of

[41] Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990).
[42] The field of aesthetic inquiry that Walton draws on is generally preoccupied with the notion that works of art are things to be "used." See, for example Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art* (New York: Oxford UP, 1980).
[43] Walton, 37.
[44] Ibid., 38.
[45] Ibid., 38.

make-believe" with this painting – to talk or engage in criticism about it, or just to see it – there are certain things that all viewers of this painting must implicitly "agree" to imagine on its basis. So crucial is this, according to Walton, that we might as well speak in this context of "rules" and "prescriptions": "a fictional truth consists in there being a prescription or mandate…to imagine something."[46] Certainly, a viewer is free to break these "rules" if he or she wants to. When viewing *La Grande Jatte,* for example, someone might decide to imagine, not a couple strolling in a park, but "hippos wallowing in a mud hole." Walton's claim, however, is that this would amount to playing an "*unauthorized*…game" with the painting, and that "to play [such a game] is to misuse the work."[47]

The reason to describe Walton's approach here, to say it again, is mostly for the sake of contrast. For, while this dissertation will also to some extent think of works of art as things "to be used," it will construe the *way* in which they are to be used very differently from how Walton's study recommends. This should already be fairly evident in light of the introductory reading of *North by Northwest*. For, if we were to think of this film as a "prop" in Walton's sense, then at least one "fictional truth" that it "generates" would be something to the effect that a crop-duster is flying over a cornfield; and it would seem, one might add, that, during the scene in which this happens, one would be breaking a "rule" by imagining that anything else were happening. The possibility of imagining something else here, however, is largely what the introductory reading highlights: it suggests that, when we see a crop-duster flying over a cornfield, we might imagine that, say, a grisly skeleton is aiming a bow and arrow. In this sense, this reading would seem to be breaking the apparent "rules" for how one is supposed to watch the film. Yet, whereas, in Walton's example, the breaking of such rules should amount to imagining something that is just

[46] Ibid., 39.
[47] Ibid., 60.

wrong – "hippos wallowing in a mud hole" –here something different is going on. For, while this reading might seem to be breaking certain "rules" of the film, it is of course the film itself that tells it to do this. What this reading imagines, in short, is not something that is completely random, but rather something that the film itself, if one could put it this way, also seems to be thinking of.

This first difference from Walton's approach naturally implies the existence of a second one. For, if the earlier reading of *North by Northwest* is indeed inspired by aspects of the film itself, then there is clearly a minimal level on which it too must be following "rules" for how the film is to be seen. While this must be so, however, it seems that "rules" is actually not quite the right word for what we are talking about. For, while it might be the case that aspects of this film enable one to imagine a grisly skeleton while viewing it, it is most definitely not the case that the film *forces* one to imagine this. What we are most definitely not dealing with here, that is, is "a prescription or mandate…to imagine something." The question this of course raises pertains to how it is that, if we are thus not "mandated" by the film to imagine this, we could still be justified in doing so. And the answer – it should be a familiar one by now – is that what justifies our imaginings here is most essentially a certain kind of belief. What the introductory reading of the film implies, in other words, is that the film presents us, not only with "mandate[s]…to imagine something," but also, one might say, with opportunities to believe. If one takes such opportunities, so to speak, it becomes possible to see in a work far more than simply its most straightforward subject matter.

The claim that the preceding paragraphs are circling around is that, when it comes to the phenomenon of romance as this dissertation defines it, the belief that literature calls for is not a belief in what stories are literally about. And this claim suggests another explanation for why it is

that romance is the operative term of this dissertation. For, to be sure, what Walton is indeed right about is that, when we entertain the "fictional truths" that any story or representation "generates," we are in some measure conforming to "a certain convention" or to a certain set of "rules" pertaining to what we are to imagine. Romance stories, as was said earlier, are characteristically improbable. And while one might take this to mean that they are just not very good, what this *actually* means, in light of Walton's observation, is that they are, or at least can be, surprisingly profound. For what we are essentially registering when we see that a given story is improbable is that the conventions we must conform to in order to imagine this story take no account of reality, or are *merely* conventional and, in this sense, false. If this is the case, however, then what improbable stories can implicitly suggest to us is basically the same idea that Augustine formulates – namely, that purely human or conventional meanings should be looked upon with suspicion. What romance literature renders utterly transparent, in other words, is that purely conventional means of signification inevitably lose touch with reality - *this* is essentially what we see when we see that this literature is patently conventional. In the moment that we see this, however, one might say that we receive new instructions for how literature is to be read.[48]

[48] The overall argument presented here is comparable to the argument put forth by Stanley Fish in his 1967 *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1971). The essential point of connection is that, according to Fish, *Paradise Lost* is written in such a way that it is meant to confront its readers with their own sinfulness. For instance, if the rhetoric of Satan is so compelling in this poem, the reason is not that Milton wanted to be subversive; the reason is that it is supposed to make us realize how easily Satan deceives us. When we begin to pick up on this, Fish writes, the result "is the adoption of a new way of reading" (14). We become more self-conscious about the process of reading, and are thus in a better position to question the first impressions that the poem's language makes on us. This overarching thesis is similar to the argument I am making. In the details, however, the phenomenon Fish describes is very different from what I refer to as "romance." For, in Milton, what allows our sinfulness to become apparent is the fact that, say, we have read a passage too quickly: we assume that the text says one thing, whereas, in reality, if we take a closer look, we realize that we have allowed ourselves to be deceived. An ideal reading of the book, therefore, would essentially consist in reading *exactly* what is there on the page. According to what I call "romance," however, this would not be a solution. On the contrary, the idea is that going along perfectly with what is on the page is the mark of sin; and deviations from the letter on the page, therefore, are not necessarily a bad thing. Or, to take another example, it seems the goal of *Paradise Lost* is "the creation of a reader who is fit because he knows and understands his limitations" (49). The general drift is that the

We realize, for one thing, that, if the "rules…to imagine something" that stories establish are inherently suspect and problematic, we should not follow them perfectly. We should not imagine only what they want us to. Yet, at the same time, this very notion that there is something suspect about the conventional might itself be thought of as a positive insight. The stories *are* showing us something true, in other words, and should thus not be disregarded completely. What this ultimately amounts to is that we should take the things that the stories want us to imagine and "use" them instead. We should transform these things into signs referring to something else. To the extent that we must do this actively, there is of course still something conventional about these new signs. Yet it is a conventionality of a very special kind, arising as it does out of the awareness that conventional meanings always miss something.

Another work of secondary literature that is worth considering here is Nicholas Boyle's 2005 study *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*. What is immediately interesting about this work is that, in its attempt to formulate a definition of literature, it too ends up invoking a certain notion of use. For Boyle's claim is that "a Catholic approach to literature" would proceed from the "twin premises" that literature "is language free of instrumental purpose, and [that] it seeks to tell the truth."[49] Drawing heavily on Paul Ricoeur's 1976 lecture "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,"[50] Boyle begins by noting that when literature tells of, or refers to, things, it does not do so in the manner of either everyday speech or of, say, scientific discourse. In these other sorts of contexts, Boyle notes, language is

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ideal reader would cease with this business of imagining things in the text that aren't really there. A central aspect of "romance," however, is that, sometimes, the imaginings that a text seems to elicit from us are legitimate. It is sometimes only in the light of these imaginings that the real content of a text can fully appear.

[49] Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Notre Dame, Indiana: U of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 125.

[50] The talk was published in Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 73-118.

often "concerned with describing things…for manipulative and utilitarian purposes."[51] When literature speaks of things, on the other hand, it is not because we are supposed to be able to do anything with them. If the things that literature tells about are of no "use" to us, now, the question that arises is why we still read literature. And Boyle answers this question effectively in two ways. First of all, when the utilitarian function of language falls away, what remains is the capacity of literary language "to let us see the world simply as it is."[52] Instead of showing us how to use things, it seems, literature "reveals" to us that they are. In addition to this, however, literature's "revelatory" capacity seems to be inextricably bound up, for Boyle, with the fact that literature gives us "pleasure," or that we "enjoy" it. "A book becomes literature," he writes, "by using language for the purposeless purpose of enjoyment."[53] And it is of course important to emphasize here that, because literature is not concerned with how things might be used or manipulated – because it does "not talk about the things of this world as…capable of fulfilling the desires of the speaker or writer" – this "pleasure" that it creates is "disinterested." When we enjoy literature, it is certainly not because we somehow "desire to possess" the world it presents to us.[54]

As this summary account begins to suggest, there is a certain sense in which Boyle's argument is reminiscent of Augustine's in *De doctrina* – in both cases, namely, a kind of opposition is set up between the notions of "use" and "enjoyment." At first glance, however, it can easily appear that Boyle understands these notions in a way that is diametrically opposed to how Augustine does. While, according to Augustine, one should "use" the things in Scripture, "using" the things in literature is exactly what Boyle says one should *not* do; and whereas Boyle

[51] Boyle, 125.
[52] Ibid., 125.
[53] Ibid., 132.
[54] Ibid., 125-129. As is to be expected, in the places where Boyle describes the pleasure offered by literature as "disinterested," he refers explicitly to Kant.

speaks enthusiastically about "enjoying" these things instead, things other than God are, in Augustine's view, technically not to be enjoyed. When one looks a bit closer, however, it becomes clear that this opposition is really only apparent. For, when Augustine speaks of using things, he is of course not saying that we should somehow become manipulative, or make things serve our immediate interests. And, similarly, Boyle's notion of a "disinterested" enjoyment effectively comes very close to what Augustine means by saying that we should use things "with love," or that we should enjoy God "in" things. To state it plainly, Boyle's argument is in many respects comparable to Augustine's – something that should of course not be too surprising considering that Boyle is writing "a *Catholic* approach to literature." Yet Augustine's *De doctrina* is never mentioned by Boyle. And though Boyle's account is perhaps similar to Augustine's, there is good reason to recall here what exactly Augustine's claims in *De doctrina* are. For Augustine's way of setting things up terminologically lends special clarity to a certain idea which can otherwise become obscured. The idea in question concerns the relationship between reading and enjoyment.

It must first of all be noted in this connection that romance literature is of course thought of as preeminently enjoyable. Indeed, the general consensus is that it is actually enjoyable to a fault. One example here might stand for many – just recall Don Quixote, who reads his "books of chivalry with such relish and enthusiasm"[55] that he goes mad, and is to some extent seen by those around him as a threat to society. Or to consider a less well-known – though no less remarkable! – example, the preface "An den Leser" to Andreas Heinrich Bucholtz's 1665 tome of a novel, *Herkuliskus und Herkuladisla*, is a testament to just how serious the anxiety surrounding the enjoyment of romance literature can be. As Bucholtz complains at length:

[55] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Rutherford (New York: Penguin, 2001), 26.

> Das schandsüchtige Amadis Buch hat mannichen Liebhaber auch unter dem [sic] Frauenzimmer/deren noch keine dadurch gebessert/aber wol unterschiedliche zur unziemlichen Frechheit angespornet sind/wan sie solche Begebnissen vor Augen gemahlet sehen / welche wol die Unverschämtesten vor der Sonnen zu verrichten scheu tragen […] Ob dann einiger Amadis-Schützer einwerffen wolte/die lustbringende Erfindungen machete diesem Buche sein Ansehen / und entrissen es der Verwesung; so mag ehrliebenden Herzen dieses noch lange nicht gnug seyn. Dann die Leichtfertigkeiten hecheln gar zu grob/und die unziemliche Betreibungen zwischen jungen verliebten hohen Standes-Leuten brechen so unverschämt loß / daß von keuschen Herzen es ohn Ärgerniß nicht wol kan gelesen werden; was wolte dann von frech-wilden geschehen? Zwar ein gefüsseter ehrliebender Geist achtet dessen wenig; aber wer vermuthet sich eines solchen bey der lustsüchtigen Jugend?[56]

Ultimately, one explanation for such anxiety might be found in Northrop Frye's observation that "romance is nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfillment dream."[57] For what this observation implies is that the content of romance can often be seen as the product of wandering or illicit desires. To enjoy a romance, on this reading, could potentially amount to indulging in a form of desire bordering on lust. Clearly, if literature is going to be enjoyed, it should not be enjoyed like this. It would seem, rather, that the right way to enjoy it would partake of an enjoyment that, as Boyle puts it, is "disinterested."

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[56] The work quoted here – its full title is *Der Christlichen Königlichen Fürsten Herkuliskus und Herkuladisla, Auch Ihrer Hochfürstlichen Gesellschaft anmuhtige Wunder-Geschichte* – is remarkable for many reasons. First of all, Bucholtz' essential aim is to write an *Amadis*-like narrative that will strengthen readers in their Christian faith, in other words, to give them leisure reading that will not corrupt them. Yet this was arguably already, at least to some degree, the goal of the *Amadis* narrative itself! In this sense, there is a minimal level on which Bucholtz project is paradoxical, or contains an odd sort of contradiction. For instance, is the problem that the *Amadis* accidentally went too far in giving its readers enjoyment? Should we therefore try to bring the enjoyment down a notch? But how much enjoyment is alright? Could even Bucholtz' project make the same mistake that the *Amadis* does? The short poem that Bucholtz ends his preface "An den Leser" with certainly suggests that he foresees this possibility. As he writes, in reference to the story that follows:
"An den Nase-Klügling
Was wol gemeynt / und zur Erbauung dient/
Das fichte nicht mit Läster-Reden an.
Wer sich so leicht zum Tadelen erkühnet/
Und keine Schrift ohn Schmähung lassen kan.
Der wisse daß sein Straffe-Lohn schon grünet/
Sein Geiffer wird verflucht von jederman."

[57] *Anatomy of Criticism*, 186.

To be sure, it is doubtless the case that some of what we think of as romance literature is, if not actually suspect in a moral sense, at least mediocre as far as its literary merit goes. The goal of this dissertation, it must be emphasized, is thus not to imply that everything we think of as romance, even cheap paperbacks, would really be worth studying. And there is a way in which this should hopefully already be fairly clear. For, as was said earlier, if this dissertation will in part be concerned with belief, the kind of belief this will be is not a belief in what stories most literally seem to be about. When the enjoyment of romance is thought of as something suspect, however, this always happens because its readers are expected to believe in its content in precisely such a literal manner. Speaking with Augustine, one might say that what happens in these cases is that the readers of romance are expected to enjoy the literal things of which stories tell. And, if this is what reading romance amounts to, it is no surprise that Augustine actually condemns "romances" as a source of base "pleasure" in *De doctrina*.[58] To say it again, however, it is not belief in the literal content of stories that this dissertation is interested in. The readings in the following chapters, that is, see through this content, or recognize it as in some sense trivial and made-up. Yet, if this is so, the reasonable question to ask here is why it is that romance should still be understood as what these following chapters are even about. If these chapters will read stories differently from how the stereotypical, or presumed, readers of romance do, in other words, why does it still make sense to think of romance as the topic these chapters are investigating?

The answer, to put it plainly, is that the reading of romance, as was just noted, is generally thought to be driven by enjoyment, and that it is emphatically by enjoyment that the readings in the following chapters will be driven as well. The catch to this statement, of course, simply concerns what exactly the object of enjoyment for these readings will be. As was just

[58] Augustine, 53-54.

explained, it certainly will not be the literal things that stories tell of. What these readings will aim to show, however, is that, even if these literal things are not to be enjoyed, something else *is*: the thing that these literal things refer to when they are understood not as things but as signs. On the one hand, it is arguable that another way to put this would just be to say that the following readings will enjoy the things in stories "disinterestedly." It is arguable, in other words, that this account of the relationship between enjoyment and reading is similar enough to Boyle's. That said, however, it ultimately makes sense to insist upon the more Augustinian formulation, i.e. to insist that the following readings will not so much be enjoying things "disinterestedly" as they will be using things in order to enjoy something else. For, to be sure, romance, as this dissertation defines it, is enjoyable in a very special sense. It is better to account for this, however, not by focusing on the kind or quality of enjoyment it brings about, but rather by specifying what exactly it is that romance enables enjoyment of. What is most fundamental here, in short, is that there is a shift in *what* exactly is being enjoyed. And, when one follows this train of thought a bit further, it becomes clear that there is another sense in which the word "disinterested" is misleading. For this word can at least carry the connotation of something like "coming down a notch," as if a disinterested enjoyment were perhaps of a lesser, and thus healthier, intensity. If, in the following chapters, however, romance enables the enjoyment of a new object, what is of course special about this object is that, as Augustine might put it, it is actually meant to be enjoyed. For the fact that this object is necessarily an object of belief means that there is something about it that escapes the conventional – something that is not merely made-up, that is, but that is actually real. The implication is that this is an object by which our enjoyment will never be frustrated – an object that in a sense can actually bear or sustain our enjoyment. And what all of this is driving towards is that our enjoyment of this object should

really be thought of as enjoyment in the fullest sense possible. We are not dealing here with any lessening of degree or intensity. Romance *is*, rather, emphatically enjoyable. And this should be taken to mean, not that there is something suspect about it, but rather that the object it tells of, so to speak, is actually worth enjoying.

Another way of making this claim might be in terms of the common characterization of romance referred to at the beginning of this introduction – in terms of the notion, namely, that what romance allows its readers to experience is a sort of temporary escape from reality. Clearly, what this notion typically implies about romance is that it gives rise to a questionable form of enjoyment. Just as it is possible to rethink the relationship between romance and enjoyment, however – as the preceding paragraph just showed – so can one do the same with this notion of romance as escapist. To follow the above pattern, one might say that romance, as this dissertation defines it, *is* indeed emphatically escapist. The question is simply *what* exactly it enables an escape from. It was just said, now, that the object that romance tells of is an object that is actually meant to be enjoyed. By making its readers aware of this object, then, romance effectively gives them an alternative to all other things that are *not* meant to be enjoyed. And, with this in mind, it becomes clear that romance indeed enables something along the lines of an escape. The thing to note here, of course, is just that this is an escape, not from necessity or reality, but rather from something like misguided ways of desiring and enjoying. Romance does set us free, yet simply in the sense that it redirects our desire towards an object that is actually equal to it. Such a redirection alone, however, is already tantamount, one could argue, to a kind of legitimate, and in many respects unparalleled, "escape" or "wish-fulfillment."

The impression or claim that all of these reflections should help to strengthen is that, in the context of the present study, the notion of romance is indispensable. For, to be sure, when

one thinks about the approach to literature which the present study argues for, it might at first glance appear counterintuitive to associate the notion of romance with this approach. "Wasn't it just said" one might ask, for instance, "that Augustine condemns 'romances'? So why should we draw on him while claiming to be elaborating a theory of romance, of all things?" The answer, to say it again, is that, on the one hand, the following chapters will indeed not seek to read literature in the same manner as the presumed readers of romance stories. They will not understand the immediate content of stories to consist of real things, that is, but rather of true signs, one might say. As the preceding pages have shown, however, the phenomenon that emerges even when one reads in this different sort of way is *still* comparable to what we think of as romance. It is simply as if romance somehow rises now to a kind of higher level, or as if the questionable aspects about it are now slightly transfigured. With this sort of shift, we are clearly no longer talking about the reading of mere romance tales. Yet it is important to retain nevertheless the sense that we still are on some level talking about romance. And it is possible to illustrate why this is so by taking one final glance at a work of secondary literature.

In his classic 1974 study *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Hans Frei describes in beautiful detail a sea-change in Biblical hermeneutics that took place throughout the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the title of his book suggests, Frei's view is that a certain notion of "Biblical narrative" determined how the Bible was read throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, but that, beginning in roughly the eighteenth century, this notion was "eclipsed" as a result of new tendencies in scholarship. The traditional notion of "Biblical narrative," on Frei's view, was always first and foremost that the Bible was understood to be "realistic."[59] There was traditionally a sense that the "literal" events recounted in Scripture, or

[59] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*: *A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1978), 1.

the "narrative shape" of Biblical stories, were things one had to take seriously in order to grasp the truth expressed in these stories. Readers of the Bible, it seems, traditionally knew how to see the reality inherent in *these* particular events told in *this* particular way. What the majority of Frei's book shows, however, is that, with "the coming of modernity," the ability of readers to see this became increasingly rare.[60] For, when one reads the Bible with, say, a Deist conception of universal reason, it can seem that the best that Biblical stories can do is just to confirm basic truths we might learn by other means. Or, once the engines of an historical criticism get going, it can likewise become difficult to see how the claim that a story is real or true means anything other than that it is a reliable historical document. Regardless of whatever such modern critical tendencies uncovered, what they more importantly obscured, according to Frei, is a basic understanding of the kind of narrative the Bible presents us with.

The key thing to note about Frei's study here is that, in order to explain what he means by saying that the Bible is "realistic," Frei suggests that we might think about the Bible in terms of the realistic prose narrative of the modern novel. Referring frequently to the work of Erich Auerbach, Frei generally describes literature as realistic if it portrays "ordinary" or "everyday" life seriously, which often means that it shows even the everyday to be subject to "historical forces."[61] His suggestion is essentially that both nineteenth century novels and the Bible do exactly this. To be sure, the notion of realism that Frei is drawing on here will be worth considering in greater detail later on. For now, however, suffice it say that there is simply a host of problems that arise when one seeks to apply this notion to the Bible. To name just two (there are others): what is one to make of all those aspects of the Bible for which the adjective "realistic" is clearly a bit off – the Bible's heavy doses of fantastical imagery and miraculous

[60] Ibid., 3-4.
[61] Ibid., 14-15.

happenings? And why would it be the case that, as Frei's argument implies, modern novelists gained a sense for the realistic at the exact same time that readers of the Bible lost it?[62] When it comes to finding a literary equivalent for what Frei identifies as "Biblical narrative," realism, it seems, leaves something to be desired. And what this observation is ultimately driving at is that romance, as the preceding pages have described it, would be a far more convincing candidate for this role.

To begin with, if we think of Frei's Biblical narrative in terms of romance, then this matter of the apparent incongruence between the spheres of Biblical hermeneutics and secular literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries disappears completely. For, as will be argued later on, the period around 1800 is one in which the phenomenon of literary romance *also* experiences an "eclipse" of sorts. If we think of Biblical narrative in terms of romance, in short, what we see is that both of these phenomena become unintelligible at the same historical moment – so that the trajectories of Biblical hermeneutics and secular literature no longer seem oddly to contradict each other. Yet this claim is ultimately of secondary importance. The main reason to think about romance here is quite simply that it more fully matches the description of the kind of narrative Frei is interested in. For one thing, the notion of romance, unlike that of realism, has no problem accounting for those aspects of the Bible which might seem to diverge from the "ordinary" or "everyday". Additionally, it is crucial to note that, according to Frei, an appreciation of the special nature of Biblical narrative is reflected in the tradition of figural

[62] Frei himself is perplexed by this: "Despite the development of literary realism…no one pursued the possibility that the biblical stories, including miracle reports, might make sense most nearly as realistic narratives… […] Whatever the consensus of previous Christian belief about the place of specific historical events in the divine scheme of things, the isolation of the 'fact' issue as such and its elevation to prime importance in religious argument was itself a function of the realism of the eighteenth century. It was a development unprecedented in prior Christian theological history. But curiously enough, this new and growing realistic sensibility, far from furthering the application of literary realism to the biblical narratives, actually hindered it. Once the Deist has raised the question of external evidence for revelation, the status of factuality for the meaning of revelation became a permanent item on the agenda of religious argument" (137-138).

interpretation which one finds in many writings of the Church fathers. For, as will be explained in detail in Chapter 3, the basis of figural interpretation is the idea that passages taken from various books of the Bible are to be read in light of each other; and the readings that follow will repeatedly demonstrate that, when it comes to works of literature, the notion of romance calls for a remarkably similar sort of interpretive approach. And finally, it is also possible to say that the notion of romance even accounts better for what Frei means when he claims that Biblical narrative is "realistic," or that its "literal meaning" is to be taken seriously.

To be sure, this latter statement appears at first glance to be rather at odds with what was said earlier: wasn't it earlier suggested that to read with romance in mind is precisely *not* to believe in the literal content of stories? While the answer to this question is of course "yes," the contradiction that this poses is only apparent. For it is worth stressing that, in the earlier discussion, what is at stake when thinking about the matter of literal content is, not so much if this content is, say, true or false, but rather if it is best to be thought of as either a thing or a sign. And if the notion of romance suggests that the literal content of stories is not to be believed in, what this means is simply that one should always remember that this content is composed of signs and not things. The key point with regards to Frei, however, is that the signs that romance thus recognizes are still what one might describe as "true" signs - as signs, that is, they *should* be believed in or taken seriously. The catch here, of course, is simply that the thing these "true" signs indeed refer to is an object of belief, i.e. is not really anything that could be seen or described independently of these signs. Yet this exactly fulfills the rather peculiar criteria that Frei sees as definitive of the "realistic" narrative of the Bible. For, on the one hand, it is important to Frei that the literal sense of Scripture is thought of as being "real" or true. At the same time, however, it is just as important to him that the real things which this literal sense

refers to cannot somehow be separated from this literal sense – that is, it should never appear that we might arrive at the truth made manifest in the Bible by means other than reading the Bible. It is arguably the case that Frei's simultaneous demand for both of these criteria can seem contradictory, or, at least, confusing. For if the things in Scripture are "real" – one might reasonably ask – shouldn't this mean that we can put our Bibles down and go find them, so to speak? The resources offered by a certain understanding of romance, however, make it crystal clear how these two demands fit together. The important thing to note, it turns out, is that the reality referred to in Biblical narrative is intrinsically such that it can only be believed in. And to attempt to arrive at this reality by any other means would essentially be to misunderstand the nature of what one is looking for. One would be misconstruing, in other words, what exactly the content of the Bible is.

By way of concluding, however, it should also be said that there is yet another, more basic, reason to think of romance as the phenomenon which the following chapters will be exploring. It is the simple fact that the word romance implies a phenomenon that has something to do with love. The notion of romance, in other words, evokes the sense, not only of a certain way of representing things – as does the notion of realism too – but also of a certain thing that is represented. What we are always on some level dealing with here, in short, is a love story. On the one hand, this claim suggests one final explanation for why romance should be thought of as the literary phenomenon closest to Biblical narrative. For it will be recalled that, when it comes to determining what the Bible is about, the authority of Augustine says that "Scripture enjoins nothing but love," i.e. that it is in some measure about love throughout. And, as a term for the kind of stories one finds in Scripture, the merit of romance would thus be that it is able to take account of this. The question of Biblical narrative aside, however, the fact that romance implies a

story about love is of significance even with regard to purely literary, or non-Biblical, works. For it often helps to explain what enables the comparison of these works. Though the following chapters will be about romance, for instance, a work that was referred to earlier –Gryphius' *Cardenio und Celinde* – is obviously not a romance in any generic sense (it is "ein Traur-Spiel"). As the title *Cardenio und Celinde* perhaps already begins to suggest, however, a *Trauerspiel* though it may be, this work is quite simply about people who are in love, or who are at least caught up in romantic entanglements of sorts. On a fundamental level, that is, the play is about human desire, and about how this desire is often in need of reorientation. Clearly, to say that the play is a romance in *this* sense is to invoke of notion of romance that is not traditionally generic. Yet it also helps to explain why it could actually make sense that there are certain similarities between this play and, say, a film by Alfred Hitchcock

Chapter 1. Folk Romance to Film Romance: Goethe and Hitchcock

The introductory discussion of romance brought the following two main claims to the fore. First, it was argued that romance gives expression to a conventionality that is real; and second, it seems that this sort of conventionality is such that it must necessarily rest upon belief. To say that a discussion about romance could even address such matters, however - i.e. questions concerning the nature of the conventional, for instance – is implicitly to make a third claim as well - namely, that romance is to be thought of here, not so much as a concrete thing or entity, but rather more broadly as a kind of phenomenon. For romance, as the following pages will define it, might be said to appear in a number of guises. One can investigate it by looking at works which, according to many established categories, do not seem to have much in common. And, if this is so, it is clearly not the case that romance is just one kind of work among others; it is rather a phenomenon that becomes observable in a variety of different works. That said, it is of course still in some sense true that "the romance," as a specific sort of entity or generic category, exists. Admittedly, even in this respect there is a wide variety of works that one might want to call "romances" (early Greek novels, medieval courtly verse narratives etc.). When it comes to thinking about romance in this way, however, it is nevertheless often the case that works to which the label "romance" might be applied indeed fulfill a certain criterion: they are popular. Romance, that is – taking this word to refer to a specific kind of literature - often assumes forms that a given society does not recognize as especially prestigious or authoritative.[1] In one sense or another, romance is rather literature of the people. And one of the most important examples of such a popular form of romance is undoubtedly the ballad.

[1] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976), 23-31.

The tradition of balladry in Europe stretches back, by some accounts, to the late Middle Ages.[2] The question of its exact origin aside, it is certain that ballads were a well-established feature of the literary landscape, especially in England, throughout much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[3] An episode from Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* (1611) gives a good impression of what the ballads of this period were like. In the play's fourth act, the roguish vagabond Autolycus shows up peddling, along with an assortment of cheap trinkets, "ballads…songs for man or woman of all sizes…love songs for maids…" (IV.4.187-195). As some of his more dimwitted listeners react to these wares:

> CLOWN: What hast here? Ballads?
> MOPSA: Pray now, buy some. I love a ballad in print…for then we are sure they are true.
> AUTOLYCUS: Here's one to a very doleful tune, how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burden…
> MOPSA: Is it true, think you?
> AUTOLYCUS: Very true, and but a month old. […] Why should I carry lies abroad?[4]

If ballads are a kind of popular literature, what this clearly means in the context of such an episode is that they are trivial, even vulgar. Shakespeare's play was evidently written at a time when the ballad was to some extent thought of as the preferred literature of uneducated commoners. In the second half of the eighteenth century, however, the notion that the ballad is popular began to imply something quite a bit different. One indication of the sort of shift that takes place here might be the following passage from Thomas Percy's landmark collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and other Pieces of earlier Poets* (1765). As Percy writes, the "rude songs" in this volume are to be understood "as effusions of nature, shewing the first efforts of ancient genius, and exhibiting the customs and

[2] M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), 18.
[3] Nick Groom, "The Formation of Percy's Reliques," *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Volume 1* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996), 9.
[4] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996).

opinions of remote ages: of ages that had been almost lost to memory…".[5] In 1765, the fact that the ballad is popular does not necessarily mean it is just trivial. On the contrary, it seems that it is now precisely the ballad's popular origins that make it somehow significant as a literary document.

For what it now means that the ballad is popular is that it is something like the archaic expression of a people still in tune with nature, the expression of a people as yet untouched by the corrupting influence of modern European society. To observe this shift in the understanding of balladry is of course to observe just one indication of much broader contemporary developments. What we are seeing here is nothing less than the first stirrings of Romanticism, and the emergence of a new sort of socio-cultural configuration which, in the intellectual sphere, will ultimately go on to invest such energy in the fields of anthropology and ethnology. Generally speaking, what such developments meant for literature was that a literary work could now be read as the unique expression of a particular culture or historical moment. And the thinker who arguably best understood the inherent potential of such an approach to literature was Johann Gottfried Herder.[6]

Without a doubt, Herder was one of Percy's first and most enthusiastic readers. And in his two collections of *Volkslieder* (1774, 1778/79) he essentially aims to accomplish what Percy did with the *Reliques*, only on even a grander scale. For the *Volkslieder* are presented by Herder as the poetic heritage, not only of England or of his native Germany, but of virtually all the lands of Europe. What Herder understands here under "Volkslied" is a variety of narrative verse forms that he often more specifically refers to, among other things, as either "Balladen" or "Romanzen." Whenever he explains what it is about these poems that makes them at all worth

[5] Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Volume 1* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996), vi.
[6] Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Notre Dame, Indiana: U of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 17-29.

collecting, he ends up echoing – albeit with an unmistakable "Sturm und Drang" flair - the same sorts of sentiments that are already hinted at in the passage from the *Reliques* quoted above. "An Sprache, Ton und Inhalt," for instance,

> sind [die *Volkslieder*] Denkart des Stamms [in which they originate]...Wer sie verachtet und nicht fühlt, zeigt, daß er im Tande ausländischer Nachäfferei so ersoffen, oder mit unwesentlichem Flittergolde der Außenmummerei so verwebt sei, daß ihm das, was *Körper der Nation* ist, unwert und unfühlbar geworden.[7]

In a similar vein, Herder's hope is that his collection will demonstrate to the "Nachahmergeschlecht" of modern German poets "was…ein *wahres Volkslied*, eine *lebendige Gesangromanze* [sei]."[8] And, in addition to the idea that such a "wahres Volkslied" is not merely the product of "Nachäfferei," it is just as certain that it should also have nothing to do with "Abstraktion," or "künstliche, wissenschaftliche Denkart." "Der wahre Romanzenton" should rather be aimed at a people's "sinnliche Existenz." For, far from tending, "wie…unsre aufgeklärte Zeit," towards abstract thought and idle speculation [*Grübeln*], "[die] *Seele des Volks*," it seems, can "only see and hear" [*nur sieht und hört*].[9] In passage after passage, Herder gives voice to the general sentiment that the songs and ballads of his collection somehow answer to a set of guidelines that the modern age has almost lost all awareness of. And there is never any doubt that this "folk" approach to art, i.e. an approach which seems to arise almost organically, is meant to be seen as far superior to most contemporary notions of what poetry should look like.

Certainly, it would be possible to trace the contour of Percy's and Herder's views on balladry and folk poetry quite a bit further. For, to say it again, these views will largely become characteristic for the Romantic movement in general. They will still in some measure be recognizable, for instance, in a text such as Wordsworth's "Preface" to the 1802 edition of

[7] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Volkslieder Übertragungen Dichtungen*, ed. Ulrich Gaier(Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990), 19.
[8] Ibid., 23.
[9] Ibid., 24.

Lyrical Ballads.[10] Already on the basis of a small sample of these views, however, it is possible to make a certain observation about them that is of special relevance in the present context. With the introductory discussion of romance in mind, namely, what is interesting to note about Herder's conception of folk poetry is that it can be understood as an argument for a particular sort of conventionality. And, to be more specific, it can be understood as an argument for a conventionality that is real. The sense that *Volkspoesie* is the result of a sort of real conventionality, in short, would seem to be what makes it so remarkable. For, on the one hand, there is no doubt that folk poetry is to some extent registered here as conventional. This seems to be essentially what it means, in fact, that it is *folk* poetry. The poetry of one people, that is, is going to be a bit different from the poetry of another due to the fact that what each people is defined by is a unique and particular set of, as Percy might put it, "customs and opinions." At the same time, however, it is obviously not the case that the poetry of a particular people is supposed to be thought of as *merely* conventional. For a merely conventional sort of poetry is the creation, not of any *Volk*, but rather of the "Nachahmergeschlecht" of most modern poets. If the work of these poets is conventional, it is because it is the imitation of foreign models. When it comes to folk poetry, however, something different is going on. Here, conventionality is the result, not of slavish imitation, but rather of something like the intuitive grasp of a certain worldview. It arises, that is, organically, on the basis of a people's genuine contact with the particular stretch of "Erde" it inhabits. And to say that it has such an origin is clearly to say that there is something

[10] Wordsworth's word for real conventionality seems to be "real language." For example: "there are few persons, of good sense, who would not allow that the dramatic parts of composition are defective, in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature." He uses the phrase three times here. *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 95-115.

very special about it. It is to say, for instance, as Herder at one point puts it, that works of *Volkspoesie* come into being as a kind of "*Gewächs Gottes*."[11]

Yet it is helpful to recall again the basic understanding of romance that was outlined in the introduction. According to that understanding, romance, on the one hand, gives expression to a conventionality that might be thought of as real – as if reality itself had its own sort of conventions. On the other hand, however, as the inherent strangeness of this idea already suggests, this sort of conventionality can only come into being upon one condition: it has to be believed in. For if a given sign strikes us as inherently incredible – i.e. if it seems to require belief on our part in order to be understood as actually referring to something - this is potentially the very indication that it is open, one might say, to reality. And the implication here is that, when it comes to the sort of conventionality in question, certainty of a particular kind can essentially never be had. For if it ever seems that the meaning of a given sign might be empirically proven – i.e. that it doesn't require active belief for this sign to mean what it does – this would simply show that we're not dealing with romance anymore. Regarding the Romantic conception of folk poetry, now, it was just said that Romantic theorists most fundamentally understand such poetry as being both conventional and real. Apparently, however, if they are right about this, then it would seem that the sort of conventionality this poetry gives expression to is something that one would have to believe in. To put it a bit differently, it would seem that, by describing folk poetry as both conventional and real, Romantic theorists would also have to be arguing that the reading of it must be guided by belief. When one examines the discourse surrounding folk poetry a bit further, it becomes possible to say that they indeed argue this. To be sure, the works that James Macpherson published in the 1760s as his own translations of the

[11] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Volkslieder Übertragungen Dichtungen*, ed. Ulrich Gaier(Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990), 23.

ancient Highlands bard Ossian were not made up of ballads or short verse narratives. Nominally, they were "Epic Poem[s]."[12] Scholarship suggests, however, that, to the extent Macpherson drew on genuine sources, these sources were "popular ballad[s]."[13] And Herder indeed writes about of *The Works of Ossian* as if they are just as much examples of *Volkslieder* as the songs and ballads in Percy's *Reliques*. What makes *Ossian* noteworthy here is mainly the controversy it stirred up. For this controversy lays bare like nothing else the extent to which belief plays a role in the Romantic conception of folk poetry. Specifically, of course, the thing that either belief or unbelief pertains to in this controversy is the authenticity of *Ossian*, or, as David Hume put it, whether or not the poems are based on an "ancient manuscript" or "were…forged within these five years by James Macpherson."[14] Samuel Johnson, for one, in a letter to Macpherson, did not equivocate about where he stood: "I thought your book an imposture; I think it an imposture still."[15] And at least one of Johnson's contemporaries was "convinced" by the Doctor's reasons for this take:

> I am charmed with [Johnson's] researches into the Erse language, and the antiquity of their manuscripts. I am quite convinced; and I shall rank Ossian and his Fingals and Oscars amongst the nursery tales, not the true history of [Scotland].[16]

Meanwhile, however, in German-speaking lands, Herder was arguing for what seems to be the completely opposite position. On the one hand, Herder is clearly aware that the authenticity of *Ossian* could be seen as doubtful. As he addresses his imagined interlocutor in the 1773 *Briefwechsel über Ossian*: "Sie, der vorher so halsstarrig an der Wahrheit und Authenticität des

[12] James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996), 39.
[13] Howard Gaskill, "Ossian, Herder, and the Idea of Folk Song," in *Literature of the Sturm und Drang*, ed. David Hill (Rochester, New York: Camden House), 97.
[14] Michael Mac Craith, "'We know all these poems': The Irish Response to *Ossian*," in The Reception of Ossian in Europe, ed. Howard Gaskill (London: Thoemmes, 2004), 91. The quotation is taken from a letter by Hume to Hugh Blair written on September 19, 1763.
[15] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R.W. Chapman (London: Oxford UP, 1970), 579.
[16] Ibid. 582.

Schottischen Ossians zweifelte...". Yet he himself is adamant: "Ossians Gedichte [sind]...Lieder des Volkes, Lieder eines ungebildeten sinnlichen Volks." And, remarkably, what he refers to in order to justify this view is either "[ein] inneres Zeugnis" or "den Geist des Werks selbst…, der uns mit weissagender Stimme [zusagt]: 'so etwas kann Macpherson unmöglich gedichtet haben! so was läßt sich in unserm Jahrhunderte nicht dichten'"![17]

Unlike Johnson and Herder, many people of the time were less certain about the matter. Percy, for instance, began – perhaps because he was an Englishman and not a Scot - as a doubter, but was then, at least for a time, "converted to a belief in the authenticity of *Ossian*:"

> When I was in Scotland I made great inquiry into the Authenticity of Ossian's Poetry; and could not resist the Evidence that poured in upon me; so that I am forced to believe them, as to the main, genuine in spite of my teeth.[18]

Arguably, what made it so difficult to decide about *Ossian* is the fact that there was far more at stake in this debate than just the isolated case of Macpherson's supposed translations. It is telling, in this regard, that Percy's *Reliques* were actually accused of being a "Forgery" too. Similar to Macpherson, Percy claimed that "[t]he greater part of [the *Reliques* were] extracted from an ancient folio manuscript."[19] A certain Joseph Ritson, however – a collector of old English poems himself- insisted that, even if such a manuscript existed, Percy's "labour…in correcting" it "must have equal'd that of Hercules in cleansing the Augean stable."[20] The larger controversy here, of which the case of *Ossian* is just a part, seems to concern the more fundamental issue of what even constitutes "truth" or "authenticity" when it comes to literature. On the one hand, in someone like Ritson, we see a tendency toward a more historical-critical

[17] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Herder und der Sturm und Drang: 1764-1774*, ed. Wolfgang Pross (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1984), 477-478.
[18] Thomas Percy, *The Percy Letters: Correspondence of Percy and Evans*, ed. Aneirin Lewis (Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 117. The quotation is from a letter written on December 24, 1765.
[19] Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Volume 1* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996), ix.
[20] Nick Groom, "The Formation of Percy's Reliques," *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Volume 1* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996), 54.

attitude: simply put, the text is authentic if it is "ancient" and was not tampered with. Herder and Percy, to be sure, were also interested in historical accuracy. Yet there is clearly an additional element to their approach. As the above passage from Herder suggests, there is a sense, in his view, that the "Authenticität" of a work is a product, not only of its provenance, but also of its "Geist." And, evidently, when one fails to appreciate this, the reason for it is that one has begun to doubt [*zweifeln*].

Strictly speaking, with regards to *Ossian*, it is of course true that Herder was wrong. And, in the case of Percy's *Reliques* as well, it seems that skepticism concerning the "ancient folio manuscript" was not unfounded. At the same time, however, to say that Herder was simply "wrong," and to call it a day, would be to misunderstand how the Ossianic debate was ever able to take on the proportions that it did. It seems, in other words, that, even if Herder was "wrong," he was nevertheless on to *something*. The hypothesis of this chapter for what exactly this something is might be summarized like this. On the one hand, if the Romantic conception of balladry, or *Volkspoesie*, expects one to believe in the existence of a poetically productive *Volk*, this basically means that, as was suggested above, this conception understands balladry to exhibit a peculiar sort of conventionality. To the extent that this understanding constitutes a literary program, the *Volk* that Romantic theorists speak of is certainly real in some measure: it anchors a coherent notion of literature that, at least for a time, was wildly productive. That said, however, it is of course perennially possible to argue, show, prove – as has been done over and over again – that this *Volk* never really existed.[21] Granted that this is right, however – that there never was any such idealized *Volk* - this changes nothing about the fact that a peculiar sort of conventionality calling for belief on our part *can* actually be identified in many ballads. Or to put this claim a bit

[21] For example, Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

differently, it's as if the conventionality characteristic of balladry is indeed such that it calls for or requires belief – in *this* sense, Herder is right. Where the Romantic conception goes "wrong" is just where it wants to define this belief as a belief in a "Volksgeist."[22] For the suggestion that a "Volksgeist" is what we should believe in can lead to a rather skewed understanding of what real conventionality is – can lead to an understanding of this phenomenon that is at least not the *only* way to conceive of it.[23]

In this respect, it is worth being as explicit as possible: the point is not that early Romantic theories of folk poetry anticipate a notion of what the present study defines as romance. Insofar as they imply that the reading of literature might be guided by belief, these

[22] In saying that Herder is "wrong" or "mistaken," what I mean is that he is "wrong" from the perspective of romance. In other words, he takes a step in a direction here that makes it increasingly difficult to see romance as a phenomenon. Naturally, however, when one considers what he is doing from a different perspective, he is very "right." What is at stake here, obviously, are not just simple questions that one might be "right" or "wrong" about; what is at stake are the coordinates of a socio-cultural framework. Regarding how these coordinates are shifting in the late eighteenth century, there is of course an easy, if overly simple, way to put it: the role of Christianity in European society is being rethought. And, more than likely, it is this fact that explains the strange fascination with Ossian. For there is no doubt that what initially made *Ossian* so remarkable is that the poems seem to be utterly unaware of Christianity. As Macpherson writes in the "Preface" to his first Ossianic publication, "[I]t is remarkable that there are found in them no allusions to the Christian religion or worship; indeed, few traces of religion of any kind." *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996), 5. As Herbert Schöffler succintly puts it: "Alles war Natur in den Ossianischen Gesängen.... Und – das Wesentlichste – diese Natur kannte keinen Gott. Ein unerhörtes Ereignis für diese aus altkirchlichem Denken sich lösende Jugend der Zeit. […] fort von gottbelebter Natur hin zum Horizonte ohne Götter und Gott. Kein Wunder, daß die Erschütterung der Seelen groß war." Herbert Schöffler, "Ossian: Hergang und Sinn eines großen Betrugs," in *Deutscher Geist im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 146-147.

[23] A rough sketch of how Romanticism understands the real conventionality of ballads might look like this. On the one hand – as the quotation from Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* shows – the stories ballads tell are obviously formulaic, obviously made-up. The innovation of Romanticism, however, is to reconceive the implication of this formulaic quality. In a word, the fact that the stories are formulaic is turned into a demonstration of how simple, artless, naïve, natural, and uncorrupted the *Volk* is. Yet the crucial thing is that Romanticism can understand formulaic stories in this way only because it simultaneously assumes something else: namely, that it itself is trapped in modernity. For, normally – and the Shakespeare quotation is again helpful – the fact that a story is formulaic would just make us think that it is implausible. For Romanticism, however, it means something totally different, it means just that the people who wrote it were not yet modern. In this sense, therefore, it can be totally excused, permitted. It gains a new sort of explanation or justification. Yet again, the crucial assumption here is that a break occurred which now separates the *Volk* from the moderns. Summarizing, one might say that, though a real conventionality results from all of this, it is not the kind that romance envisions. For it is imagined as existing exclusively among the *Volk*. That is, the ways of the *Volk* were still real because they sprang from nature. Among the moderns, on the other hand, the idea is that there simply is no conventionality anymore. All traditions have lost their hold on the moderns. What governs their world, they would say, is just science and rationality. Romance, by contrast, is not one-sided like this. For romance, it's not as if there could be a real conventionality on the one hand and an absence of conventionality on the other. Reality and convention, rather, pervade each other completely.

early theories may help to illustrate how romance works. Yet they amount to something far different from romance – and will give rise to yet other things far different from romance - as soon as they put forth the notion of a *Volk* for what this belief should pertain to.[24] For the claim of romance is that the object in which literature might inspire belief is essentially unimaginable, such that if it ever seems like it would be possible to pin this object down – e.g. to say that it might be imagined as the existence of a *Volk* – the notion of romance has at this point been lost from view. The idea is not that the object believed in should be utterly unknowable, a kind of black hole; it is simply that this object needs to be thought of in such a way that there could never be the temptation to look for evidence of it that would make belief just additional or superfluous- it has to be obvious that belief will necessarily always be required. And, concerning the notion of a *Volk*, this is not so obvious. Clearly, however, if the Romantic conception of balladry is, let's say, mistaken in this regard, then it must be possible to read ballads differently. It must be possible to show that ballads can still call for and elicit belief, even if this is most definitely not a belief in a folk origin. The remainder of this chapter, will indeed aim to show this. And the way it will do so is by considering two of Goethe's most famous ballads – "Der Erlkönig" (1782) and "Die Braut von Corinth" (1797) - against the background of a few films by Hitchcock.

On the one hand, such a comparison must undoubtedly seem odd at first. And indeed, there is a sense in which something like an element of chance is behind it. For, at least according to the existing scholarship, there is no tangible reason – evidence that Hitchcock read these

[24] The question of what they "amount to" will be addressed further on in the chapter, yet it may be helpful to anticipate that juncture somewhat. The basic idea is that, in theorizing the existence of a *Volk*, eighteenth-century thinkers are laying the groundwork for the rise of modern subjectivity. In the long-run, it seems that what the belief in a *Volk* eventually becomes is something like the belief in the self. To put it differently, we are witnessing the development whereby people eventually begin to think of themselves as autonomous, self-determining individuals. For the full account of the role that folk poetry plays in this development, see David E. Wellbery, *The Specular Moment*: *Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

poems, for instance – to bring Goethe and Hitchcock together. The fact that this comparison is being pursued, therefore, is the result of a kind of chance discovery. On the other hand, however, it seems that, in light of the present line of inquiry, only a seemingly "odd" comparison would really be of any help. For what is at stake here is the nature of the conventional in general, not the specific features that make up any one identifiable genre or form. In other words: it is helpful, and to some degree necessary, to look also at film, for instance, in order to see that what we're dealing with are not just features of, say, the ballad. While Goethe's ballads and Hitchcock's films are certainly separated in enough respects not to belong to any one generic category, it should be mentioned, finally, that there are perhaps some things that link them – most notably, just the word "romance." Like Herder, Goethe often refers to ballads as "Romanzen."[25] And, if Hitchcock makes "romantic thrillers," they are romantic thrillers in which the romance element is especially dominant. This may seem simply like saying "both of these forms deal with love." Yet the following readings will show that the parallels to be considered are far more complex than this. These readings will unfold in two main stages: first, three simple comparisons will lay out a number of parallels; after this it will then be possible to perform a genuine analysis of two of the works considered.

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"Der Erlkönig" – *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934)

One possible starting point for this comparison is the 1934 version of Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the basic storyline of which begins as follows. A husband (Bob) and

[25] Consider Goethe's letter to Schiller from May 3, 1797. In response to Schiller's remark that he has found good material for "eine Ballade," Goethe writes: "Der Gedanke, eine Romanze aus diesem zu machen, ist sehr glücklich." Additionally, Goethe's ballad "Die Braut von Corinth" initially appeared in Schillers Musen-Almanach with the subtitle "Romanze." For a more in-depth discussion of what specifically, in eighteenth-century German letters, a "Romanze" was thought to be, see Rüdiger Singer, *Nachgesang: Ein Konzept Herders, entwickelt an Ossian, der Popular Ballad und der frühen Kunstballade* (Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 225-236.

wife (Jill) are vacationing with their young daughter (Betty) in St. Moritz, Switzerland, where they have recently made the acquaintance of Louis Bernard, a man who, as it turns out, is a government agent, and who knows of a plot to assassinate a statesman. At the beginning of the film, Bernard is killed by the villains behind this plot, yet is able, before dying, to relay what he knows to Jill and Bob. When the villains realize this, however, they kidnap the couple's child, and warn that they should say nothing about what they know or "[they] will never see [their] child again." The sense that this film is noteworthy in the present context is perhaps most strikingly apparent at that moment when the child is first taken. For what we see at that moment is, among other things, the following. A somewhat androgynous-looking child (Betty) is sitting next to an impassive male figure in a horse-drawn sleigh, riding through the forest:

Figure 1.1: the child is kidnapped in
The Man Who Knew Too Much

Figure 1.2: the child is kidnapped in
The Man Who Knew Too Much

The general mood and content of these images is perhaps already enough to evoke Goethe's ballad "Der Erlkönig," Yet there is more to be considered here than just a sort of common general mood. To suggest some of the parallels that most readily come into view: the androgyny of the child, for one thing – who is tellingly almost always called a child, not a daughter– would seem to make room for the fact that the child in the poem is technically a "Knabe;" the poem begins, of course, with the "Arm" of the father prominently grasping [*faßt*] or holding [*hält*] the child, while, in the film, we see the gloved hand of the male figure wrapped around the child's face; although it would seem to be for a different reason, the face [*Gesicht*] of the child in the poem as well is initially covered or hidden [*birgst*]; considering that the child in the film seems to be resting on something like gigantic furs, she is certainly, like the child in the poem, kept "*warm*."[26] Or, to jump to the end of the poem, what we read there is that the child is "ächzend." To be sure, we don't exactly hear this in the film, but it is as if we see it, for the child is shown

[26] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Gedichte 1756-1799*, ed. Karl Eibl (Berlin: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2010), 662-663. All citations to the two poems discussed in this chapter refer to the Klassiker Verlag edition.

breathing heavily with an open mouth. And, arguably, both the word "ächzend" and this image in the film carry something of the same sexual undertones.

Perhaps the most interesting parallel between poem and film, however, has yet to be mentioned. It emerges on the basis of a brooch or pin which, in the film, the child is wearing on the lapel of her coat:

Figure 1.3: Betty's brooch in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*

On the one hand, it is difficult to say with precision what the shape of this brooch depicts. Obviously, it depicts a little skier figure of some sort. Yet what kind of being, exactly, is this skier? It is not clear if it is male, female, or really even human.[27] Regardless of what exactly it depicts, however, this brooch is certainly noteworthy when one considers how the "Erlkönig"-figure in the poem is described. As the child of the poem puts it, the "Erlkönig" is equipped with a "Kron' und Schweif." It is of course true that the skier figure, not being a king, technically has neither a crown nor a train. Upon second glance, however, one might say that this figure actually does have an equivalent of these things. The skier figure may not wear a crown, yet it does wear

[27] One commentator, Ina Rae Hark, sees in this brooch the figure of "a little skier girl." I must admit that, when the brooch is shown later on in the film, during the Albert Hall sequence, it does somewhat look like a girl to me. Yet, in the close-up of it, oddly enough, it strikes me as more difficult to say for sure. In either case, it seems possible to say that there is some level of ambiguity here. See Ina Rae Hark, "Revalidating Patriarchy," in *Hitchcock's Rereleased Films: from Rope to Vertigo*, ed. Walter Raubicheck and Walter Srebnik (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 215.

a curious sort of snow hat; and with regards to the trailing train, there is a sense in which one can see this in the ends of the scarf, or even in the trailing bottom half of the skies. In a similar vein, there is also something to note here about the fact that the "Erlkönig" is a "König," a king. What exactly is he a king of? The word "Erlkönig," coming as it does from "die Erle," suggests perhaps that he is just a sort of spirit of the forest. It is helpful to note, however, that this word is potentially the result of a mistranslation on the part of Herder. For Goethe's "Erlkönig" is roughly based on the German translation of a Danish ballad included in Herder's *Volkslieder*.[28] And it seems that the word Herder rendered as "Erle" in this translation – *elle* – is really supposed to mean "Elfe," elf.[29] The material that Goethe's ballad draws on, therefore, features not so much an "Erlkönig" as an "Elfenkönig," – a fact which is interesting when we turn back to the skier figure in Hitchcock. For is there perhaps something a bit elfish about this figure? Could the curious hat and shoes – and the rather impish facial expression - be those of an elf?

Again, it is difficult to say this for sure. In light of a few other aspects of the film, however, there indeed seems reason to think of this skier figure on the brooch as something like the film's version of an "Erl-" or "Elfenkönig." Consider again, for instance, the image of the kidnapped child and the impassive male figure riding through the night. What we see in this image, or series of images, is a kind of three-figure constellation made up of child, man, and skier figure. And in the poem as well, an essentially three-figure constellation prevails, in which the "Erlkönig" is in the same place as the brooch in Hitchcock. In the poem, of course, the interplay within this constellation looks roughly like this: while the child tries to get the father to

[28] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Klassische Dramen*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer and Peter Huber (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2008), 1123. The commentary here is on Goethe's Singspiel *Die Fischerin* in which "Der Erlkönig" first appeared. It reads: "Der Stoff [der Erlkönig-Ballade] entstammt einer weiteren dänischen Volksballade, *Erlkönigs Tochter*, in Herders Übertragung."
[29] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Volkslieder Übertragungen Dichtungen*, ed. Ulrich Gaier(Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990), 1144. "Der Name 'Erlkönig' aus Ellerkonge beruht auf einer Verwechslung des oft homonym geschriebenen elve, elle (Elfe) mit el, elle (Erle) durch Herder."

see, or recognize the existence of, the "Erlkönig," the father seems somehow incapable of doing so. In the film, nothing like this happens in the short scene in the forest. Yet it does arguably happen elsewhere. Earlier on, namely, we see the moment when Betty first receives the brooch (from her mother); and, with the poem in mind, it is remarkable both what she does here and how she is reacted to. She first looks at it and gives out a happy "oh!," upon which she is told to "shh!" and "be quiet!" by both her mother and a crowd of upset adults. She then tries to show the brooch to her father instead – "Daddy, don't you like it?" – who similarly responds with nothing more than an annoyed "shut up, darling." Quite plainly, what happens here is that, though the child tries to get her father to look at and somehow acknowledge the brooch, he is evidently unwilling to do so. And it is very telling that, as in the poem, this scene takes place shortly before the catastrophic moment when the child is taken, as if the father's unresponsiveness somehow contributes to this moment.

Yet, concerning the father, a few more things are worth mentioning. Almost directly after the image of the kidnapped child in the forest, for instance, what we see is the father, now back in London, being interrogated alone by the police. And the nature of this interrogation is such – "you…went to St. Moritz…with your little daughter…You returned to London without your little daughter" – that it initially sounds as if the father is maybe suspected of killing the child. Naturally, this brings the end of the poem to mind: "In seinen Armen das Kind war tot." Furthermore, upon closer consideration, this predicament of the father in the film actually sheds a fascinating light on the figure of the "Vater" in Goethe. For the issue in the film is of course that the father, as the film's title suggests, is a "man who knows too much." Simply put, he loses his child as a result of knowing about an assassination attempt. In Goethe's ballad, there are naturally no plots to assassinate any statesmen. Yet let's consider a bit more carefully what is

going on in the poem. Basically, the child repeatedly presents the father with indications that there is an "Erlkönig." And each time, or at least the first three times, the father simply explains away what the child tells him– says that it was really just fog or rustling leaves. In a certain sense, one could describe this scenario by saying that the issue here is that, like in the film, this "Vater" is a "man who knows too much." His knowledge, that is, literally extends too far, in the sense that the problem here is that, by calming the child's fears with rational explanations, the father fails to see what the child is even talking about. There is thus something a bit amiss about the father's knowledge; to a certain extent, he should really claim to "know less." And, with this in mind, it is amazing that, in the film, when the father is being interrogated after the kidnapping, he initially claims to know "nothing whatsoever" – as if trying to overcorrect for the catastrophe that his knowing too much has just caused.

On another note, something that has not yet come up is the role of the central villain (Abbott) in the film, played by Peter Lorre. Since he is behind the child's kidnapping, one might think that he too would qualify for something like the film's version of an "Erlkönig." And there are indeed a few signs that he actually does.[30] Consider again the moment when the child tries in

[30] Concerning the idea that Lorre plays an "Erlkönig"-figure in the film, some of his own comments on the role are remarkable. If one didn't know what role he was talking about, it could really almost sound like he was cast in a dramatic production of the ballad: "This…was a really intelligent…film, and the part called for subtle characterization…. There was no obvious terrorism in it. I had to be a villain without making it apparent until the film had half developed. I had to be a villain enough for a child, [who had] the clear perception of childhood, to dislike me; and yet for grown-ups to see nothing out of the ordinary in me at all. This gave the role a background of reality and I was very glad to play it." It is also noteworthy that, by Lorre's own account, he knew virtually no English even during the shooting of the film; he allegedly learned his lines phonetically. The fact is interesting, since it highlights the extent to which Lorre in some sense appears in the film as a German-speaking actor. Now, if someone is going to play the "Erlkönig" in an English-speaking film, it would certainly be fitting to find someone with some sort of connection to the German literary tradition. Strikingly, something similar arguably can be observed in *The Lady Vanishes*. For not only is this film like one of Goethe's ballads, it also takes place in what is transparently a German-speaking region, and German is indeed spoken in the film. Even an aspect of *Shadow of a Doubt* might be mentioned here too. For, again, the film is like one of Goethe's ballads. And, although we are apparently in small-town America, the film was made during World War Two. The events in Germany are somewhere in the background here. Additionally, of course, there is also the matter of Uncle Charlie manifesting aspects of the Dracula myth – something that warrants associating him generally, perhaps, with Eastern and Central Europe. When Uncle Charlie is said to come from "out East," this obviously does not mean *only* that he comes from

vain to show the brooch to her father. What happens here is that Abbott steps between them, presenting the child with a chiming watch:

Figure 1.4: father, villain, and child in
The Man Who Knew Too Much

The child then gives it back to him, protesting angrily "I'm not a baby!" The moment is interesting in light of how the "Erlkönig" wants to entice the child with "schöne Spiele." Or consider as well how the "Erlkönig" in the poem in some sense desires the child ("mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt"). For this fact is noteworthy in light of how Abbott makes his appearance at the very opening of the film. He is made to fall down in the snow, namely, because of something that Betty does – upon which Betty's father says to him: "That daughter of mine seems to be knocking them cold before her time." The phrase "knocking them cold" is then emphasized when Abbott asks about it. And the result is that, at the very beginning of the film, a desire for Betty on the part of Abbott seems subtly to be intimated. Yet a perhaps even greater sign that Abbott is a kind of filmic "Erlkönig" comes later on. There is a point, closer to the end

Philadelphia. For Lorre's comments on his role, see Stephen Youngkin, *The Lost One: A Life of Peter Lorre* (Lexington: U of Kentucky Press, 2005), 91-92.

of the film, when father and child are reunited yet still in the clutches of the villain. What Hitchcock shows us here is another sort of three-figure constellation, in which father and child, holding onto each other, look with concern at Abbott:

Figure 1.5: villain, father, and child in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*

It is almost as if Hitchcock presents us here with what Goethe's poem might look like when the father finally realizes the child is onto something, when the father begins to see, that is, what the child sees.

Another figure in the film worth considering, finally, is the mother. The sense in which she too might be thought of as standing in a kind of relationship to the poem is probably most evident at the famous scene in the Albert Hall. The mother goes to the Albert Hall because it turns out that the assassination attempt is to take place there during a concert. The piece performed at this concert, the "Storm Clouds Cantata," was composed for the film by Arthur Benjamin. And, in the present context, its lyrics are rather interesting. What the chorus in the Albert Hall is singing is the following:

There came a whispered terror on the breeze
And the dark forest shook
And on the trembling trees
Came nameless fear, and panic overtook
Each flying creature of the wild
And when they all had fled…
God save the child
Around whose head screaming
The night birds wheel and shoot away
God save the child
Finding release from that which drove them onward like their prey
[God save the child, God save the child…]
Finding release the storm clouds broke
And drowned the dying moon
The storm clouds broke, the storm clouds broke
Finding release!

On the one hand, this text is sufficiently different from Goethe's ballad that it really doesn't seem to be referring to it, or to be explicitly based on it, let's say. At the same time, however, there are unquestionably certain parallels.[31] The cantata begins with reference to a wind or "breeze;" it is a "dark" "night;" the general atmosphere is thick with "fear" and "panic;" and – most notably, of course – there is a "child" here apparently in grave danger. Add to this now another interesting fact: in the film, when the mother is hearing these lyrics, she at one point pauses to look down at the peculiar brooch-figure, which she is now holding in her hand. At the same time we hear the above lyrics, therefore, we are shown the peculiar figure that, earlier, was already associated with the image of the kidnapped child riding through the night. Summarizing, it is tempting to describe the effect of all of this as follows. What we see in the Albert Hall sequence is the mother of the poem – who, of course, does not explicitly appear there – in some sense looking on at the terrifying scene in the night, in some sense "reading the ballad." She sees

[31] There seems to be an additional parallel here of a slightly different order. For it is of course striking that a film reminiscent of "Der Erlkönig" – a poem most familiar in the *Lied*-form Schubert gave it - would somehow work a performance of vocal music into its plot.

from a distance the plight of the child, and does what seems to be, in the situation, the only thing she can do, i.e. she screams.

"Die Braut von Corinth" – *The Lady Vanishes*

Let us turn now to another film from Hitchcock's British period, *The Lady Vanishes*, from 1938. When this film begins, Iris, its heroine, is vacationing in "Central Europe;" yet she is about to head back home to England, where she is to be married – something she seems less than excited about. Things begin to take a slightly different course, however, when, on the train ride through Europe, an old woman whom Iris has just met (Miss Froy) inexplicably vanishes. When Iris tries to find her, everyone on the train denies that the woman ever even existed. The only person who helps Iris in her search is Gilbert, a young musician. Together, the two of them discover that Miss Froy has been kidnapped by a ring of conspirators on the train. Through a series of twists and turns, they free the old woman and ruin the plans of the villains before finally returning home. And, at this point, finally, Iris ditches the person she was supposed to marry and marries Gilbert instead.

Again, what the following pages will show is that, when one observes how it is that Hitchcock films this story, it becomes possible to find, in a sense, one of Goethe's ballads within it. The ballad in this case, however, is not "Der Erlkönig," but rather "Die Braut von Corinth" – a poem that it will perhaps be helpful also to summarize. It goes roughly as follows. When the two protagonists of this poem – a Corinthian girl and an Athenian boy – were children, it seems their parents agreed that they should eventually be married. We learn, however, that, since the time of this agreement, something has changed: though the boy is still a pagan, the girl's family (or at least her mother) has become Christian. Will they still allow the marriage to take place? When the poem opens, the boy arrives in Corinth in order to find out. Having been welcomed into the

girl's family home, he indeed encounters, in the night, his apparent bride to be. It turns out, however, that the girl is not exactly in a marriageable state: when her family became Christian, they apparently did something like pledge her to a convent, which in some sense led to her death - so that she now leads only a ghostly, vampiric existence. Nevertheless, this nocturnal meeting of the pair ultimately becomes erotic, even, to some degree, matrimonial. To be sure, the girl's mother, who can hear them from the hall, tries to intervene. Yet the girl strongly asserts herself here, repudiating her mother's Christianity. And, in the poem's final flourish, the girl asks the mother to grant her and the boy a kind of joint *Flammentod*, a death, it seems, which might allow this pair to return to the pagan gods who will condone their love.

On the one hand, when the film and ballad are seen from a bird's eye view like this, they can already appear to share a sort of a basic plot structure. Their surface differences aside, both works are centered around the figure of a bride to be; and in the course of both of them, again, one might say that this bride arrives at sort of fundamental awareness about the nature of the world around her. It is not only on the level of basic plot structure, however, that these works are comparable. And this perhaps first becomes apparent in light of how Iris is portrayed in the early scenes of the film. We first learn that Iris is to be married as she talks about her upcoming wedding with her friends in her hotel room. Primarily of interest in this scene are the two following things. First, it is clear that Iris' marriage will have nothing to do with what is referred to in the scene as "love;" she is getting married, rather, only because she thinks that this is what is expected of her, i.e. that the groom is socially well-placed and the match would please her father. Second, it is curious that, when Iris is talking here, the image of her body on the left side of the screen is subtly juxtaposed with the image of crucifix on the right side:

Figure 1.6: Iris in her hotel room in
The Lady Vanishes

Certainly, it is not the case that Iris is about to become some sort of nun. But let's consider the facts. She is being driven into a marriage that has no basis in sexual attraction; and, as she talks about this marriage, she is in some sense standing in the shadow of a cross. When described like this, Iris' situation is not all that different from that of the bride in Goethe's poem. And this impression is certainly strengthened by another striking parallel. When the bride in the poem explains her family's conversion, namely, she implies that it turned her into a sacrificed victim, a "Menschenopfer." Iris clearly imagines that her marriage will make of her the exact same thing. As she envisions the scene of her wedding: "this time next week I shall be a slightly sunburnt offering on an altar in Hanover Square."

In the poem, of course, the Christian element, stemming from the family's conversion, is not all that we see: the fact that the boy is pagan allows the poem to stage a kind of confrontation between Christianity and the Gods of Greece. Remarkably, now, it is possible to say that the film stages this confrontation too. For the person in the hotel room above Iris turns out to be Gilbert,

the young musician; and when Iris sends the hotel manager to Gilbert's room, to make him quiet down, what we see Gilbert doing there is worth reflecting on. As he himself tells the manager, he is playing "the ancient music with which your peasant ancestors celebrated every wedding for countless generations; or "putting on record for the benefit of mankind one of the lost folk dances of Central Europe." To be sure, we're not dealing here with, say, the Gods of Greece. Yet Gilbert is associated with what might certainly be described as an "ancient" or pagan culture. And, in the scene that follows, he indeed confronts or encounters Iris in the exact same way that the boy in the poem encounters the bride. What happens is that, having been thrown out of his room, Gilbert comes downstairs to stay in Iris' instead. And, with the poem in mind, it is remarkable what we see here. For one thing, Gilbert greets Iris by playing a few notes on his clarinet. Considering that these notes were just said to come from "ancient wedding music," it is almost as if he is subtly proposing to Iris here – which of course is what the pagan boy in the poem does when he meets the bride. And, in the same vein, it is telling that, as Gilbert approaches Iris' bed, she at one point commands him to "keep away!" For this is the same thing that, during their nocturnal meeting in the poem, the bride initially tells the boy: "Ferne bleib', o Jüngling!"

These few observations, however, are really just the tip of the iceberg. In order to see how deep the parallels between these two works run, it is helpful first to highlight the following passage from the poem. It is spoken by the bride, and describes the effects of her mother's Christian conversion:

> Und der alten Götter bunt Gewimmel
> Hat sogleich das stille Haus geleert.
> Unsichtbar wird Einer nur im Himmel,
> Und ein Heiland wird am Kreuz verehrt (57-63).

The crucial thing to note about this passage is that it essentially concerns the status of images, or of the imaginary. For the pagan gods are figured here as a sort of wondrous visual delight, "[ein] bunt Gewimmel," whereas the Christian God is emphatically invisible, "unsichtbar." The general sense that this description creates is that, when the home of the girl became Christian, what basically happened was that *imag*inary, or visible, things lost their validity. With the rise of an invisible, or un*imag*inable, God, that is, imaginary things basically became branded as unreal, or as *merely* imaginary. Turning back to the film now with this in mind, it is worth reconsidering the scene in which Gilbert is shown "putting on record [a] lost folk danc[e]." What we see here is Gilbert playing music while a group of three hotel workers dance; at one point, he has them hold a pose so that he can draw or "record" this dance in his notebook:

Figure 1.7: Gilbert in his hotel room in *The Lady Vanishes*

One way of describing what Gilbert is doing here is to say that he is creating a *tableau vivant*. For, on the one hand, the dance he is looking at is indeed an image of sorts: beyond the fact that he is drawing it, he is also imagining it, one might say, in the sense that he seems to be directing

these dancers' movements – this dance, in other words, did not just happen spontaneously. On the other hand, however, though the dance is thus an image, it is of course also real. Gilbert has made it so, that is, by getting real people to perform it. The implication, it seems, is that, in Gilbert's eyes, the imaginary is perfectly valid, perfectly real. And it is important to remember that the film tells us this as it shows Gilbert recording "ancient," or pagan, customs. Just like the poem, in other words, the film too seems to suggest a link here between paganism and the validity of the imaginary.

Since, at this point in the film, Iris' conception of marriage is subtly coded as Christian, one might expect that she, on the other hand, would take something of the opposite stance, i.e. that she would assume the imaginary to be illusory. It can be shown now that this is indeed her understanding. Most telling in this regard is initially just that what bothers Iris is the stomping of the dancers on the ceiling above her. What she initially objects to, in other words, is that, when one of Gilbert's imaginings becomes real, it makes all sorts of racket and disturbs the peace. When Gilbert soon thereafter enters Iris' room, however, we see her denial of the imaginary take on a slightly different form. For here it's as if the imaginary creation she is denying is her own image of Gilbert. Given that Iris is shown sleeping just before Gilbert opens her door, for instance, it is not difficult to see his appearance as the start of an imaginary dream sequence. Beyond this, however, there is a moment where Hitchcock literally turns Gilbert into a kind of image. After making his place on Iris' bed, Gilbert heads to the washroom, where he prepares a hot bath; and, when he comes out, the steam from the water surrounds him with a momentary nimbus:

Figure 1.8: Gilbert emerges from the washroom in *The Lady Vanishes*

The suggestion seems to be that Gilbert himself almost assumes the status of a god here. Or, to put it in terms of the poem, it's as if, with his appearance, part of the "bunt Gewimmel" parades through Iris' room. An even larger shot of the crucifix on Iris' wall here, however, makes it clear how she must react to this parade. Such images, in short, like illusory pagan gods, cannot have any reality for her. So she is forced to have the manager give Gilbert his old room back – anything to make him leave.

Later on in the film, however, Iris' view with respect to the imaginary begins to change; and this again happens in a way that is reminiscent of the poem. For, in their search for Miss Froy, Iris and Gilbert at one point open the door of a train cabin in which they see what appears to be a completely bandaged medical patient being watched over by a nun:

Figure 1.9: the bandaged Miss Froy in
The Lady Vanishes

The image is striking when compared with the following passage from the poem, spoken by the bride:

> Mutter! Mutter! spricht sie hohle Worte:
> So mißgönnt Ihr mir die schöne Nacht!
> Ihr vertreibt mich von dem warmen Orte.
> Bin ich zur Verzweiflung nur erwacht?
> Ist's Euch nicht genug,
> Daß in's Leichentuch,
> Daß Ihr früh mich in das Grab gebracht (155-161)?

When viewed against the background of this passage, it's as if the two figures in the above image – both of them together – *are* the bride of Corinth. And this impression is largely confirmed by what, in the film, happens next. Iris notices, namely, that the nun in the above image is wearing high heels, and is thus, as she puts it, "not a nun at all:"

Figure 1.10: the “nun” with high heels
in *The Lady Vanishes*

What this most obviously corresponds to in the poem is the fact that the bride of Corinth is not, let’s say, “a nun” either, i.e. she wants to marry the boy. Yet, again, what is really at stake here might be thought of as the status of the imaginary. In the poem, for instance, when the bride gives in to her love for the boy, she is thereby to some extent conceding the reality of his gods, the reality of his imaginings. And, in this moment in the film, something similar is happening. For, on the one hand, what Iris sees here is an image that, paradoxically, contains nothing imaginary, i.e. that is just bare reality. This is what it means, in short, that the figure here is completely bandaged, invisible. Strikingly, however, Iris notices that an element of this bare reality *does*, in fact, emerge visually: this nun is wearing high heels; later, she even puts on makeup. The effect of this is that the spheres of the real and the imaginary begin to mingle here. The possibility of an image that is actually real begins to dawn.

Before concluding, there is one final parallel between poem and film – maybe the most stunning one – that needs to be mentioned. It concerns a side plot developed around two

Englishmen also staying in the hotel where Gilbert and Iris are. Due to lack of space in the hotel, these two men are forced to share a maid's room. And, at one point, when this maid comes to retrieve some clothing, she bids good night to the men with two words, which – though they are supposed to be spoken in an unintelligible dialect invented just for the film - clearly sound forth as German: "gute Nacht!" It is worth lingering here for a moment, just to let the fact of this utterance sink in. For, first of all, "gute Nacht" are the exact same words – in the exact same language! – that appear in the poem when the boy is first welcomed into the bride's home: the mother shows him a room and wishes him a "gute Nacht." Yet it is not the appearance of these words alone that is striking; it is the fact that they appear in both cases at the very same structural moment in the narrative. For, in the poem, after the good night wish, the bride – "als ein seltner Gast" – steps through the door of the boy's room. The scenario is a bit reversed in the film, yet easily recognizable. Immediately after the maid says good night to the men, we see the door to Iris' bedroom open, through which walks Gilbert – another "seltner Gast" to be sure.

Yet the parallel in question could be explored and traced out much further than this. Consider, for instance, that, in Hitchcock, just before the "good night" scene, the two Englishmen are portrayed as hungry: they behave like cranky children upon being told there is "no food left." At about the same moment in the poem, by contrast, the Athenian boy is described as having no interest at all in "Speis' und Trank." Evidently, what both works are doing is allowing hunger for food to serve as an indication of the nature of a figure's desire. We are being shown, in short, that the boy (or Gilbert) does not desire here simply in the manner of, say, a child. Or consider as well that, while there is said to be "no food" here, Iris and her friends were earlier served an opulent meal in her room:

Figure 1.11: bread and wine in *The Lady Vanishes*

This image is virtually described in the poem, when we read that "Wein und Essen prangt." The boy, in short, is also given an opulent meal. And it goes without saying that, in both cases, the meal in question is one that is marked by ambiguity. For, consisting as it does of bread and wine, it initially seems to stem from the Christian dimension of the work: it is given to the boy by the Christian mother; Iris sits before it and toasts to her impending "marriage". Soon, however, the range of its meaning expands: in the eyes of the pagan boy, it turns into "Ceres' [und] Bacchus' Gabe;" and, though Iris doesn't know it, the "marriage" she is toasting to here is really the one that will begin that night in her hotel room.

"Die Braut von Corinth" – *Shadow of a Doubt*

Hitchcock's 1942 *Shadow of a Doubt* may seem to be worlds away, both literally and figuratively, from *The Lady Vanishes*. It is his sixth Hollywood film – though his first truly American film, having an American setting – and is comparable to *Lady Vanishes* perhaps only in the sense that it too is about a young woman and her path toward a new sort of awareness. Regardless of how different its surface particulars are, however, *Shadow of Doubt* turns out to be

another film in which one finds traces of Goethe's "Braut von Corinth." What basically happens in the film is the following. Charlie, a young woman in Santa Rosa, California, feels there is something wrong with the state of her family; she wants her beloved Uncle, also named Charlie, to come and visit the family in order to "shake [it] up." When Uncle Charlie indeed visits, however, Charlie begins to notice odd things about him. And, with the arrival of two undercover detectives, she eventually realizes that her beloved uncle is a serial killer in hiding. When Uncle Charlie senses that his niece is onto him, the situation becomes almost deadly for her; until, at the end of the film, it seems that Uncle Charlie is going away. What happens now, however, is that, as Uncle Charlie's departing train starts to pick up speed, there is a mysterious sort of scuffle between uncle and niece in which Uncle Charlie falls from the train and meets his death.

When it comes to comparing this film to the poem, a good place to start is a scene that takes place shortly after Uncle Charlie arrives in Santa Rosa. It is late in the evening here, and Charlie is shown bringing a pitcher of water into the room where her uncle in staying. With the poem in mind, the basic scenario of this scene is already suggestive. For the poem's main action begins when "ein Mädchen," i.e. the bride, walks late at night into the room in which a newly admitted guest of her house is staying. The sense of affinity here becomes even greater, however, when one takes a look at how Hitchcock portrays this scenario. Compare, for instance, the following shot of Charlie entering the room to the stanza from the poem in which the boy and girl first meet:

Figure 1.12: Charlie enters Uncle
Charlie's room in *Shadow of a Doubt*

> Denn er sieht, bei seiner Lampe Schimmer
> Tritt, mit weißem Schleier und Gewand,
> Sittsam still ein Mädchen in das Zimmer,
> Um die Stirn ein schwarz und goldnes Band.
> Wie sie ihn erblickt,
> Hebt sie, die erschrickt,
> Mit Erstaunen eine weiße Hand (29-35).

"Sittsam still" would be a good way to describe Charlie's steps too. She similarly appears next to the "Schimmer" of a "Lampe" in the hall. Admittedly, she does not wear "ein schwarz und goldnes Band" (something it would be hard to wear in a black and white film); yet she most certainly wears an oddly ceremonious, pristine white dress with ribbons at the neck and waist. In the same vein, though it is true that Charlie expresses no fear (sie "erschrickt" nicht) upon entering this room, she indeed does just before leaving it. For Uncle Charlie will violently grab her arm here, sending her into a kind of startled daze. And another thing worth mentioning is the fact that, in the poem, the boy is described as fully clothed in this scene – "daß er angekleidet

sich auf's Bette legt;" for the coda of this scene in the film is similarly the image of Uncle Charlie lying on his bed, still sporting dress clothes:[32]

Figure 1.13: Uncle Charlie in his room
in *Shadow of a Doubt*

Yet there are even more striking things to consider. In the poem, what basically happens of course is that, while the bride initially seems to be a nun, it turns out there are two ways in which she is not: in the first place, she still harbors desire for the boy and thus wants to be in an *earthly* marriage; and secondly, she is not merely the "schönes Mädchen" she appears to be, but also a sort of "vampire" who will "kill" the boy by loving him. And – despite the obvious surface differences between the basic plot of the ballad and the basic plot of the film – Charlie in *Shadow of Doubt* proves to be not quite what she seems in exactly these same two ways. In the bedroom scene just mentioned, for example, Charlie certainly enters the room innocently enough. Yet,

[32] It is helpful to articulate that there are amazing parallels, not just between the poem and each film – i.e. *Lady Vanishes* and *Shadow* – but also simply between the films themselves. Simply put, their affinity has the following basis. In the nocturnal bedroom scene in these two films, Iris has a boy (Gilbert) before her, while she thinks she wants a "God;" Charlie, on the other hand, actually has a "God" (her uncle) before her, and she must realize in the course of the film that it is better – if she wants to live – to have a boy. The films are thus like mirror images: the scenario is the same, yet flipped. Beyond this general observation, there are other, more concrete indications that the films follow the same blueprint. In both films, for instance, immediately after the nocturnal bedroom scene, Hitchcock gives us the exact same shot. In *Lady Vanishes*, we see a long shot of the village, in which, one by one, each light goes out except one; in *Shadow*, we see the family home from the outside, in which, one by one, each light goes out except one (or maybe two?). Clearly, these scenes plays the same role in each film, occupy the same place in their structure.

when she subsequently shuts the door on herself and her uncle, leaving them inside together, she does it with a manner that suggests there is something of another side to her:

Figure 1.14: Charlie in Uncle
Charlie's room in *Shadow of a Doubt*

On the one hand, there is an undertone of a sort of playful sexuality in this shot, heightened by the fact that it is happening at night in a bedroom. At the same time, a latent sense of unwittingly destructive mischievousness comes through, considering that the reason Charlie closes the door here is to tell her uncle that she has discovered something in the newspaper about him. In other words, what she is doing is unwittingly exposing traces of her uncle's guilt– an activity which, in

the film's finale, will ultimately lead to his death. And, in this sense, it becomes possible to say that Charlie is just as fatal to her family's visitor as the bride is in Goethe's poem.

Turning now to an even earlier moment in the film, something else that deserves consideration is how exactly Charlie is first introduced to us. When we first hear her speak, it happens in an early dialogue with her father in which two interesting details find expression: Charlie's words imply, first of all, that her father is inadequate as a familial head[33] - it seems that, though he just got a "raise" at the bank, he does not adequately care for what Charlie describes as the "souls" of the family - and, second, that it is her mother who suffers most because of this. As she puts it:

> Poor mother, she works like a dog, just like a dog. Dinner, then dishes, then bed. I don't see how she stands it. You know, she's really a wonderful woman. I mean, she's not just a mother. And I think we ought to do something for her.

Yet what could be done about this? A few aspects of this scene suggest what Charlie has in mind. To begin, what she initially says is that the family "will just have to wait for a miracle." A few moments later, she comes up with the idea to invite her Uncle Charlie, saying that he is just the person "to shake up" and "save" the family. And, against the background of such statements, it is interesting to note the way Charlie is depicted in this scene. What she is doing in these earlier shots, namely, is lying on her bed in her upstairs room, looking up at the ceiling. And her position here is clearly contrasted with that of her young sister Ann, who is shown lying *downstairs* on the *floor*, looking not upwards, but *downwards* onto the pages of a book:

[33] The subtle inadequacy of the father is insightfully reflected on by James McLaughlin, "All in the Family: Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*," in *A Hitchcock Reader*, ed. Deutelbaum and Poague (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1986), 141-161. As McLaughlin notes: "Joe [the father] is an absence, a lack, a big hole in the Newton family edifice…[he is] 'dead,' a soft murder for which Charlie's wish for her uncle's appearance is primarily responsible" (145).

Figure 1.15: Charlie in her room in
Shadow of a Doubt

Figure 1.16: her little sister, Ann,
reading downstairs

The explicitly upward trajectory of Charlie's view, coupled with her mysterious concern for "souls" and the contempt she displays for her father, suggest that the solution to her family's plight which she has in mind is to get rid of her earthly father and to bring in a holy one. From Charlie's perspective, that is, her uncle takes on the features of a sort of godlike father who might better perform those tasks which her real father apparently fails at. And other scenes in the film provide support for this claim in some unexpected ways.

While it is often noted, for instance, that the early scenes of the film establish a link between Charlie and her uncle, it is less common to point out that they also suggest a connection between Charlie's uncle and her mother, i.e. between brother and sister. In the early scenes that take place in the family home in Santa Rosa, there are two instances in which it is said that the mother of the family is "out" – i.e. not at home. And this detail takes on greater significance when one recalls that, in the scene just prior to this, which shows Uncle Charlie in a boarding house out East, the exact same thing is said about him: the proprietress of the boarding house tells Uncle Charlie that, when two men came looking for him, she told them he was "out" – upon which he responds that he "may even go out and meet them," and then indeed goes outside.

Fast forward now to the moment when Uncle Charlie's imminent arrival is announced. The surface mystery or enigma of this moment is of course that, just as Charlie gets the idea to invite her uncle, the family gets a telegram from him in which he says he is coming. The images which depict this coincidence, however, subtly suggest a mystery of far greater proportions. For when the telegram is read to the family, it is the mother who receives it. And, as she stands with the phone to her ear, the way she holds a jacket folded over her left arm makes it seem for the period of about seven seconds that she could almost be pregnant:

Figure 1.17: the family learns that Uncle Charlie is coming in *Shadow of a Doubt*

To say it again, the scenes leading up to this moment have suggested that, if only on some imaginary, minimal level, Charlie's mother and her uncle were just in the same place, i.e. "out." Are we to assume that there was some kind of meeting between them that will now lead to the birth of a child? Yet, lest one be led by this only to notions of incest, it cannot be overlooked that there is of course a Biblical subtext at work here too. For, as noted above, Uncle Charlie has already been characterized as a sort of God figure. What we're dealing with, therefore, is nothing less than an Annunciation scene: Charlie's mother is literally being told here over the phone that she will be visited by the Holy Spirit, i.e. Uncle Charlie. And, while this is fascinating - to say the least - in its own right, it is especially noteworthy here because it highlights another link to Goethe's poem. For, in the poem, it is the mother who is emphatically Christian: considering that her apparent husband is nowhere to be seen, it's as if, literally, her husband is the invisible Christian God. And, regarding the film now as well, it seems that something similar can be said, i.e. that Charlie's mother too is mysteriously close to something like "God."

It should be mentioned that there are yet other aspects of the film that confirm this understanding of Uncle Charlie. When the two undercover detectives arrive at the home, for

instance, what bothers Uncle Charlie about them is the prospect that they might take his picture. He confiscates the film from their camera, fearing it contains his image; and he even claims that "[he's] never been photographed in [his] life." Being invisible, or having no image, however, is of course the signature feature of the God in the poem. To quote again the passage mentioned earlier in connection to *Lady Vanishes*:

> Und der alten Götter bunt Gewimmel
> Hat sogleich das stille Haus geleert.
> Unsichtbar wird Einer nur im Himmel,
> Und ein Heiland wird am Kreuz verehrt (57-63).

It is also worth thinking some about these two undercover detectives. For the "younger" one of them essentially becomes Charlie's love interest. And this fact, together with a few other details, suggests that he basically corresponds to the Athenian boy in the poem. In the beginning of the poem, for instance, it is the mother who first lets the boy into the home; and, in the film as well, it is emphasized – when Uncle Charlie reproves her for letting "strangers into [the] house"– that the mother is the one who let in the detectives. Additionally, if the detective here can be thought of in terms of the Athenian, then it is of course also significant that he brings a camera, wants to take pictures. What we see here, in short, is that, just like the pagan boy, the detective is associated with a particular understanding with regards to the imaginary. To be more specific: the goal of the two detectives is to photograph Uncle Charlie – to photograph, therefore, a sort of "God." In this sense, their understanding is that gods *do* appear, *do* have images; or, variously, that imaginary creations *do* have validity. (The idea, in terms of the plot, is that photographs of Uncle Charlie really *would* be of a criminal.) This is a position not unlike what the poem describes as paganism.

By way of concluding, there are at least two more parallels that are either too blatant or too curious to be ignored. The first one supports what has already been said about the

relationship between Charlie and her uncle. We learn, namely, that Charlie's oddly ceremonious white dress was given to her by her uncle as a gift; and, during this present visit, he similarly gives her a ring. The implication is fairly obvious: it seems that, if Uncle Charlie is a kind of God, then Charlie is agreeing to relate to him here as a kind of bride. His arrival in the family home, in other words, has roughly the same effect on Charlie that the mother's Christian conversion has on the bride in the poem. The second parallel concerns something rather curious about the fact that Charlie has a sister. For, in the poem, when the bride is initially explaining to the boy that she is Christian, she says that, because of this, he will have to marry her sister instead: "Mich erhältst du nicht, du gute Seele; Meiner zweiten Schwester gönnt man dich" (71-72). In the film, now, virtually the same thing happens. For, when the detectives show up at the home, the younger one asks to take Charlie out on a date. To be sure, Charlie is fine with this. But her mother's response is the following: "Ann would be better." Just as in the poem, therefore, the suggestion is initially made that the young male suitor might focus his attention on the younger sister. And it is only when the detective insists upon Charlie, contradicting the mother, that he is allowed to take her.

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It would be beyond the scope of a single chapter to consider in depth each poem and film just commented upon. By making three separate comparisons, therefore, the preceding pages do not aim to lay the groundwork for three separate analyses. Their goal is rather simply to provide an impression of the breadth of the phenomenon in question. The idea here is that our understanding of any one of the above comparisons is influenced or affected by an awareness that numerous other such comparisons can be made. In other words, while it would be possible to structure this chapter around just one of the above comparisons, this approach might fail to make

clear what exactly the chapter is investigating. For what is at stake is not an isolated link between one poem and one film, but rather a sort of field of possibilities with regard to thinking together works by Goethe and Hitchcock. In subsequent chapters, comparisons between yet other works by these artists will further support the claim that such a field exists. For now, however, the preceding observations should serve as a sufficient background for a somewhat more focused reading of at least two of the works mentioned. While chapters 2 and 3 will provide opportunities to return to "Der Erlkönig" and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, it will be most helpful in the present context to turn our attention to "Die Braut von Corinth" and *The Lady Vanishes*.

When approaching these two works, a good way to start is with an observation that was already made above: the fact that both of these works are interested in the status of the imaginary.[34] In both of these works, that is, the imaginary is thematized, in the sense that literal images quite simply play a role in how the plot unfolds. Yet what exactly does the word "imaginary" mean here? What are these works thinking about when they seem to be thinking about images? For a few reasons, it is possible to say that what the theme of images enables here is a kind of reflection on the nature of conventionality. The first reason for this is perhaps easiest to get into view by recalling certain aspects of the discussion in the introductory chapter. It was noted in this discussion that romance literature is typically thought of as being imaginary: Don Quixote's "imagination"[35] is what gets the better of him; it is under the heading "Of Imagination" that Hobbes will write of "them that are much taken with reading of Romants;"[36] many other cases could be named. At the same time, however, the earlier discussion also

[34] It should be noted that there are literally countless films that wrestle with the question of the imaginary just as *The Lady Vanishes* does. In cinematic romance, in fact, it almost seems obligatory explicitly to refer somewhere to "reality" or "imagination." Somewhere, that is, a figure will be said to be "just imagining things." Or perhaps someone will be told to get back to "reality." Hitchcock's *Family Plot* (1976) ends, for instance, with a boyfriend exclaiming to his girlfriend "you're real!" There are simply too many examples to name. Another one is of course *Shadow of a Doubt*. As Uncle Charlie says to his niece: "Oh Charlie, now, don't start imagining things."
[35] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Rutherford (New York: Penguin, 2001), 27.
[36] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin Books, 1985, 89.

considered this imaginary quality from a more literary-critical perspective. In reference to writings by Northrop Frye, it was suggested that, if a given work of literature strikes us as imaginary, what this essentially means is that it is conspicuously conventional, that the conventional, formulaic aspect of literature is especially pronounced in this work. With this observation in mind, it becomes evident that, to a certain extent, to say that something is imaginary is to say that its conventionality is noticeable. And if the status of images or of the imaginary becomes questionable in the poem and film, therefore, what this would more fundamentally mean is that the status of the conventional is being questioned here.

Another reason to think of the imaginary in terms of the conventional, however, is that, when viewed from a certain angle, the poem and film themselves can be seen to do this. Undoubtedly, this is most readily apparent in light of a few details in *The Lady Vanishes*. The film opens, for instance, to the following scene: a hotel manager is speaking to staff and patrons in five different languages, and numerous misunderstandings result. It is clear that this situation is meant to indicate, not simply, say, what happens in a hotel, but rather that the social order the film initially presents us with is coming apart. Society here has splintered, in other words, to the point that what ensues is nothing less than – as it is termed – a "crisis." The film is so subtle, however, that one of the main manifestations of this crisis is to be found in the occasional bit of comic relief provided by two Englishmen. The key thing about this duo is that they are incapable of recognizing or transcending the bounds of their own worldview.[37] First and foremost, of course, it is their pronounced Englishness which shows this: they assume that everyone should speak English; in Hungary, they stood for the Hungarian Rhapsody because they thought it was the national anthem; they angrily denounce (over the phone) a person who, despite being in

[37] One could possibly argue, of course, that this pair is romantically involved. Yet it is not as if such a reading is obligatory. A different reading might suggest simply that the fact of sexuality is something this pair is very awkward about, something they unsuccessfully try to ignore. They really do just seem to care about nothing else but cricket.

England, does not know the score of a cricket match; they have zero interest in what an American newspaper says about baseball; they try to make friends with the villain just because he speaks Oxford English etc. Yet the issue here goes beyond nationality. For when this pair actually sees fellow English people – Iris and her friends – they mistake them for Americans. It thus seems that, even if nationality is not a problem, some other matter will inevitably arise – here it is perhaps the fact that Iris and her friends are women. In either case, the main idea is that these Englishmen are ensconced in their own worldview to such a degree that it alone defines reality for them.

The point to be made here, however, is that, when presenting the Englishmen as blindly set in their own ways, the film also ends up suggesting that they are, in a problematic sense, imaginative. Perhaps the most blatant suggestion of this is made when they are shown simulating a cricket match with the help of sugar cubes. At one point, they pour out sugar cubes on a table and let each one stand for a cricket player. Iris and Miss Froy, however, are sitting next to them at tea. And at just this moment, Miss Froy asks for the sugar – which one of the men sullenly gives to her with a begrudging stare. It seems that what essentially transpires here might be described like this. The Englishmen, first of all, are imagining that a game of cricket is unfolding in front of them. Yet, when Miss Froy asks for the sugar, she effectively reminds them that this is not so, reminds them that what's on the table is sugar, not cricket players. As the annoyed reaction of the men demonstrates, then, this reminder from her completely ruins their game. Summarizing, what becomes clear on the basis of this scene is that these Englishmen are incapable of acknowledging the conventional nature of their own imaginings. In other words: when Miss Froy points out that the imaginary game before them is based on convention – i.e. the notion that sugar cubes equal cricket players – this game simply ceases for them, as if

evaporating. The larger implication here is that, if these Englishmen are shown to be imaginative, what this means in context is that the conventional nature of their own conventions is lost on them.

Yet there is another sense in which this English pair might be brought into relationship with the notion of the imaginary. In order to show this, it is helpful to reconsider the moment, referred to earlier, when the maid in whose room the pair is staying wishes them a "gute Nacht." What exactly is the nature of this "Nacht," this night? To put it plainly, one answer is the following. If a person falls asleep here, let's say, or is enveloped in night etc., what this means is that, aside from imaginings that are *merely* imaginary, or solely conventional, all this person can see is darkness, i.e. nothing. Even if there are images with a basis in reality, that is, this person cannot see them; reality does not *appear* to this person; when the light of conventional meanings is turned off, night falls.[38] For most of the film, now, it seems that, with regards to the Englishmen, this is the actual state of affairs. (One of them even says that being cut off from all things English is like being "in the dark.") Yet, in context, of course, the reason these Englishmen are important is that they serve as a sort of foil for Gilbert. For when the Englishmen "fall asleep," what we see is that Gilbert, in a sense, "wakes up": he opens a door in the darkness,

[38] This claim about the significance of the "good night" wish could be strengthened by referring to many other films. Something very similar happens, for instance, in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). About three quarters through the film, the aging Norma Desmond, who plays here a kind of Queen of the Night – this is indeed a film about a "sunset" - says "good night, darling" to the young man who has wandered into her old mansion. As soon as the lights in her bedroom go out, we see the young man sneak out to visit a much younger girl. Obviously, a lot is different in this film, but the same underlying structure is there. Or consider also Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn* (1949). Here, Ingrid Bergman plays another sort of mistress-of-the-house figure. And on the evening when she meets the young man visiting her and her husband, she bids him a "good night," and then disappears into her bedroom. Again, surface differences aside, the same basic structure is perceivable. The housekeeper Milly in *Under Capricorn*, for instance, has the same role which "Die Braut" has in Goethe's ballad. Things are just altered so that, in the film, this role can now become a villainous one. To mention just one more example, one of the most memorable "good night" wishes occurs in *To Catch a Thief* (1955), where Cary Grant shows a mother and daughter (Grace Kelly) to their rooms, and is kissed by Grace Kelly. No one says "good night" when this is happening, yet Grace later refers to her kiss as "saying good night." It also makes sense that, when she later refers to this kiss, she claims that, as she kissed him, Cary Grant was thinking of her mother. For generally, as in the above examples, "good night" is indeed said by the mother.

switches on a light, and sees Iris. What basically happens at this moment is that Gilbert looks at reality and *sees* it. He proves capable of seeing an image, in short, that is not merely imaginary. And we can of course speak here, not just of Gilbert, but of the "Jüngling" in the poem too. For he also is told "gute Nacht," yet stays awake long enough – "er schlummert *fast*" – for this "Nacht" to appear, i.e. for the bride to be visible to him when she enters his room. To reiterate, it seems that the Englishmen fall asleep because they see only imaginary, conventional, images. And, with this in mind, it is possible to describe in similar terms why it is that Gilbert and the "Jüngling" *don't* fall asleep. In a word, they are edging beyond the bounds here of merely conventional meanings, encountering meanings that convention alone does not institute.[39]

Meanwhile, however, what we see from the angle of Iris or "die Braut" is a similar sort of movement - but in the opposite direction. Just to consider the case of Iris, for instance, the facts are plain: she claims that "nothing will keep [her] awake," that she "want[s] to get some sleep." Translated into a different idiom, she is basically saying that, when the light of conventional meanings goes out, night *should* fall. Reality, in other words , *doesn't* appear; which is to say that, if something is real, there should be absolutely nothing at all conventional about it. Yet Iris is of course proven wrong; something does indeed, at least for a time, "keep her awake:" Gilbert's entrance into her room. What Iris is being made confront here is not simply, say, the young man from upstairs, but rather something about the nature of reality. She is realizing that

[39] A wonderful way of describing this movement of "edging beyond the bounds" is suggested by Juri Lotman. As he writes: "An event in a text is the shifting of a persona across the borders of a semantic field […] A text that possesses plot is built on the foundation of the plotless text as its negation…The immobile submit to the general, plotless type of structure…The movement of the plot, the *event*, is the crossing of that forbidden border which the plotless structure establishes. It is not an *event* when the hero moves within the space assigned to him." With Lotman, we can say that, at this point in the film, there is an "event," the crossing of a border. While it is happening, however, the two Englishmen would be – in Lotman's vocabulary – "immobile," "dead." It is Gilbert and Iris who, both literally and figuratively, start to come alive. *Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1977), 233-239. A more recent film that clearly comes from the same world as both Hitchcock's film and Goethe's poem is the 1987 *Moonstruck*. Tellingly, in the scene in this film when the romantic pair first comes together in their own sort of bedroom scene, their words to each other are "I was dead" – "Me too."

reality does actually have an image, or that there is a kind of conventionality that doesn't simply evaporate – think of the English duo's imaginary cricket match – when faced with reality, a kind of conventionality that knows reality, one might say. What these and the above observations are getting at is that, in the bedroom scene of the film, Gilbert and Iris are, in multiple senses, approaching each other. It's as if their seemingly different understandings of reality begin here to merge. Needless to say, however, at this point in the story, neither one of them has the resources to explain how such a mutual approach should even be possible. For how can reality have an image? Or what could allow a conventionally established meaning to be real? There is a fundamental sense in which the suggestion of such things is just inherently perplexing.[40] The implication is that Gilbert and Iris, in the course of the film, need to be shown how such things are at all thinkable. And their teacher in this respect is the figure whom they spend much of the film looking for, the figure who, in this sense, brings them together: Miss Froy.

To say that Miss Froy brings this pair together is to say that she on some level represents in the film the reality of convention. And there are indeed various grounds on which it is possible to understand her this way. To suggest just one of them, an important theme in the film that is

[40] There is a wonderful passage in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* that illustrates the sense of inherent perplexity I am referring to. In the play's fourth act, Perdita and Polixenes debate as follows whether the practice of grafting flowers is defensible or not.
PERDITA: …the fairest flowers o'th'season are our carnations and streaked gillyvors, which some call nature's bastards; of that kind our rustic garden's barren, and I care not to get slips of them.
POLIXENES: Wherefore, gentle maiden, do you neglect them?
PERDITA: For I have heard it said there is an art which in their piedness shares with great creating nature.
POLIXENES: Say there be, yet nature is made better by no mean but nature makes that mean; so over that art which you say adds to nature, is an art that nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry a gentler scion to the wildest stock, and make conceive a bark of baser kind by bud of nobler race. This is an art which does mend nature – change it rather – but the art itself is nature.
PERDITA: So it is.
POLIXENES: Then make your garden rich in gillyvors, and do no call them bastards.
PERDITA: I'll not put the dibble in earth to set one slip of them; no more than, were I painted, I would wish this youth should say 'twere well, and only therefore desire to breed by me" (IV.4.81-103).
To be sure, a certain contemporary discourse on the relation between "art" and "nature" comes to the fore here. But, more generally, the passage just illustrates the peculiar status of the question as to the nature of this relation. It's as if a question is being debated that the play itself is the answer to, a question that the figures in the play are always thinking about, one might say, even when the dialogue does not explicitly have them discuss it.

already hinted at by its title is magic. In their search for Miss Froy, Iris and Gilbert come upon the wares of a magician, including a poster advertising an act called "the vanishing lady;" and just before Miss Froy indeed disappears, Hitchcock shows us this magician amusing a child with a sort of vanishing hand trick. The idea in the background here is that, by posing in part as a travelling magic show, the villains in the film are implicitly offering an account of what seemingly real conventions are. They implicitly claim, in short, that such conventions are really just magic, illusion, trickery. What it means, however, that, as the title says, "the lady vanishes," is that, in actuality, there is more than just magic to this. A "lady" truly did exist, and is now gone. "The vanishing lady," therefore, is not just some trivial magic act; it is rather, as we learn, a means of carrying out violence in secret. The illusions of mirrors and trap doors, it seems, have consequences that are *not* illusions, i.e. that are very real. Against this background, to prove that Miss Froy exists is essentially to prove that a world of human making can have substance to it.

A few other things along these same lines could be said about Miss Froy. Undoubtedly, however, there is one point in particular that, for the present argument, stands out as the most crucial. It is this: if Miss Froy represents real conventionality, what enables her to do so is the fact that, in order for her to be found, her existence is something that must be – to use the film's word – "believed" in. In her search for Miss Froy, Iris naturally meets with resistance; and it is repeatedly suggested that what she counters it with is belief. As her search is just beginning, the following dialogue – worth quoting at length - with the film's villainous Dr. Hartz takes place:

> IRIS: There must be some explanation.
> HARTZ: There is. […] I have known cases when a sudden shock or blow [Iris was earlier hit on the head] has induced the most vivid impressions.
> IRIS: I understand. You don't believe me.
> HARTZ: It's not a question of belief. Even a concussion may have curious effects upon an imaginative person.
> IRIS: I can remember every little detail. Her name, Miss Froy. Everything.

HARTZ: So interesting. If one had time, one could trace the cause of the hallucination.
GILBERT: Hallucination?
HARTZ: Precisely. There is no Miss Froy, there never was a Miss Froy. Merely a vivid subjective image.
IRIS: But I met her last night at the hotel.
HARTZ: You thought you did
GILBERT: But what about her name?
HARTZ: Some past association. An advertisement, or a character in a novel, subconsciously remembered.

Other examples include the moment when Gilbert and Iris find the bandaged medical patient– "we believe it's Miss Froy," they tell Dr. Hartz – or the moment when the kidnapping of Miss Froy is related to the other passengers. "Things like that just don't happen," the Englishmen reply; "I don't believe it," responds someone else. To be as clear as possible, the point to be made here is most definitely not, say, that if you believe in anything long enough, all your dreams come true. The point here – hopefully - is more complex. To be sure, a statement such as the following is basically right: if Miss Froy turns out to exist, the reason for this is that Iris and Gilbert believe she exists. In order to understand such a statement properly, however, one has to take into account just *what* Miss Froy is, what the extraordinary phenomenon is that she stands for. If something conventional or imaginary is going to be real, in short, it simply has to be believed in – and not because we're waiting for evidence that would give us greater certainty, but rather because, if certainty about this were actually possible, the phenomenon in question would not be real conventionality. For a convention to be real, we have to realize it is a convention; there has to be something about it that looks slightly, let's say, unreal, something requiring an active belief on our part. If we indeed contribute such belief, however, the remarkable thing is that this slightly unreal convention can actually become real. For, if we have to believe in it, we never lose sight of the fact that we are helping to create it. We never make the mistake of starting

to accept it as a kind of given, as "the way things just are" – a mistake that, in most cases, eventually causes a given social order to collapse.

To help illustrate this idea, a number of aspects of the film could be discussed. It is worth recalling, for instance, the scene in which Miss Froy asks the Englishmen for the sugar. For, on the one hand, as the quoted dialogue in the paragraph above shows, Miss Froy is described by the villain of the film as an "hallucination," a "subjective image." At the same time, however, what the scene with the sugar cubes shows is that, in actuality, the function of Miss Froy is to disturb or break up "subjective images" – here, the image of a cricket match. With both of these things in mind, it becomes clear just how strange the phenomenon is that thus presents itself. For Miss Froy, it seems, is a "subjective image" that undermines other subjective images. Because Iris and Gilbert believe her to exist, for instance, they aren't taken in by all the lies that everyone (including the Englishmen) on the train tells them – as if, even at this point in the story, Miss Froy is calling lies or "hallucinations" into question, is "asking for the sugar," in a sense. Much more could be said on this score. Instead of thinking further about the film, however, there are two crucial issues which, in the remainder of this chapter, need to be addressed. They are, first of all, what exactly these reflections on the film have to do with the earlier comparisons between Goethe and Hitchcock; and, secondly, the question as to what one makes of any points of divergence – for there certainly are some – between *The Lady Vanishes* and "Die Braut von Corinth."

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Concerning the first issue, the best way of linking the above reading with the earlier comparisons is in terms of the following figure: one might say that when we observe the literally countless parallels between the works mentioned, we essentially find ourselves in the same

position that, in the film, is occupied by Iris. In a certain sense, that is, when we see these parallels, we see what Iris sees. Within the terms of the present figure, in other words, we see "Miss Froy" – which is, of course, basically to say that we see a conventionality that is real. Or, to say the same thing a bit differently, while watching the film, we do what the film's villain, in the dialogue above, tries to explain away either as "hallucinating" or as getting distracted by a "past association": we see not only the images on screen, but, in this case, the various scenes from Goethe's ballad too. To sum up this state of affairs a bit banally, one might say that the content of the film is thus reflected in its form: not only is the film about a search for real conventionality, it itself occasions such as search. The implication of this, of course, is that, just as Miss Froy is found in the film, so do we, in a sense, find her too as we watch the film. Naturally, it is helpful to reflect some on how exactly this happens.

One way to begin such a reflection is to consider, somewhat hypothetically, a certain reaction to either *The Lady Vanishes* or "Die Braut von Corinth" that any reader of these works is in some sense required to have. A cursory perusal of these works inevitably suggests, namely, that the stories they relate are rather fantastical. In the case especially of the film, it is no exaggeration to say that the plot continuously borders on sheer absurdity – a point Hitchcock himself makes in conversation with Truffaut, where he notes that critics – "the plausibles", he calls them – who demand plausibility from films would find quite a bit to object to in this one. Against this background, it's easily thinkable that, in the eyes of even the most conceivably gullible viewer or reader, the fictionality of these works – the fact that they are not "true stories," to put it crudely – will eventually become apparent. When this happens, however, it's as if a reader has something like two options for how to make sense of it. On the one hand, there is the perhaps most obvious option, according to which the apparent implausibility of a work is

construed as a cause for disappointment. The reasoning here might go roughly like this: "though the work has its moments – we might imagine a person saying – it's story is too ridiculous, too taxing upon the 'suspension of disbelief;' it's perhaps not bad if you overlook how absurd it is etc."

According to the second option, however, it is possible to relate to implausibility in a completely different way. Viewed from this angle, for instance, if a work is somehow implausible – if it has obviously been put together by an imagination, let's say – it is perhaps the case that this is simply one of its attributes. Viewed from this angle, therefore, the notion of "suspending disbelief" does not really even make sense. For, if a work is potentially unbelievable, it's not as if one is supposed to ignore this fact in order to view it correctly. On the contrary, this unbelievable, implausible aspect is perhaps something that one should incorporate into an understanding of what the work means. In other words: it is potentially the case that the work is saying something that it could not say if it were plausible.[41] The implausibility of the work, in short, potentially means something.[42] And the point is that it can mean something more than just that the work in question is not very good.

[41] Romance can seem to depart in this sense from Aristotle. As Aristotle writes in *Poetics*: "Stories should not be constructed from improbable parts, but above all should contain nothing improbable" (60a28). The issue is, however, a complicated one. For, on the one hand, Aristotle concedes that what makes great poets great is that they make improbable plots seem believable: "even the improbabilities in the *Odyssey*…would not be tolerable, if an inferior poet composed them" (60a37). And, certainly, the exact same thing can be said about *The Lady Vanishes*: Hitchcock somehow manages to make this nonsense captivating. However, a crucial feature of romance is that, even as it makes improbable things believable, it simultaneously makes meaning out of the fact that it is doing this. In other words, it never wants to wipe out completely the sheen of improbability; for, if it did this, it would fail in some respect. It has been observed by Christopher J. Wild that *Poetics* aims to describe theater in a way that will make it seem socially acceptable. Arguably, something similar might be said of the way it describes plots in general. For what Aristotle is implicitly refuting in *Poetics* is the Platonic notion of the poets as liars. Because of this, it is perhaps understandable that he would not have much good to say about improbability. Obviously, however, such an approach really agrees at bottom with the Platonic notion, i.e. implies that lying poets are bad poets. Romance reshapes this debate by reconceiving what it even means for a plot to be recognizable as improbable.

[42] One concrete way to illustrate what this means is to point out Hitchcock's use of models in *Lady Vanishes*. The film opens by panning across what is patently recognizable as a model village, with model trains, model people with mechanical arms etc. One possible to reaction to this shot would be: "Hitchcock clearly had no resources, he was forced to resort to these pitiful models." Another reaction, however, sees these models as a priming reference to the artificiality that the whole film is pervaded with. Pedro Almodóvar is even more explicit when it comes to utilizing

Yet the word "potentially" is in the above sentences for a reason: it is obviously not the case that we could be talking here about *any* implausible story. The implausibility in question, rather, is of a specific nature. And what specifically defines and sets it apart is that it results from the following phenomenon. If the film and ballad in question appear as implausible, the reason for this is that their content – the things they show us, what happens in them – itself has the character of a sign, itself refers. (And it is certainly not the case that the content of *any* implausible story does this.) It is perhaps easiest to conceive of this by thinking again about the effect of comparing these works. For, on the one hand, in case the implausibility of these works was not already apparent, the fact that they are comparable at all should make it glaring. When we see that the film is so similar to the ballad, for instance, it becomes transparent that it doesn't just give us a glimpse into a train car. The similarity here reveals, rather, that both works are constructed along the lines of certain patterns and formulas. On a minimal level, now, an awareness of these patterns would disillusion any naïve assumption that the works were true. The crucial point, however, is that this is most definitely not the *only* thing that it does. For when we observe the parallels between these works, it's not as if their content is now simply falsified, let's say; this content is rather utterly transformed. And to attempt to say *how* it is transformed – To begin with, it in some sense disappears as content, one might say: the things we thought we were looking at give way to, or are occluded by, mere signs or patterns. The remarkable thing, however, is that this "disappearance" turns out not to be total or lasting: things and images are still there, it's just that they have now accrued their own sort of signifying capacity. It seems, in

models, not out of necessity, but on purpose. As he comments on *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988): "I wanted…to start on a model of Pepa's apartment block and give the impression…that the model was the real thing. Then I'd pan across to the bed Pepa was sleeping in and the audience would then realize the building was a model." *Almodóvar on Almodóvar*, ed. Frederic Strauss (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 82.

short, that they have now become the medium through which the *real* content of the work is referred to.

Strictly speaking, to say that these things and images have become something like signs is to say that there is a conventional aspect to them. In at least two ways, however, it can be shown that the conventionality here in question is truly remarkable, it can be shown, namely, that it is real. The first way is related to how it is that we become aware of this conventionality. As was just described above, if the things in the given works are going to appear as signs, this can only happen after the initial period in which they first seem to "disappear" or become occluded. Another way to put this, however, would be to say that the first step on the path toward the conventionality we're dealing with here is an insight into just how misleading and problematic conventionality can be.[43] The first step, in other words, is a realization that images produced on the basis of conventional patterns and formulas are not real, are false, are unbelievable etc. Or to describe this realization a bit more carefully – It's as if we see that, if one were to buy or accept wholesale the formulas that works are based on, one would end up accepting as real or true something that is essentially a deception, i.e. one would become in some sense blind to reality. To say it again, now, it is of course only out of this realization that one can begin to view the things in works as signs. Given what this realization is a realization of, however, the conventionality evinced in these new signs is inevitably going to be of a very special sort. For we are now dealing with conventional signs that are born out of an awareness that conventional signs are misleading. Considering what one must know in order even to recognize these signs, therefore, it is clear that they cannot and will not signify in the usual manner. One might say that, unlike most signs, they will not so easily enable a kind of deception. For, in the act of referring

[43] The implication of this is that the story has to seem partially believable to us, has to be able to captivate us to some extent. This is addressed in greater detail further on, and especially in footnote 47 below.

beyond themselves, they will not simply leave the picture, so to speak. They will refer beyond themselves, yet, paradoxically, will only do this to the extent that one remains with them, so to say. This is what it means, in short, that, even in becoming signs, they are still things and images, i.e. they are still visible. This is what it means that they are at once both real – i.e. things – and conventional – i.e. signs.

Yet there is a second way to describe all of this, one which has to do, not so much with the peculiar nature of the signs in question, but rather with the peculiar nature of the "*real* content" – to cite the phrase used above – that they refer to. For to say that these signs still appear as things is to say that the content they refer to *allows* them to appear. In other words: this content does not overshadow them, it never becomes yet another thing that would take the place of, and thus block out, the things referring to it. In this sense, we might say that this content is invisible, or rather that it is visible only in the things that refer to it. Or to express this thought even more carefully: the means through which this content appears is that it allows the things referring to it to appear – as if this act of "letting things appear" is itself perceivable. In any case, the basic idea here is that, when the things in a work are viewed as signs, the content of this work is no longer content in any usual sense. In a word, it is invisible content, un*imag*inable.[44] And the point is that this too is a major factor in why the overall phenomenon here might be thought of as real conventionality. For, if the content of a work is invisible – at least not visible in any usual sense – there is obviously no possibility any longer that one could view this content while at the same time ignoring, or being unaware of, the signs that express it. The sort of minimal deception

[44] One way to summarize these reflections would be to say that works of art can be viewed as icons. About icons Jean-Luc Marion has written the following: "…the icon summons sight in letting the visible…be saturated little by little with the invisible….[T]he invisible proceeds up into the visible, precisely because the visible would proceed from the invisible…. The icon…attempts to render visible the invisible as such, hence to allow that the visible not cease to refer to an other than itself, without, however, that other ever being reproduced in the visible. Thus the icon shows, strictly speaking, nothing...". *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The U of Chicago Press, 1991), 17-18.

that allows people to take formulaic patterns as things – this deception cannot happen anymore, it becomes structurally impossible. And with this in mind, now, it is especially clear why the role of belief in all of this is so crucial - why belief is not just something to make do with in lieu of certainty, but is essential. For to say that the content of a work is invisible *is*, in some sense, to say that one has to believe it exists. If one has to believe here, therefore, that actually is a good thing, it bodes well. For it implies that there is no visible – i.e. directly knowable, namable – content that would block out or occlude – i.e. cause us to ignore - the signs upon which content is here based. Rather, *all* we see are these signs. These signs are completely and utterly laid bare, completely and utterly revealed. And to stress again just how remarkable this is, it is worth noting that what is being described here has the logic of an almost paradoxical, back-and-forth interplay: belief in the invisible content of a work, it seems, turns out to be what most fully reveals the signs that refer to this content.

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This is at least one account of how it is that, to recall what was said above, we "find Miss Froy" on the basis on the parallels between the works in question – one account of how the observation of these parallels can lead to the realization that what both works manifest is a real conventionality. Yet the metaphor being used here – i.e. finding Miss Froy – comes, of course, only from the film. Is it perhaps a bit unjustified, therefore, to include, without any reservations, the poem in this discussion? And, in addition to this, there is something about the above account that is difficult to ignore – the extent, namely, to which it mirrors basic elements of Christian theology. In the above account of how we recognize real conventionality, that is, it is as if certain theological terms – e.g. original sin, crucifixion, resurrection, Trinity – are hovering like shadows between the lines. If this is so, however, there is an obvious reason to think that the

poem could be a bit out of place here: it quite simply seems to read as an unabashed critique of Christianity.[45] How likely is it that an explicitly anti-Christian poem would manifest a notion of signification that Christian theology might help to describe? And, even if it did manifest such a notion, how might this curious fact be explained?

One place to start when it comes to pursuing these questions is with the figure who, in both film and poem, seems to be associated, not with a Christian, but with a pagan outlook – that is, the young male figure in each work. As the earlier comparison pointed out, just as the Athenian boy in the poem is "ein Heide," so is Gilbert, when he first appears in the film, shown as the devotee of a kind of "ancient…folk" culture. There is a moment in the film, however, where it seems that another aspect of Gilbert starts to shine through – an aspect that clashes, in a way, with his apparent paganism. It comes when, just before leaving Iris' room, he points upwards – indicating where Iris should send his things, i.e. to his upstairs room – while a crucifix on the wall looms behind him:

[45] And it has been argued that the poem can indeed be read as a genuine reflection on, and critique of, aspects of Christian theology. Ilse Graham sees in the poem - which does not seem to be set in Corinth for nothing - an engagement with the letters of Paul. Ilse Graham, "Die Theologie tanzt: Goethes Balladen *Die Braut von Korinth* und *Der Gott und die Bajadere*," in *Goethe: Schauen und Glauben* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988).

Figure 1.18: Gilbert points "upstairs"
in *The Lady Vanishes*

To summarize as simply as possible, it's as if, for a few seconds here, Gilbert turns into John the Baptist.[46] Naturally, much could be said about this. Yet, in the present context, the thing to take away is just the following. The early scenes of the film present us with resources to understand Gilbert's paganism as a manifestation of what is really just a particular dimension of Christianity. To describe in a word what this dimension is: while it seems that Iris, at this point in the film, knows only of the crucifixion, it's as if Gilbert knows of the resurrection too. Yet the main point here, again, is just that, in the film, the pagan element is basically shown to become a Christian one. For, in the poem, what happens is very different from this.

Simply put, the young Athenian seems to be pagan through and through. And it would seem also that he never "converts," so to speak. For the suggestion in the final line is that his and

[46] John the Baptist is sometimes depicted pointing upwards, or with a goatskin draped over his shoulder. The piece of clothing Gilbert has on his shoulder – is it a robe, a giant scarf? – recalls the goatskin. In *Suspicion* (1941), Hitchcock seems similarly to drape a coat over Cary Grant's shoulder at a moment not unlike this one in *Lady Vanishes.*

the bride's ultimate trajectory leads back to where he came from: "die alten Götter." Evidently, therefore, the distinction here between pagan and Christian is absolute – as if the "Jüngling" remains pagan throughout, while the "Braut," similarly, becomes *completely* pagan by virtue of rejecting her mother's Christianity. It merits pausing to note that we really should not be surprised to find this state of affairs in the poem. For a similar state of affairs, let's say, is characteristic of a movement in German literary culture roughly contemporaneous with the poem. As the preceding pages have suggested, for instance, in both Goethe and Hitchcock, paganism and Christianity can be understood as different ways of thinking about images, as different conceptions of what their status is. With regards to this question as to the status of images, however, much of German thought leading up to 1800 took a fairly identifiable stance: that which is immediately perceivable, the general thinking suggests, is far preferable to anything merely "abstract" - to anything that might be known rationally, that is, yet not really felt or experienced directly. Yet, since "Christianity," as the preceding pages have shown, can be understood in all of this as something like abstraction *par excellence* - i.e. as the view that no images are real, that the "bunt Gewimmel" of the Greek pantheon is illusory – it is no surprise that it occasionally becomes for this period a sort of bogeyman.[47] Schiller's poem "Die Götter Griechenlands" is maybe the most striking record of this. Yet the phenomenon here is a global one with a variety of manifestations – one of which is the turn to, and reconceiving of, folk poetry that this chapter began by describing. If we should be so attentive to the "Stimmen der Völker," to quote Herder, the main reason is that there is nothing abstract about these

[47] The picture sketched here is mainly of heuristic value. It is impossible to give on one page an overview that would reflect the complexity of the period. In Herder and Hamann, for instance, we have thinkers who evidently see Christianity as the opposite of dull abstraction. As Frank Manuel describes Hamann's understanding of the Bible: "Only the concrete, the graphic, the emotion-laden was real in the sense that it bore profound meaning for man, a creature of emotion and passion. The words of the Bible…were earthy, specific, sensate, natural, full of feeling, not cold, metaphysical, abstract concepts." Frank Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 286-287.

"Stimmen." Goethe's "Braut von Corinth," of course, is technically a *Kunstballade*, i.e. not itself sung by these "Stimmen," to put it naively.[48] Yet the fact that paganism can at least appear to be valorized in this poem is still largely a reflection of the literary program that Herder (and the young Goethe) inaugurated in the decades before the poem appeared. The fact that paganism can seem to carry the day here, in other words, is still reflective of what, in the context of this literary program, a "Ballade" or "Romanze" even is. How could a ballad be written, that is, in which anything abstract, anything "Christian," at all seemed to be presented in a good light? This would essentially amount to a contradiction in terms.[49]

Yet, if Goethe's ballad references "abstraction," i.e. "Christianity," it can be shown that it does this not only in order to refute it.[50] It can be shown, rather, that the poem *needs* to reference abstraction. The point is that it would be impossible to valorize "paganism," as the poem might seem to do, if "Christianity" did not exist as its opposite – the notion of "paganism", in short, is worthless or empty when considered all by itself. Once again, the best way to get this into view is by highlighting another parallel between the ballad and *The Lady Vanishes*. In this case, the

[48] Indeed, as Max Kommerell notes about "Die Braut von Corinth "Wie der reich gegliederte Strophenbau beweist, entfaltet sich dabei eine hohe Kunst, sogar Künstlichkeit der Sprache, die den Volkston ausschließt." Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1956), 361.

[49] It is instructive to consider here Goethe's entire corpus of ballads. Many of them can indeed be read as critical of Christianity.

[50] To the extent that this reading aims to question what can seem to be the superficial message of the poem, i.e. that the Greek gods are better than the Christian one, it follows the lead of Ellis Dye. See Ellis Dye, Love and Death in Goethe: "One and Double" (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 141-155. As Dye writes: "I would suggest that, despite an overlay of anti-Christian polemics, the primary emphasis in the poem is on the bridging of distance and difference, on conjunction and integration, and that its contrasting stress on difference and opposition serves as much to heighten the love interest and the mythical import of the plot as to express Goethe's objections to the Christian religion" (143). Such an approach is novel, since, as Dye notes, "most readers" of the poem – he gives an extensive bibliography – have taken its apparent anti-Christian message at face value. H.A. Korff, for instance, plainly states that the "Grundgesinnung" of the poem is "daß das Christentum sich aus einem falschen Drange nach Heiligung gegen die natürlichen Mächte des Bluts versündigt hat." H.A. Korff, *Goethe im Bildwandel seiner Lyrik: Zweiter Band* (Hanau: Verlag Werner Dausien, 1958), 64. In the present reading I completely agree that the poem is mainly about integration and the crossing of boundaries. I additionally note, however, that, if this is what the poem is about, it is all the more striking that traditional readings of the poem are not really wrong: the poem *does* side with the Greeks. The question then becomes: why exactly does the integration the poem portrays take place only in the name of one of its poles, and why does this pole happen to be paganism?

parallel concerns the moment when, in the poem, the mother discovers that her daughter and her guest have found their way to each other:

> Unterdessen schleichet auf dem Gange,
> Häuslich, spät die Mutter noch vorbei.
> Horchet an der Tür, und horchet lange,
> Welch ein sonderbarer Ton es sei.
> Klag- und Wonnelaut
> Bräutigams und Braut,
> Und des Liebestammelns Raserei (127-133).

Against the background of this stanza, a moment in the film becomes exceedingly curious. In the hotel, just as Iris is retiring to her room for bed, we get a shot of Miss Froy – unquestionably a kind of mother-figure in the film – walking past Iris' room in order to get to her own:

Figure 1.19: Miss Froy in the hallway
of the hotel in *The Lady Vanishes*

It is certainly "spät" here; there is certainly something "häuslich" about Miss Froy (she claims to be a governess); she is walking here down a "Gang" of sorts. Add to all of this now what happens next. When Miss Froy enters her room, she hears someone singing below her window,

and happily starts to listen. After a second of this, however, she is disturbed – just like Iris is – by the music and dancing coming from Gilbert's room above. She and Iris then both go out into the hallway at the same moment, where they share some thoughts about this disturbance:

> IRIS: What's happening? An earthquake?
> MISS FROY: That would hardly account for the music, would it? What a horrible noise! What could they be doing?
> IRIS: I don't know, but I'll soon find out.

Given the general context here – i.e. we are in a hotel, it is unusually close quarters, many of the scenes surrounding this present one are charged with sexual tension – it is not difficult to tell "what they could be doing." What is heard here, in short, is not just music and dancing. It is rather, in some measure, the same thing heard by the mother in the poem: "Klag- und Wonnelaut…".

The situation here, however – even ignoring obvious surface differences – is not *exactly* the same. And it is when one considers this fact that the basic issue on which the poem and film diverge becomes apparent. If Miss Froy objects to the "horrible noise" coming from upstairs, the reason for this is not that she is just, say, prudish. Quite clearly, rather, the reason she objects is that she recognizes within this "noise" the potential for violence. For it turns out that, in the song of the singer below her window, Miss Froy is actually listening for a government secret she must relay back to London. When the "horrible noise" caused by Gilbert drowns out this song, therefore, it's as if the safety in all of Britain is placed at risk, i.e. as if the villainous conspirators in the film will never be foiled. But let's consider again, now, just what causes this "horrible noise." While it could be understood, as was just noted, partly in a sexual sense, what Gilbert is literally doing – i.e. staging a folk dance – is not insignificant. To repeat what was said earlier, he is turning one of his imaginings– i.e. the imagining of an "ancient…folk" culture – into reality, or acting as if this imagining were really in front of him. Yet, since this is basically tantamount to

acting “like a pagan,” the overall implication of this scene might be stated as follows. The film is telling us that the so-called “pagan” attitude toward the imaginary is highly questionable. If left unchecked, the potential result is nothing less than war.

Yet another way to put all of this, of course, would be to say that Miss Froy is basically protecting Iris. By objecting to the “noise” of a would-be “pagan,” that is, Miss Froy is not just protecting Europe; she is protecting the girl about to fall in love with this “pagan” – protecting her from the violence this relationship could incite. When we turn back to the poem, now, things at least seem to be very different in this respect. Here, the “Mutter”-figure is apparently more evil than she is caring or protective. Yet let’s just think about this for a second. If “paganism” can come off as at least superficially good in this poem, why is this? Might it have something to do with the fact that, in the course of the poem, “paganism” is basically crushed? For the boy is, of course, “killed” by the girl. And is it perhaps the case that, if it were *not* so summarily crushed, it would have inevitably proven, just like in the film, to lead to violence – so that the girl might have been “killed” by the boy? The point here is that the “paganism” of the boy only appears as good because it meets with the “Christianity” of the girl. Yet why is the girl “Christian?” The answer, of course, is that her mother is. With this in mind, a different vision of the mother comes into focus. In a word, she might be just as protective of her daughter as Miss Froy is of Iris. And this idea is perhaps supported by something a bit odd about how the poem ends.

It is curious that, in a certain sense, the poem doesn’t really end. In the last stanza, we hear the bride’s final request, spoken to the mother; yet we never see what the mother does, never learn if this fire the girl speaks of is ever set. Arguably, however, there is a clear explanation for this. What it means that the girl even needs to give this final request to the

mother is that, in actuality, the mother is the main force bringing this pair together. Without her (and her "Christianity") there could be no romantic union here. Truly, therefore, she is like Miss Froy; for the image that closes the film is similarly one of Miss Froy holding the hands of Gilbert and Iris, effectively linking them together:

Figure 1.20: the romantic pair reunites
with Miss Froy in *The Lady Vanishes*

In the film, however, we can of course *see* this image, we're allowed to attend the wedding, in a sense; in the poem, on the other hand, it is as if this is just not possible. For what would it mean, in the poem, to *see* the mother actively join this pair? Simply put, it would mean that the poem would implode. For all of its terms and coordinates would need to be fundamentally rethought: dreaded "Christianity," in the form of the mother, would apparently smile now as benevolently

as Miss Froy; "die alten Götter" would lose much of their appeal; the "Väter" in the poem – who initially arranged the marriage – would have to come back onto the scene, etc. It is no exaggeration to say that we would be reading a completely different poem.[51]

Summarizing, the main issue on which the poem and film diverge is this one. In the straightforward notion that any images might be thought of as real the film recognizes the potential for violence; the poem, by contrast, is set up in such a way that this potential can never really come to the surface. It has perhaps already become apparent, now – on the basis of what has already been said about the film – that the film, in a way, actually comments on this state of affairs. For it contains in its plot a sort of critique of folk song, or, rather, a critique of a certain notion of folk song. It is not for nothing that Gilbert, when making the "horrible noise," is doing it in order to "record" a "lost folk dance." And a few lines spoken by Miss Froy are very telling as well. Early on, when talking to the two Englishmen about "Bandrika" – the fictional country in "Central Europe" where the film is supposed to take place – Miss Froy describes why she likes Bandrika as follows:

> Bandrika is one of Europe's few undiscovered corners… In the six years I've lived here I've grown to love the country, especially the mountains. I sometimes

[51] Some more specific accounts could be given for why the poem ends as it does. For instance, it seems likely that, if the "Mutter" never sets this fire, the reason is that the reader is supposed to. "Wenn der Funke sprüht / Wenn die Asche glüht" – one might paraphrase these clauses as roughly "when a reader comes along who knows how to make fire out of the ashes of these mere letters, who knows how to read properly etc." Here, in other words, the pair cannot be shown literally to return to "die alten Götter" because their return is something we as readers must actively bring about. This is one possibility. Another one concerns the question of why the figure of the mother, even as she brings this pair together, somehow remains a villain to the end. Some observations by David E. Wellbery are helpful here. As Wellbery notes, German literature of the 1790s consistently figures the mother as a "predominant imago and idealized focus of identification." It is the mother who guides socialization in this period, and who in some sense teaches the subject how to desire. With "Die Braut von Corinth" in mind, now – a poem written in 1797 – this is quite suggestive. For, on the one hand, the mother does indeed welcome the Athenian boy into the house - and the lines recounting her welcoming of him seem sexually charged in certain respects. Could it be that what we see in the poem is how a desire for the mother, on the part of the Athenian, gets transferred onto the bride – so that his desire, in a fundamental sense, remains a desire for the mother even as it obtains a new object? If this is possible, then it makes sense that, at the end of the poem, the mother would need to remain in the darkness. She has taught the boy how to love, he in some sense loves only her. Yet, for this very reason, she can only participate in the union of bride and groom in an imaginative sense. When she literally and corporeally appears between them, it is as a villain. For Wellbery's observation in context, see *The Specular Moment*: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 87-97.

> think they're like very friendly neighbors. You know, the big father and mother mountain, with their white snow hats, and their nephews and nieces…with smaller hats… Well, of course that's just my fancy […] Do you hear that music? Everyone sings here. The people are just like happy children, with laughter on their lips and music in their hearts.

It almost sounds here as if Miss Froy is a wide-eyed tourist who has come to the Highlands to meet the descendants of Ossian. The point in context, however, is that this is all just a cover. Miss Froy is a secret agent. She's in Bandrika because she knows that among the "happy children" of this region there is a plot brewing. She knows they're *not* just "happy children." Considering, now, how Miss Froy has been described in this chapter, the overall implication seems to be this. The problem with the naïve notion of folk culture is that it envisions the customs or conventions of the folk as being *literally* real or special – as if the ways of the folk were *really* in tune with nature. Miss Froy, of course, also stands for real conventionality; yet, in her case, what makes this possible is – not an alleged folk genius – but rather an awareness of just how problematic anything conventional is. A real conventionality that is genuine, it seems, must be founded on a kind of paradox.

Yet we should not get too ahead of ourselves here. For this can start to sound like the beginning of an argument that this chapter does not intend to make. To be as clear as possible: it's not as if Herder and Goethe are somehow obscuring the reality of violence, allowing it to proliferate under cover. To be sure, *The Lady Vanishes* was made in 1938, and is obviously prescient – is viscerally concerned, in fact – about the threat of Nazi-Germany. It is right to think here, therefore, as has often been done, about the directions in which a cultural program invoking the notion of a *Volk* can be steered. Regarding the Romantic turn towards folk poetry, however, it can be misleading to take this turn too much at face value. This turn needs to be considered, in other words, in the context of the overall Romantic reconfiguration of aesthetics. When we look

at "Die Braut von Corinth," for instance, the signs of such a reconfiguration are plain to see. To take just one example. It was mentioned earlier that any viewer/reader of the film/poem will inevitably realize that the story being related in these works is not a true story. Regarding the poem, however, it seems that, actually, no one is *ever* supposed to think even for a second that these events happened; the poem blatantly participates, that is, in a *literary* tradition. Yet consider now what the long-range effects of this are. For, often, when one reads a story – or watches *The Lady Vanishes* – it's as if one runs through the following reflections while reading: "This story is clearly made-up; yet a part of me thought it was true![52] A part of me wants to go along with this formulaic nonsense! Clearly, humans can be deceived by conventionality; conventionality can clearly be a problem etc."[53] But if there is never any pretension at all that the story is true, these reflections cannot happen. It becomes impossible to feel within yourself as a reader that conventions are misleading. The problematic nature of conventions is not really something the work can be concerned with anymore.

[52] It becomes especially clear here why a romance is not just any implausible story. Yes, a romance needs to be recognizable as implausible. Yet it also needs to be captivating. As Hitchcock puts it – and the paradoxical nature of his statement should be well noted - you've got to be "as authentic as you can possibly be, because you're dealing with fantasy. When you tell that little boy the story on your knee, whether it's Red Riding Hood, you've got to make it sound real." The point is that these two things together – the story's felt reality *and* its patent implausibility – constitute its actual truth. For the story can only reveal the potentially misleading nature of the conventional if it can make us partially believe in it. This phenomenon in its entire breadth is wonderfully complex; no one formulation captures it completely. Yet, in a word, what it means that we end up with a partial belief in the story is that, as explained earlier, we realize that its content is made up of signs. In other words, to the extent the story is real and believable, it does consist of things; yet, because this content is implausible, it now assumes the status of a sign pointing to something else. What determines that it is a true sign – that it actually points to a real, unseen content – is the way in which we have come to see that it is even a sign, i.e. by realizing that human convention is misleading, that we believed a made-up story. If these new signs – unlike the ones we started with, the ones that misled us – don't give us any content to see, they are true, they are signs of a different order. For the quotation, see the interview with Hitchcock in *Cinema* vol 5, issue 1 (August and September 1963): 4-8, 34-35.

[53] It is helpful to compare this response to what might be the generic response to a Romantic work. It is perhaps: "This is clearly made-up and fantastical, yet a part of me gets it! I must kind of genius just like the artist! Even within me, there must be some kind of amazing capacity for creativity!" This response implies nothing about sin, of course. What it implies instead is that the speaker lives in the modern world. It's as if the continuation of the above response would be: "I am a genius like the artist! Yet I am such a tortured soul. Nothing is real to me, the confines of this world are just too narrow for me to spread my wings and take flight etc." The equivalent of this in the response to romance is that we recognize the reality of sin. Here, that is, we feel that our innate "creativity" needs to be restricted and held in check for a completely different reason.

Yet, again, if Romantic aesthetics enables such a transformation, its goal is not simply to make everyone dangerously unreflective. On the contrary. The point is precisely that we should be woken up to the free and autonomous nature of our subjectivity. We should realize, that is, our identity as individuals, become self-conscious about our own role in determining who we are and the world we live in.[54] It is only natural, therefore, that a Romantic poem could not function by making its readers wary of convention. For, in the Romantic outlook, doing this could only seem to amount to something like questioning our ability to be self-determining. In the Romantic outlook, in other words, the conventional nature of works of art can no longer be made meaningful with reference to human sinfulness; it can only be made meaningful, rather, with reference to the notion that people are free, that they make their own world, that the artist is a genius – and these are of course things that are not supposed to be drawn into question. Yet, if human convention is now in a certain sense unchecked – i.e. if it now means just that each person is free – an obvious question arises: how is this viable? The above reading of Goethe's ballad again shows the way. For, in the ballad, the reason that "paganism" can seem promising is that it is crushed by "Christianity." And if the notion of human autonomy similarly seems unproblematic, the reason is that it, in turn, is crushed by modernity. Humans become free and autonomous, that is, at the same moment that, at least in their own eyes, they lose the ability truly to identify with anything traditional or conventional. In modernity, in other words – at least according to modernity's own self-understanding – there is no danger that anything "made-up," anything mythical or illusory, could fail to be seen through, fail to be dispelled. Yet, exactly because of this, it's as if the human capacity for world-creation can now express itself only in harmless ways: we can be free, autonomous individuals because all of the important questions

[54] "The mistake of the bride's mother lies…in her…disregard for the autonomy of her daughter…. The mother's crime is exploitation; the daughter was made to enter a monastic life that was not of her own choosing." Ellis Dye, *Love and Death in Goethe: "One and Double"* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 148.

really need to be answered by science. If the human capacity to make meaning is thus unleashed, it seems this only happens because the sphere in which this capacity is effective is perceived as radically restricted – so that the problematic edge of this capacity is taken from it, or is sufficiently dulled.

The situation, therefore, is again like what we see in the ballad. Autonomous subjectivity and modernity essentially need each other, only make sense in terms of each other. Yet their union has to occur over an abyss, as it were. We cannot *see* their marriage because, if this were to happen, these two entities would cease to exist as we know them. Naturally, these are heady reflections that probably raise more questions than they answer. In the immediate context, for instance, one question they suggest pertains to whether or not a kind of historical trajectory is implied by this chapter. For, if the poem cannot explicitly portray its marriage of opposites, why is it that the film can? Why is it that the entity coded as "paganism" can more obviously be subjected to critique in the film? What has happened – to pose a ridiculous yet necessary question - between 1797 and 1938? Should we perhaps train our thoughts here on the new possibilities offered by film as a medium? It has been marveled at, for instance, that, in the twentieth century, among the high arts, it is seemingly only cinema that can convincingly be mimetic in a traditional sense.[55] In its classical phase, at least, cinema presents us with patently conventional stories we are still able to get lost in. By this account, it would seem that cinema is in the unique position of still being able to demonstrate that conventions are real – in the sense, that is, that mere deceptions exert a terrifying, potentially problematic force on us. It is arguably

[55] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). "I assume it is sufficiently obvious that these ways of giving significance to the possibilities of film – the media of movies exemplified by familiar Hollywood cycles and plots that justify our projection of types – are drawing to an end. And this means…that they no longer naturally establish conviction in our presentness to the world" (60). "What needs accounting for is simultaneously that the tradition is still available to current successful films, and also that serious works are in the process of questioning their relation to the tradition, that they are moving into the modernist predicament in which an art has lost its natural relation to its history…" (72). "Is the power of representation…irretrievable? Is there no way to declare again the content of nature…" (118)?

not only the villain on screen that audiences of Hitchcock films are frightened by. Yet might there not be yet another explanation here, one that stems, more profoundly, from how human autonomy and subjectivity are conceived ca. 1938? For there is a common notion that cinema tells us what to imagine, presents us with ready-made dreams. Undoubtedly, this could seem to be a dubious aspect of cinema, as if it were manipulative. Yet, if a film like *The Lady Vanishes* tells us what to imagine, might it perhaps have more complex motives? Might the film be aware of the potential drawbacks of conceiving subjectivity as absolutely free? Might it be trying to offer, under the radar, a notion of freedom and autonomy that is slightly different from the one modernity is founded on?[56]

But all of these thoughts are starting to lose something out of view – the fact that this chapter is not mainly about the differences between the poem and film, but about the similarities. To summarize, when we see these similarities, we realize that there is something conventional or formulaic about the works in question. On a minimal level – i.e. the claim here is not that direct influence needs to be involved – we realize that, far from just presenting true stories, these works are products of imitation, products of a kind of artistic game. As the introductory chapter explained, however, the Augustinian thesis is that, typically, if an institution is established solely by means of human convention, it will crumble. So that, here, the fact that the works in question

[56] A film that becomes relevant in this context is the 1987 *Moonstruck*, written by John Patrick Shanley and directed by Norman Jewison. As mentioned in footnote 39, this film clearly owes much to the tradition that Goethe's ballad and Hitchcock's film come from. And certain aspects of it support the kind of historical trajectory I am here sketching out. For example, the premise of the film is that a certain bride and groom are waiting for the death of the groom's mother before they marry. Leading up to the marriage, however, what happens is that the mother begins to recover; it seems she will not die. When the bride learns this, she exclaims: "This is modern times, there ain't supposed to be miracles no more!" The basic idea seems to be that, in modernity, when the bride and groom marry, the mother has to die, in some sense. Yet the point in context is that the film challenges this tendency. In *this* film, the mother will still be around. And this seems to stem from the fact that the film, more generally, is questioning certain aspects of modernity. The groom who initially stipulated that his mother had to die, for instance - this groom knows nothing about the conventions of getting married: he has no ring when he asks her, he does not know you get down on one knee etc. And it is explicit that this hyper-modern groom has been the agent of violence: he caused his brother to lose his hand – which, thinking of Goethe's *Götz*, might be deemed the quintessential wound modernity inflicts. Summarizing, the film can be seen as trying to rehabilitate a way of thinking about marriage that does not presuppose absolute individual autonomy.

are conventional becomes astounding. For, even when we realize that these works are conventional, they don't "crumble." We can see their conventionality without the images that they present disappearing. The implication is that what we're dealing with is a *real* conventionality – and this is the case regardless of whether or not, say, Hitchcock knew Goethe's poem. Assuming he knew it, then it was genius (not in the Romantic sense, clearly) to copy it so delicately, to be so wickedly subtle with his copying – to make us think we were just watching a movie about a train.[57] The question of influence aside, the main idea is just that, when we see how similar these works are, they become not less but *more* interesting, not less but *more* complicated. The works reinforce each other, carry on a kind of dialogue with each other that we can overhear. If the basis of this dialogue were really just mere human convention and imitation, it would eventually dissolve into discord. As the comparison of these works has hopefully shown, however, one can read them in such a way that this never happens. From a certain angle, we can see that these works are really speaking something like the same language. Peace reigns between these works, therefore, when they meet in our minds, or, to put it a bit differently, perhaps we might say that what reigns between them is romance.

[57] The question of influence aside, it is remarkable that, regarding "Die Braut" and *Lady Vanishes*, both Goethe and Hitchcock describe these works as the product of ideas that they had long been carrying with them and developing. As Goethe puts it: "Mir drückten sich gewisse große Motive, Legenden, uraltgeschichtlich Überliefertes so tief in den Sinn, daß ich sie vierzig bis fünfzig Jahre lebendig und wirksam im Innern erhielt; mir schien der schönste Besitz, solche werte Bilder oft in der Einbildungskraft erneut zu sehen, da sie sich denn zwar immer umgestalteten, doch, ohne sich zu verändern, einer reineren Form, einer entschiednern Darstellung entgegen reiften. Ich will hievon nur die Braut von Korinth, den Gott und die Bajadere, den Grafen und die Zwerge, den Sänger und die Kinder, und zuletzt noch den baldigst mitzuteilenden Paria nennen." J.W. Goethe, "Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein geistreiches Wort," in *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften: Erster Teil*, ed. Ernst Beutler (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1949), 880. And immediately after a discussion of *Lady Vanishes*, Hitchcock tells Truffaut the following: "The work done in England was the growth and development of instinct. The instinct of ideas. The latter period [of my career in England] was the beginning of the formation of ideas. The ideas began to come, off-beat, pixieish ideas. These all came in the latter period…. *Lady Vanishes* or *The 39 Steps* represent the peak in one's instinctive ideas, of working in a certain *genre* of material that appealed to me." In this same stretch of interview, Hitchcock notes that the story of *Lady Vanishes* has been done "two or three times," and he relates what he calls "the famous legend" about a girl whose mother vanished during the Paris Exhibition of 1889. Needless to say, he does not list Goethe's ballad as one of the film's earlier versions. The form in which the above Hitchcock quotation appears in print makes many unfortunate omissions. I have therefore simply written down what Hitchcock says in the audio recording that is one of the supplements to the Criterion Collection edition of the DVD.

Chapter 2. Romance and Idolatry: On the Defense of Images

Though the notion of romance refers to a variety of literary and cinematic works, there are certain characteristics that it almost always seems to evoke. Let us recall two of them. To begin, it is something of a commonplace that romance literature is imaginary, or that, when we're dealing with romance, we're dealing with a product of the creative imagination. While the epic and *chanson de geste*, for example, are thought to be grounded in historical fact of some sort, the medieval romances of the twelfth century are rather unmoored in this regard. To recognize them as romances is largely to recognize that they are much more explicitly fictional creations. As one scholar has put it, what marks the emergence of romance in this period is that the fictional "world in which we move…is one of unbounded, unbridled imagination..."[1] And, to go a step further in this direction, it should also be noted that the imaginary quality referred to here is sometimes thematized in the text by means of reflections on the nature of literal images. The notion of the *imag*inary, that is, can sometimes be etymologically plumbed. For images, and the question as to their status, is simply a theme in many of the works we might consider. One thinks of the *Ethiopian Story*, in which the image of Andromeda, viewed by Chariclea's mother "during…intercourse," is the impetus behind the entire plot.[2] A famous "artisan" who "sculpts and crafts…images" plays a pivotal role in Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligés*.[3] And, to take a further leap in time, the previous chapter explored a number of instances in which images appear in Goethe's *Die Braut von Corinth* and Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*. As that discussion in part suggested, what we see in such instances is how the works in some sense think about what exactly images are; we see them reflecting, one might say, on the nature of their own status as imaginary creations.

[1] R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 248.
[2] Heliodorus, *The Ethiopian Story*, trans. Sir Walter Lamb (London: Everyman, 1997), 90.
[3] Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (New York : Penguin, 1991).

The second characteristic to recall is of a somewhat different kind. It is a function of the register of romance. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is a register we might typically think of as popular. Romance literature is not generally assumed to be especially canonical or important; it would seem more often than not to serve rather as entertainment. And this feature about it has caused virtually all of its manifestations to be viewed at one time or another with suspicion. "Any serious discussion of romance has to take into account its curiously proletarian status as a form generally disapproved of, in most ages, by the guardians of taste and learning…."[4] So could a preacher ca. 1200 suddenly mention King Arthur in a sermon in order to level a critique at the interests of his listeners: "You see, my brothers, to how sad a pass we have come; when I was speaking to you about God, you fell asleep; but as soon as I began a secular story, you all woke up and began to listen with eager ears."[5] In the context of modern literature, it is not exactly in the name of "God" that romance is called into question. Yet a suspicion of some kind undoubtedly persists. It would seem most basically to pertain now to the lack of verisimilitude. This is the brunt of the argument in *Don Quixote*. The problem is not simply that romances "aim…to amuse," but that they fail to do even this. For "they're full of so many monstrous absurdities." Writers of such works go wrong by "forak[ing] verisimilitude," by relating "adventures [that] are incredible." A more respectable form of literature would strive to "com[e] as close as possible to the truth."[6] At issue in Cervantes are apparently just the medieval romances of chivalry – the ancient Greek romances seem to escape his general censure. It would certainly be wrong to think, however, that the translation and revival of Greek romance in the sixteenth-century was viewed as a positive or innocuous development by everyone. In an anti-

[4] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976), 23.
[5] Susan Crane, *Insular Romance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 94. The quotation appears originally in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*.
[6] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Rutherford (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 440-41.

theatrical tract of 1582, Stephen Gosson laments the fact that "the *Aethiopian historie*" – along with works such as "the Golden Asse," "Amadis of France," and "the Round Table" – has been "throughly ransackt, to furnish the Playehouses in London" with new material.[7]

The reason to take note particularly of these two aspects of romance – i.e. its imaginary nature, on the one hand, and the fact that it is a favorite object of critique, on the other – is that their juxtaposition begins to suggest something. The notion of images, or imaginary creations, that are viewed with suspicion is arguably evocative of a somewhat different discourse. We seem to be approaching something akin to the problem of idolatry. The discussion of romance potentially resonates with a discussion about the peculiar status of images in a more strictly religious context. To be sure, the cinematic example aside, to talk about romance is to talk about literature, i.e. about narrative unfolding in time, about an art form bound to the medium of language. Romance's imaginary quality, however, in some cases seems to encourage a tendency to think about it visually. In reference to modern literature's general shift in the direction of realism, for example, Frank Kermode takes note of the impression that "the old laws of the land of romance" do not seem operable anymore. Interesting here is the reason he gives for this. For something to be a romance, it seems – for it to be a work of "fiction" or to draw on "inherited forms" – is, in Kermode's words, for it "to cover over reality with eidetic images." A book more suited to modern sensibilities would "have no eidetic form, no concordance suggesting false absolutes." It would not "replace reality by myth."[8] Needless to say, as an account of realism, or as a summary of literary history, these remarks oversimplify things. They are noteworthy here simply due to the notion of "romance" or "fiction" that they take for granted. A story adhering to "the old laws of the land of romance" would evidently present its readers with

[7] The tract in question is Gosson's *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*. This quotation is from the second "action." Gosson is also the author of the more famous *School of Abuse*, another anti-theatrical tract.
[8] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966), 134, 142.

"falsifying…images." One could arguably continue in the same vein by saying that it would tempt its readers with idols.

This would at least be supported by the way in which idols and idolatry are generally thought of. It is perhaps helpful to recall here the basis of the notion of idolatry in the Judeo-Christian tradition:

> I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
> Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
> Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that it is the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:
> Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them […]

Idolatry, it seems, is essentially to "[worship] as God a thing which is not God."[9] Or to cite a number of other common formulations, "[i]dolatry [is the] failure to look beyond creation to the creator"; it is for there to be "an improper conception of God in the mind of the worshipper;"[10] or for an "image itself" to be worshipped "and not what the image represents."[11] In the contemporary world, as Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit note, it seems to be associated less with images *per se* than with the "imagination" and its products writ large: "Philosophy…is iconoclastic, in the sense of removing ideological masks or breaking idols. In this context the idols are the creatures of the human imagination that take control over people and their lives, and the breaking of idols means the uncovering of the fictional and illusive character of the imagination."[12] Given that the prohibition against idolatry and "images" appears at essentially the beginning of the Decalogue (whether it should be thought of as the first commandment or the

[9] Catharine P. Roth, Introduction to *Theodore the Studite: On the Holy Icons* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), 10.
[10] Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), 2.
[11] Ibid., 39.
[12] Ibid., 6.

second is historically a matter of dispute[13]), it is clearly an offense of the gravest kind. According to Tertullian, in fact, "[i]dolatry is the chief crime of mankind, the supreme guilt of the world...."[14] Perhaps it is intuitive why this is so, e.g. because idolatry means nothing less than failing to worship the one true God. Yet this is in some sense merely to repeat the commandment. How else might the gravity of this offence be accounted for? What exactly is it that makes idolatry and the worship of images so problematic? One way of approaching this question is to consider it alongside the thought of René Girard.

In a certain sense, the problem of idolatry is something that Girard's work is almost always revolving around. This becomes apparent in light of the fact that the cornerstone of Girard's work is the concept of mimetic desire. According to Girard, desire is mimetic in the sense that it is often motivated by what appears to be the desire of someone else. We see what someone else desires, and we desire the same thing; we imitate this desire, take it as a model for our own. Mimetic desire is thus "[d]esire according to the Other."[15] As Girard argues in his first book, *Deceit, Desire, and The Novel*, the modern obsession with romantic originality works to sustain a "lie of spontaneous desire." "[R]omantics and neoromantics…all defend the same illusion of autonomy to which modern man is passionately devoted."[16] The great novelists, however, are not taken in by this. Even the most "romantic" and "spontaneous" of their heroes are shown to follow the same pattern: they all imitate the desire of a model; they surrender to someone else the freedom to "[choose] the objects of…desire."[17] Don Quixote's chivalric quest is inspired by the example of Amadis; Emma Bovary models her dreams of passion on romantic

[13] Giuseppe Scavizzi, *The Controversy on Images from Calvin to Baronius* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 2, 10.
[14] Quoted are the opening sentences of Tertullian's *De Idololatria*.
[15] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 5.
[16] Ibid., 16.
[17] Ibid., 1.

notions she has about distant Paris. Yet the fact that desire is thus mimetic is not the only thing that novelistic truth reveals. It also sheds light on the nature of rivalry and envy. If desire is so often thwarted, for example, one might lament that what is to blame for this is simply "fate" – as if cruel "fate" creates all the rivals who keep getting in the way. The great novelists show, however, that rivalry of this sort is only logical. In a world where one person desires something just because his or her model desires it, to desire at all is almost inevitably to be on a collision course. Conflict and rivalry naturally arise as soon as disciple and model are in close proximity. They quite simply both desire the same thing. When this happens, of course, the rival will be envisioned as an object of hatred. What Girard's theory is able to get into view, however, is that the paradoxical ground of this hatred is actually the attempt to emulate the rival, the desire to partake of what really seems to be the rival's superior "being."

To the extent that mimetic desire implies a kind of bowing down before the altar of a model, it can almost be thought of as another word for idolatry. And this is indeed something that Girard's formulations make explicit over and over again. When Emma Bovary "goes to the ball at the Vaubyessards,'…she…gazes at the idol face to face."[18] In Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, Stavrogin is the "idol" from whom all the other figures "get their ideas and desires." "Each feels for him [a] mixture of reverence and hatred…. Stavrogin is their 'light,' they wait for him as for the 'sun'; before him they are 'before the Almighty.'"[19] Mimetic desire, it seems, results in a situation in which "men become gods in the eyes of each other."[20] "Men who cannot look freedom in the face are exposed to anguish. They look for a banner on which they can fix their eyes. There is no longer God, king, or lord to link them to the universal. To escape the feeling of particularity they imitate *another*'s desires; they choose substitute gods because they

[18] Ibid., 8.
[19] Ibid., 60.
[20] Ibid., 53.

are not able to give up infinity."[21] As just mentioned, this choosing of "substitute gods" according to the logic of mimetic desire inevitably leads to rivalry. Though the model of desire may begin as an object of reverence, a kind of idol, he or she will soon turn into a "monstrous divinity" in the eyes of the desiring subject.[22] This already suggests one answer to the question posed above. The problem with idolatry is that it serves and perpetuates violence. Though it gives men a goal on which to fix their desire, it does so only by deceiving them. It is really just recruiting them for a spiral of envy and self-hatred. In the context of *Deceit, Desire, and The Novel*, it might seem that this all amounts to something like reflections on love triangles. Girard's subsequent work, however, demonstrates the relevance of mimetic desire to questions concerning nothing less than the origins of religion and human culture. A look at this larger context sheds further light on the problem of idolatry.

The starting point for Girard's 1972 *Violence and the Sacred* is a question that anthropologists had long sought to answer with only limited success: Why do all primitive societies perform sacrifices? What is the purpose of sacrificial ritual? The mimetic nature of desire, as it is revealed in our greatest literature, proves to be at the heart of the particular answer Girard develops. The first thing to note is that the sorts of rivalries characteristic of mimetic desire can emerge on the scale of an entire society. Rivalry and conflict, in other words, can spread like a contagion. The clearest example of this is a cycle of violence driven by vengeance. Two or more factions exchange blow for blow, in such a way that they are basically imitating each other. "[T]he resemblance between the combatants grows ever stronger until each presents a mirror image of the other."[23] Distinctive of human nature is that such acts of reprisal can go on indefinitely. It is a real threat that they might "prove fatal to any society of modest size," a real

[21] Ibid., 65.
[22] Ibid. 73.
[23] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London: The Athlone Press, 1977), 47.

threat that no one could ultimately be left standing.[24] Girard's hypothesis, however, is that, at the beginning of all manifestations of human culture and society is a certain event that reverses this descent into chaos: the warring combatants converge on a scapegoat, or on a surrogate victim. Because the violent crisis here is a result of mutual imitation, it dissipates surprisingly quickly as soon as all the parties involved direct their vengeance at a common enemy:

> A single victim can be substituted for all the potential victims, for all the enemy brothers that each member is striving to banish…. Each member's hostility, caused by clashing against others, becomes converted from an individual feeling to a communal force unanimously directed against a single individual. The slightest hint, the most groundless accusation, can circulate with vertiginous speech…. The corporate sense of conviction snowballs, each member taking confidence from his neighbor by a rapid process of mimesis.[25]

While imitation previously fueled violence, a war of all against all, what happens now is that it starts to fuel harmony - or at least a war of all against one. The various factions agree that the true cause of all their troubles has been found. And indeed, the killing of the scapegoat *does* effectively solve the crisis. Since the scapegoat is on the margins of society, this is a death that no one is going to answer with a further act of vengeance. The cycle of reprisals is thus put to a stop. "[T]here now reappears a true community, united in its hatred for one alone of its number."[26]

It is in light of this phenomenon of an original "founding murder" that the purpose of sacrifice comes into view. In a word, sacrifice is the attempt to institutionalize this murder, or to reenact it in ritual form. Ethnographic evidence shows that, in tribal societies, the offering of a sacrificial victim is often preceded by "mock battles" or "ritual dances" in which performers meet in "perpetual confrontation."[27] What we are seeing here, Girard claims, is a reenactment of

[24] Ibid., 15.
[25] Ibid., 79.
[26] Ibid., 79.
[27] Ibid., 98.

the violent crisis that the founding murder brought to an end. In this and other respects, celebrants participating in sacrificial ritual "are striving to produce a replica, as faithful as possible in every detail, of a previous crisis that was resolved by means of a spontaneously unanimous victimization. […] The rite…is a repetition of the original spontaneous 'lynching' that restored order in the community…."[28] The implication Girard draws is that sacrifice is ultimately a kind of preventive measure. A community replicates a violent crisis in *ritual* form so that a *real* crisis is something it doesn't have to experience. "The function of sacrifice is to quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting."[29] Sacrifice draws to itself, like a lightning rod, the latent discord brewing within a community, and channels it in the direction of the victim. To be sure, it is not as if a community knows it is doing this. In fact, "the sacrificial process requires a certain degree of *misunderstanding*. The celebrants do not and must not comprehend the true role of the sacrificial act."[30] By their own lights, they would have to believe that they are appeasing a god, offering up a sacrifice to "the god who supposedly demands victims."[31] To a certain extent, of course, there is good reason for them to think this. For the sacrifice of a victim truly does reinforce the community's social fabric. It recreates the sort of communal harmony that resulted from the founding murder. The celebrants understandably perceive this harmony as the gift of a satisfied deity. What they fail to see is just that the deity satisfied here is really their own violent impulses. Their sacrifices are actually offered to the god, not of peace, but of violence.

The nature of this delusion takes us to a further aspect of Girard's thought. One might introduce it by saying that, according to Girard, the delusion on which sacrifice is based is

[28] Ibid., 94.
[29] Ibid., 14.
[30] Ibid., 7.
[31] Ibid., 7.

dispelled by Christianity, is exposed in the Judeo-Christian texts as the lie that it is. A point that it pays to highlight here is that the delusion in question pertains essentially to how a scapegoat, or sacrificial victim, is chosen. For sacrifice to function, a community has to believe that its victim is guilty. Girard's account of sacrifice shows, however, "that the surrogate victim is arbitrarily chosen."[32] What causes everyone to converge simultaneously on one person is simply a mimetic snowballing of sorts. The victim is not guilty of the strife plaguing the community. At least in this regard, rather, the victim is innocent. And, as Girard powerfully argues, this innocence of the victim is at the very heart of the Bible's message. Over and over again, the Bible sides with the victim, presents things from his or her perspective. The significance of this is that it amounts, in Girard's view, to a radical departure from mythology. For what we get in myths is the "persecutor's standpoint."[33] An act of collective violence is recounted from the perspective of the mob that performed it. So, for instance, does the traditional myth of Oedipus report that he truly did commit parricide and incest. The victim's downfall is seen here from the perspective of those who are still convinced of his guilt. In the Bible, by contrast, this perennial story of the persecutors is challenged:

> To every one of my oppressors
> I am contemptible,
> loathsome to my neighbors,
> to my friends a thing of fear.
>
> Those who see me in the street
> hurry past me;
> I am forgotten, as good as dead in their hearts,
> something discarded.
>
> I hear their endless slanders,
> threats from every quarter,
> as they combine against me,

[32] Ibid., 104.
[33] René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 39.

plotting to take my life.[34]

In the Psalms, the Book of Job, the story of Joseph, of Isaac saved from sacrifice – in countless examples the Bible raises a voice for victims. And the Gospels are of course no exception.

As Girard points out, modern anthropology often takes the similarities between the Gospels and myths – e.g. the notion of a god's death and regeneration – as a sign that the Gospels simply *are* myths. What this approach misses, he claims, is that the Gospels assume the mythical paradigm only in order to undermine and explode it. Certainly, just like myths the Gospels recount an act of collective violence. There is a gulf separating them from myths, however, in the fact that they know they are doing this:

> So where is the difference [between myth and the Gospels]? Well, it's obvious; it's so obvious that no one sees it. Archaic religion believes in the scapegoat business, and when you believe in the scapegoat business you don't talk about it in terms of scapegoating. Only the Gospels can do that: because they don't believe in it, they tell you that Jesus is a scapegoat. When you say that someone is a scapegoat, he is not your scapegoat. To have a scapegoat is to be unaware that you have a scapegoat, to think he is really guilty. […] The Gospel says the exact opposite. The Gospel is unique.[35]

Another way to put it is to say that, in the Gospels, a light is shined, not on the supposed guilt of the victim, but rather on the mimetic tendencies of those who single out this victim. It is crucial that no one, not even the apostles, is spared in this regard. On the night before the crucifixion, we are shown Peter denying Christ and joining a group of servants and officers warming themselves around a fire. What we see here, Girard claims, is how Peter gives in to the force of the crowd. The circle around the fire – in which Girard sees intimations of a sacrificial sun cult – draws him irresistibly with its mimetic pull. He wants to be taken for one of their number. "[W]e cannot be surprised to see Peter slipping back into the immemorial practice of mankind – but this practice

[34] René Girard, *Job the Victim of his People*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987), 9. Quoted is Psalm 31.
[35] *Reading the Bible with René Girard: Conversations with Steven E. Berry* (Lancaster PA, JDL Press, 2015), 54-55.

is not what the gospels advocate."[36] By explicitly revealing the inner workings of the sacrificial mechanism, Christianity effectively renders this mechanism unusable.[37] It dispels the "delusion" that sacrifice requires. "[T]he true God," for instance, "has nothing to do with violence," the Gospels show.[38] One can no longer think that God wants sacrifices, that he is satisfied by the victim's death. The true God, rather, proves to be the God of love. It is in this sense, finally, that Christ can be *both* the "prince of peace" *and* say he has come to "bring a sword." He puts a stop to collective violence, to sacrificial killing. Yet he thereby deprives society of its age-old means of maintaining social order. "[T]he more the Gospel influences the world, the more it destroys the sacrificial apparatus that up to now has protected human culture."[39]

With all of this on the table, we've reached a point where the question of idolatry might fruitfully be reconsidered. Why is it that idolatry is such a grave offence? The reason would seem to be that it stands in the service of a social order that implicitly depends on violence. It would seem to imply a social order that is sacrificial in nature. Perhaps the first thing to stress in this regard is that idolatry *does*, in fact, help to constitute a social order. Contrary to what one might assume, that is, it isn't that idol worshippers are just wasting their time. It isn't that their cultic practices are completely ineffectual. The evidence suggests, rather, that the opposite is true. In various religious and historical contexts, images have proven to be a source of almost mysterious power. As Hans Belting writes:

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[36] René Girard, "Peter's Denial and the Question of Mimesis," *Notre Dame English Journal*, Vol. 14, 3 (Summer, 1982), 185.

[37] Girard is not the only modern scholar to make a powerful argument about Christianity's opposition to sacrifice. Remarkably, two years before the publication of *Violence and the Sacred* in English, Frances M. Young wrote a book that in certain places parallels Girard's approach. "[S]acrifice is integral to the religious response to the universe. The fact that it is necessary to stress this shows how far the modern world has moved from understanding…the intentions of sacrifice" (12). "Today we live in a culture in which the practice of sacrifice is totally foreign – no doubt largely because of the influence of Christianity" (11). Frances M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (London: SPCK, 1975).

[38] *The Scapeogat*, 189.

[39] *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, 145.

> The use of images had very ancient roots going back far beyond Greco-Roman culture. Nor should it be mistaken for a popular aberration among the lower classes…. The desire, in times of public or private need, to have a divine intercessor present at a cult site and in an image was only too understandable.[40]

In the same vein, "images of persons…were deemed to be of very ancient or even celestial origin and to work miracles, make oracular utterances, and win victories."[41] They "were constantly used for very tangible purposes, from the repulsion of evil to healing and the defense of the realm. In this way images helped in the creation of a collective identity."[42] The reference to "a collective identity" is certainly interesting in light of Girard. Mimetic desire, to say it again, is in some sense analogous in Girard to the tendency to create idols. This would seem to offer one explanation for the mysterious effects that the worship of images has sometimes had. If images "work miracles" and "repulse evil," for instance, they arguably do so for much the same reason that sacrifice does: they reinforce a community's mimetically constituted social bonds. Images, it seems, would thus play a role in recreating the sense of communal harmony that follows upon sacrifice. The "evil" they "repulse" would be the community's internal tensions.

A surprisingly apt way to illustrate this is to take an example already discussed in the previous chapter. The fact that it comes from Hitchcock indicates the potential breadth of the notion of idolatry in question. Attention was earlier drawn to the pair of Englishmen, Charters and Caldicott, in *The Lady Vanishes*. The scenes in which they appear might now be reconsidered in light of the suggested link between idolatry and mimetic social bonds. It is first of all fairly clear that a mimetic social bond is indeed what this pair represents. The two figures here, for instance, are in a certain sense presented as doubles, as if they are really just one person who appears as two. The fact that there are two of them, at least, is often a source of comedy or

[40] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1994), 33.
[41] Ibid., 3.
[42] Ibid., 44.

perplexity. In one case, we are shown just the backside of a newspaper with two hands grasping its outer edges – so that *one* person would seem to be reading on the other side. When the newspaper goes down, however, we see not one but *two* figures sitting there. A stray remark made by Caldicott, similarly – "pity he couldn't have given us one each" – seems to refer awkwardly to the hotel maid, as if it is a pity for there to be two men but only one woman. More basically, the two figures wear identical-looking suits while at one point holding the exact same pose. Given what thus seems to be the presence of a certain sort of mimesis in this pair, another aspect of the film is interesting: the film opens – to quote Charters – "in a time of crisis." There was an avalanche, the train couldn't leave, the hotel is overflowing with people, the political crisis in the background etc. If this English duo is really mimetically constituted, it seems that, "in a time of crisis," they might look for assistance in the form of an idol. And, in a certain sense, this is indeed what we see them do.

According to Jean-Luc Marion, it is wrong to say that idol worshippers mistake a created image for the divine itself. "Quite to the contrary, the worshipper knows himself to be the artisan who has worked with metal, wood, or stones…. What, then, does the worshipper worship in the idol?" Answer:

> …what man, in the city or community, experiences as divine…. Man becomes religious by preparing a face for the divine: he takes it upon himself to fashion the face, and then to ask the divine to invest it, as radically as possible, so as to become his god.[43]

There is no questioning what Charters and Caldicott "experience as divine." This may be religion in its modern guise, but they are clearly devotees of the god of "cricket." Cricket is all they think about. If someone is not a fan of cricket, or threatens their chances of getting to the next test match, they shun this person, call this person an "ignoramus." And, in the scene with the sugar

[43] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham UP, 2001), 5.

cubes discussed in the previous chapter, what else are they doing but creating an image which this god of theirs might "invest," as Marion puts it, with its presence? They are cut off from their god, that is, in a time of crisis. So they construct a kind of cricket match out of sugar cubes in which, even now, the divine might deign to appear:

Figure 2.1: a cricket demonstration by means of sugar cubes in *The Lady Vanishes*

This reading might seem to go a bit too far. Yet it becomes justified in terms of the larger context. When the Englishmen are forced to give up their sugar to Miss Froy and her tea, for instance, the very next shot we see is an ominous one of the train travelling over a steep canyon. The implication is that the episode with the sugar somehow contributes to the growing sense of danger and crisis. Yet why should something so utterly trivial have this effect? Essentially, it would seem to be because what's just happened is that the idol of the god of cricket has failed to work. To solve *this* crisis, some other kind of solution – which the film will have to work out – is needed. Again, this may seem to make too much of the matter. Yet consider that the cricket motif

reappears just before the film's conclusion. When everyone arrives safely back in England, Charters and Caldicott, eager for the day's test match, are greeted with news that leaves them speechless. As is written on a paperboy's banner, "TEST MATCH ABANDONED: FLOODS." To be sure, this works well simply as an ironic conclusion to the comic side plot. Yet is there not also something vaguely Biblical about this news? The overall crisis that the film is about has proven to be so great, arguably, that, when all is said and done, the cult god of cricket is left with no followers, is simply "abandoned."[44]

The purpose of this example is just to suggest one explanation for both the power and the often questionable status of religious images. Constructing an idol for the divine to invest with its presence is evidently the act of a community held together by mimesis – in the film, at least, we see how two figures who copy each other essentially build an idol in a time of crisis. And, with Girard in mind, we can say that the problem with this is that mimesis is inextricably bound up with violence. The idol at the center of the community in some sense covers up the presence of the victim. And, indeed, in their attempt to ensure that they do not miss the test match in Manchester, Charters and Caldicott initially work to sabotage the search for the captive victim, Miss Froy. Yet, if such a relationship between mimesis and idolatry really exists, this raises a question. It was just recounted that, according to Girard, Christianity might be understood as disrupting the mechanism that allows sacrifice to function. It shines a light on man's tendency to desire mimetically – or on sinfulness, on man's tendency to "covet" what belongs to the neighbor – thereby rendering transparent the arbitrary nature of the victim. It would seem that, if Christianity is thus opposed to sacrifice, it should also be opposed to idols. As Hans Belting observes, however, the iconographic tradition within Christianity is in certain respects indistinguishable from what one finds in pagan, or non-Judeo-Christian, contexts. Certainly,

[44] Luke 6:48.

images have been a matter of great controversy throughout most of the history of Christianity.[45] Yet the fact that they could be a topic for debate at all is interesting. For, if the use of idols is somehow implicated in sacrifice, it would seem that Christianity should want absolutely nothing to do with them. So why is the notion of the Christian religious image, in whatever manifestation it may be, something that one can even talk about?

The first step to getting at this question is to consider an aspect of Christianity that Girard was initially unsure about, or was initially reluctant to acknowledge. As Girard himself explains, what he was mainly concerned to stress in his first writings on Christianity is Christianity's uniqueness. In the face of the prevalent tendency to find only similarities between the Gospels and archaic myths, he wanted to emphasize that, where it matters, the Gospels are different: while the myths work to maintain sacrifice, the Gospels undermine it. This led him to argue that Christianity should be thought of as essentially "non-sacrificial."[46] And he even went so far in this direction as to object to the Epistle to the Hebrews when it speaks of Christ's death as a "sacrifice." Gradually, however – and especially as the result of a dialogue he began with theologian Raymund Schwager – Girard developed a more nuanced take on the issue. He changed his mind, for instance, with respect to the Epistle to the Hebrews, acknowledging that he had somehow expected the Epistle "to use the same vocabulary I do, which is just plain ridiculous."[47] There is no reason, it seems, not to think of Christ's death as a sacrifice; there *is* something sacrificial about Christianity. To be clear here, it's not as if the implication of this is that Christianity's apparent uniqueness now needs to be reconsidered: the gulf between the Gospels and archaic myths is still there. What needs to be reconsidered is just the ground of this

[45] Horst Schwebel, *Die Kunst und das Christentum: Geschichte eines Konflickts* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002).
[46] René Girard, *The One By Whom Scandal Comes*, trans. Malcolm B. DeBevoise (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2014), 42.
[47] Cynthia L. Haven, *Evolution of Desire: A Life of René Girard* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2018), 228.

uniqueness. Christianity certainly opposes and undermines sacrifice in its mythical, violent manifestation. Yet it replaces it, not with the absence of sacrifice, but with sacrifice of a different nature. Girard can ultimately speak, therefore, of "the positive sense of the term 'sacrifice.'"[48]

What is this "positive sense"? Crucial to understanding how there could be such a sense is the traditional notion of *imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ. As was earlier explained, the basis of the sacrificial mechanism is the human tendency to desire mimetically: persecutors effectively imitate each other's desire for the victim's death; what turns them into a mob is a "rapid process of mimesis," "a mimetic snowballing." To put a stop to sacrifice, therefore, it would seem that one would have to put a stop to imitation. What Christianity aims to do, however, is a bit different. Essentially, it replaces bad imitation with good imitation, imitation of the neighbor with the imitation of Christ. An example Girard finds illustrative in this regard is the story of the judgment of Solomon in 1 Kings. In a certain sense, both of the women in this story are ready to sacrifice the child in order to end their dispute. Yet we're dealing with two kinds of sacrifice. The woman who would want to "divide" the child opts for a mythical, violent sacrifice. The woman who gives the child up, by contrast, makes a sacrifice out of love. "She does therefore what Christ would have urged her to do…. Just as Christ died so that humanity might abandon the habit of violent sacrifice, the good prostitute sacrifices her own motherhood so that the child may live."[49] To sacrifice here, in the good sense, is implicitly to imitate the sacrifice of Christ. Writing with Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* in the background, Raymund Schwager makes the same point in a somewhat more straightforward manner. As he argues, we might make a distinction between the typical "imitation" of a model's desire and the "following" of Christ. The reason is that Jesus is a model unlike any other, for "[h]e wanted only to serve his

[48] *The One By Whom Scandal Comes*, 43.
[49] *The One By Whom Scandal Comes*, 42.

Father." "If Jesus' goal had been a limited good of the senses, unconditioned discipleship should necessarily have led to rivalries. But since he renounced immediate desire, he motivated his disciples to similar deeds. They 'left everything' and 'followed' him (Mark 10:28)."[50] Schwager's terminological distinction aside, the thing to stress is just that the example of Jesus provides a way for mimetic desire to have non-violent consequences. It in some sense redeems mimetic desire, one might say. For, if a social order is based on imitation, this usually means it is based on violence. If the "mediator" being imitated is Christ, however, this changes the picture of things. To be sure, mutual imitation, the imitation of a model, is still occurring: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" ("Imitatores mei estote, sicut ego Christi," 1 Corinthians 11:1). The desire ultimately being shared here, however, belongs not to the neighbor but to God. Human desire, one might say, is divinized.

One way of summarizing the issue here might be to say that, to a certain extent, Christianity is somehow both sacrificial and non-sacrificial; it manages to unite these two opposing extremes. It is with this in mind that we might begin to make sense of the status of images in the Christian tradition. For the same sort of paradoxical combination of opposites that characterizes Christianity's relation to sacrifice seems to characterize the notion of the Christian religious image as well. There are perhaps two senses in which this is true, one of them more noteworthy than the other. First of all, it is obvious that there is no *one* definitive account in the Christian tradition of how religious images, or icons, should be thought of, no *one* account of what their status is. Images have rather been conceived of differently at different times and in different places; and to say simply that there is a Catholic/Protestant divide in this regard does not begin to do justice to the actual complexity on the ground. In this first sense, therefore, the

[50] Raymund Schwager, S.J. *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, trans. Maria L. Assad (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 176-77.

notion of the image in Christianity combines opposites simply because there are many wide-ranging, contradictory accounts of images. To leave it at this, however, would fail to convey what is truly interesting here. A statement by Joseph Leo Koerner is a good starting point in this respect. "[I]t was my contention," he writes, "that the Christian image was iconoclastic from the start. Pictures of a God who suffered and died, of the deity transformed into a monster through his abject, fleshly wounds: these were meant to train our eyes to see beyond the image, to cross it out…."[51] It was just said that Christianity is somehow both sacrificial and non-sacrificial. Could it be, as Koerner's statement seems to suggest, that it also somehow gives rise to images while at the same time being iconoclastic? Could it be that these images *themselves* are iconoclastic? Yet, if this is so, what is the ground, so to speak, that images stand on? If Christianity is perhaps inherently iconoclastic, why should its iconoclasm express itself in images, of all things?

Christian thinkers have of course answered this question in various ways. One of the most powerful and foundational answers, however, has been offered by St John of Damascus, writing in response to the first outbreak of Byzantine iconoclasm in the middle of the eighth century. One of the objections of the iconoclasts was essentially a reformulation of the first commandment. They argued that, since God is "invisible, uncircumscribed, and without form," it is impossible to render Him in an image; no such image could actually be of God.[52] To some extent, John agreed with them: "If we attempted to make an image of the invisible God," he writes, "this would be sinful indeed."[53] John's ultimate claim, however, is that, to object completely to images on this ground is to fail to appreciate the significance of the Incarnation. It is indeed true that God is invisible; yet, in the coming of Christ, God assumed human form while

[51] Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 12.
[52] St John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 52.
[53] Ibid., 52.

at the same time remaining fully God. The consequence of this is that, for the first time, it became possible to see God, and thus to make an image of Him:

> Fleshly nature was not lost when it became part of the Godhead, but just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so also flesh became the Word, yet remained flesh…. Therefore I boldly draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes.[54] […] [W]e are not mistaken if we make the image of God incarnate, who was seen on earth in the flesh, associated with men, and in His unspeakable goodness assumed the nature, feeling, form, and color of our flesh.[55]

What John most basically stresses throughout, one might say, is that the Incarnation results in a kind of fundamental change. Things are different now. "I am not talking about those things which were established before the coming in the flesh of Christ our God, but about that which has come to pass after His sojourning among us."[56] One sign of this change is that images acquire a new sort of status. And the implication is that refusing to recognize the possibility of this is tantamount to claiming that no change has occurred. "In John's view the prohibition of icons challenged the fundamental Christian belief in the Incarnation, that the God who is beyond time and space was made known through a human being…."[57]

Needless to say, it is possible to explain why Christianity embraced images without having recourse, as John does, to Christian theology. Some scholarly accounts, for instance, suggest that the early medieval Church did not so much embrace images as tolerate them for practical purposes. The general idea is that, as Christianity became a religion of the masses, it was infiltrated by features of popular cult worship. And, in the case of images, it seems that theologians, realizing it was impossible to stem the tide, opted instead simply to recast image-

[54] Ibid., 16.
[55] Ibid., 52-53.
[56] Ibid., 62.
[57] Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 244.

worship in a specifically Christian light.[58] On the one hand, there is likely something to this claim. It seems problematic, however, to assume that it is the whole story. The argument offered by John of Damascus, for instance, evinces its own sort of consistent logic, which we should not be blind to. The inner workings of this logic are easy to observe when we consider John's argument along with the approach to the Gospels suggested by Girard.

Let's ask ourselves, first of all, a simple question: why is the Incarnation the thing that John keeps coming back to, the thing he evidently finds most important in this context? To some extent, an answer was already given. It seems that God used to be invisible, so that it was impossible to make an image of Him; this changed, however, with the Incarnation; God took on a human form that could potentially be drawn, painted, sculpted. So far so good. Yet what exactly does this mean? As an answer to the question just posed, such an explanation can appear oddly practical, as if the Incarnation is significant due to the technicalities involved with image-making, as if it signals just that a new object entered our field of vision. How might this explanation be deepened or expanded upon? For one thing, it is worth reflecting on the notion of images being fashioned at a time when God is invisible. Let's assume for the moment – even if the statement would ultimately need to be qualified - that an image is a kind of imitation of something. At a time when God is invisible, it stands to reason that an image could not possibly be an imitation *of Him*. Yet what is it an imitation of then? What does it depict? We need to proceed slowly here. With Girard in mind, however, it seems possible to suggest that it is the imitation, not of God, but of something essentially human. It is the result, one might say, of humans imitating not God but each other. Marion's conception of the idol proves to be helpful in this respect. As he puts it, "[t]he idol does not resemble us, but it resembles the divinity that we experience." To say that the idol results from the imitation of man is clearly not to say that it

[58] Belting's *Likeness and Presence*, for instance, generally tends in this direction.

literally looks like, resembles, man. Indeed, in Girard's terms, it seems that, if the idol resembled man like a mirror image, it would just be another monstrous double, i.e. would not be effective. The idol does, therefore, render a kind of divinity. Yet to quote Marion again, while "the idol makes the divine available…[it] in the end distorts it." "[T]he human hems in the divine from all angles" ; the idol "is characterized solely by the subjection of the divine to the human conditions for experience of the divine."[59] With Girard in the background, we might say that the "experience of the divine" in question here is essentially the experience of the miraculous harmony that follows upon the victim's death.

The divinity that the idol makes present, in other words, is something that Girard would identify as a kind of side effect of mimetic desire and mutual imitation. To be sure, John of Damascus does not exactly have a theory of mimetic desire. Yet he does suggest a relationship between idolatry and sacrifice:

> If you speak of pagan abuses, these abuses do not make our veneration of images loathsome. Blame the pagans who made images into gods! Just because the pagans used them in a foul way, that is no reason to object to our pious practice…. Pagans sacrificed to demons…The Church offers the bloodless sacrifice to God. Pagans make images into demons…But we have set up images of the true God, who became incarnate….[60]

If idolatry is associated with a kind of unholy sacrifice - a sacrifice that is not "bloodless" – the reason for this is perhaps that what idolatry rests upon is a problematic sort of imitation. Again, this is not something John says explicitly. There is no questioning, however, that the phenomenon of imitation plays a role in his argument. The kind of imitation he mentions just happens always to be the good kind, let's say. In response to the question as to why images are made, he writes that they "[encourage us] to desire and imitate what is good and to shun and hate

[59] *The Idol and Distance*, 5-7.
[60] *On the Divine Images*, 63-64. This passage is largely a quotation of 1 Corinthians 10: 19-20.

what is evil."[61] In the same vein, he justifies the images of saints – which he sometimes identifies with stories about their lives - by characterizing the saints as those who "have imitated Christ:" "I make a written record of the prowess and suffering of those who have walked in His footsteps, that I may be sanctified, and be set on fire to imitate them zealously."[62] To return to the initial question, the significance of the Incarnation, of God becoming man, is that it gives man a viable model to imitate. What this means for images, then, is in some sense that it gives them a model to imitate as well. An image of God can now actually be an imitation of God, can actually render Him.

The direction in which all of this ultimately points is perhaps best suggested by John's frequent references to the notion of "handiwork." While the iconographic tradition knows numerous cases in which images are said to be "unpainted" or "not made by hand" [*a-cheiro-poieton*],[63] it is telling that such cases are not where John's interest lies. The images he argues for are always assumed to be "made by hands,"[64] "the handiwork of men."[65] It should be noted, first of all, that, if images were often rejected on the grounds of being man-made, this is hardly surprising in a Christian context. Beyond the prohibition of graven images, an awareness of the inevitable shortcomings of things made by humans seems to lie at the heart of Christian doctrine. We saw earlier the general censure that Augustine has for "human institutions," a category in which he includes "all these fanciful signs which draw people to the worship of idols."[66] If something seems to be instituted solely by humans, according to Augustine, what this really

[61] Ibid., 74.
[62] Ibid., 29.
[63] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 49
[64] *On the Divine Images*, 33.
[65] Ibid., 61.
[66] Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 51.

means is that it is instituted with the help of "devils."[67] Given this fundamental suspicion, however, it again makes sense that the Incarnation is what John foregrounds:

> Just as something in contact with fire becomes fire not by its own nature but by being united, burned, mingled with fire, so it is also, I say, with the assumed flesh of the Son of God. By union with His person, that flesh participates in the divine nature…[68]
>
> From the time that God the Word became flesh, He is like us in everything except sin, and partakes of our nature without mingling or confusion. *He has deified our flesh forever…*[my italics][69]

What starts to come into view here is something like the strangeness of images on John's account. For, while it is in some sense basic to Christianity that there is a suspicion of things man-made, it is of course just as basic that the "flesh" of man has been "deified," as John puts it. Somehow, in the Christian image, these two beliefs or principles coincide. Man-made images can now be venerated, it seems; while, at the same time, an underlying sense that this practice is usually illicit never completely goes away. There is thus something contradictory or strange about the Christian image – something just as strange, arguably, as the notion of the Incarnation itself.

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This discussion began by suggesting a certain sort of similarity between the status of images in the Christian tradition and the status of romance in the literary tradition. To rehearse the outline of this similarity: in their respective contexts, both images and romance are a frequent object of critique; they are assumed, in many cases rightly, to be popular phenomena, something to be tolerated for the sake of the masses or lay people; they are both commonly thought of, finally, as being imaginary creations in one way or another. An implication of the parallels here

[67] Ibid., 51.
[68] *On the Divine Images*, 27.
[69] Ibid., 29.

is of course that observations about one of these things can perhaps shed light on the other one. The two phenomena, in other words, are perhaps mutually illuminating to a degree.

The writings of John of Damascus present us with one account of what exactly a Christian image is. Is it possible that this account could serve as the starting point for a particular approach to romance? While keeping John's account of the Christian image in mind, the following pages will reconsider the notion of romance as it was developed in the preceding chapters. Something about John's argument that it pays to foreground in this respect is the fact that this argument rests upon a certain kind of belief. When idolatry is mentioned in the Bible, what it generally seems to capture is the sense that created things might be imbued with the presence of divinity. "Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it."[70] Christian iconoclasts argued that even those who worship an image of Christ commit the same sin. In their eyes, the only permissible representation of Christ is the one that Christ himself instituted: the Eucharist. In the bread and wine, Christ is present; yet it would be a sin to say that he is present in an image. The role that belief plays in John's argument is crucial to how he counters this charge. By focusing on the Incarnation, John effectively argues that belief is playing a different role from what the iconoclasts expect. Certainly, venerating an image of Christ implies a belief of some sort. Yet it is not the belief that an image of Christ simply *is* Christ – as iconoclastic arguments sometimes suggest.[71] It is the belief, rather, that God became man, that he "deified our flesh," that it became possible to see God. Another way to put this

[70] Habakkuk 2: 19.

[71] This point is worked out in greater detail by Theodore the Studite, a defender of images who largely followed the lead of John. As Theodore writes: "No one could ever be so insane as to suppose that shadow and truth, nature and art, original and copy, cause and effect are the same in essence…. That is what one would have to say if he supposed or asserted that Christ and His image are the same in essence. On the contrary, we say that Christ is one thing and His image is another thing by nature…." Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), 31.

might be to say that, on John's account, belief is functioning at a kind of subterranean level – at least not at a surface level. And a result of this is that, though an image can still be conceived of as referring to something real, there is no sense that it might be *more* than just an image. What is being marveled at, in other words, is not so much that an image has come to life, but rather that God has become man – and that an image of Him, therefore, can actually exist, actually be of Him.

The reason to draw attention to this point is that it resonates it a certain way with the notion of romance here being explored. Romance is sometimes associated with an almost irresponsible willingness to believe. It "[addresses] itself solely…to the Imagination; a young and credulous faculty, which loves…to be deceived…." The fantastic "fictions" of romance owe their success primarily to the "footing [they have] in the popular belief."[72] As was argued earlier, the thought that romance and the question of believability are related seems almost inevitably right. The thing that needs to be specified, however, is what it is that we should say belief applies to in this context. Common sense would perhaps suggest that what it applies to is something like the story – as if to believe here is to think that one is reading a true story. The readings in the previous chapter, however, attempted to sketch out a different sort of answer to this question. For, on the one hand, the basis of these readings was the existence of certain parallels and correspondences. Seemingly disparate works were compared with an eye to the conventions or motifs that unite these works. On a basic level, a certain moment of disillusionment seems to come with this approach. We see that we are dealing with literary constructs of a sort, that these works are put together, fashioned. As an object of belief, therefore, the basic stories related in these works become in some sense questionable. The thing to stress, however, is that, just as this

[72] Bishop Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Henry Frowde, 1911), 139-143.

happens, a new sort of object of belief seems to come into view. For the very conventions that disturb the surface of what the story presents prove *themselves* to be something like the building blocks of a story. Something remains, in other words, after the moment of disillusionment. And one might describe this phenomenon such that the link to the discussion of icons becomes apparent. To read a story here, namely, is largely to read it in a specific way. One's belief does not exactly pertain to the basic content of this story, but rather to the conventions or *topoi* that are ultimately the ground of this content. Obviously, it is not as if something new, some new object, is now added to the field of perception. The thing that one is seeing, or reading for, *is,* however, to some extent different. Something new is available to be seen.

The question of how exactly this new thing is to be thought of is also an interesting one here. According to John, of course, what an icon ultimately depicts is God in the flesh. It goes without saying that this is an object that calls for some clarification. What this does not refer to, first of all, is simply the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. The position taken by the church in the eighth century is "that an icon of Christ [is] more than a picture of the historical Jesus."[73] Yet, at the same time, to say that an icon depicts God in the flesh is not exactly tantamount to saying it depicts the invisible God. How is one to formulate what remains if both of these options are not quite right? The key here for the defenders of icons was largely the famous doctrine of two natures, adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Christ, this doctrine most basically states, is at once both fully human and fully divine. Though these two natures come together in him, "at no point was the difference between the natures taken away because of the union;" humanity and divinity are rather united in Christ "without confusion."[74] Simply put, the significance of this doctrine for icons is that a picture of the man Jesus can also be a picture of

[73] *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 246.
[74] Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2012), 202.

God. To paint something "circumscribed" here, in other words, is simultaneously to paint something "uncircumscribed;"[75] the invisible God is somehow included, in a sense, in something that is visible. "[L]ooking at the face of Christ one sees something that cannot be seen with the eyes."[76]

There is a sense in which this understanding of what the icon depicts is a helpful model to keep in mind when we turn back to romance. Let's consider more carefully, for instance, the sorts of conventions that, as was just noted, constitute the object that romance allows to be seen. Arguably, this too is an object calling for some clarification. For to say that these conventions can be seen might seem to suggest that they can be described or documented. To some extent, of course, they can. A set of structural moments comes into view when one compares "Die Braut von Corinth" and *The Lady Vanishes*: a girl is initially pledged to a God of some sort; a boy, who is also a kind of guest, arrives and in some sense pursues her; a prominent mother-figure has something to do with how boy and girl come together. Such a structure can very productively be described. Doing so, however, in some measure fails to convey something about the phenomenon at hand. In a word, such a structure is really both seen and *not* seen, as it were. The parallels or conventions we're talking about here simply ramify throughout the entirety of these works, manifesting themselves in completely surprising, unpredictable ways. The point is that it is difficult really to see all of them; they somehow seem intrinsically resistant to being grasped, held on to. Another way to put this is to say that these parallels are actually not so much seen as they are imagined. This doesn't mean, of course, that they are not there. It simply means that they require some sort of imaginative work on the part of the reader. They can't exactly be pointed to in a straightforward way like anything else. In this sense, we can speak of their

[75] Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, 82.
[76] *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 246.

relative invisibility. This is perhaps related to the point made earlier. When you see these conventions, it's not really that you see something new. You see the same thing you saw before, yet you see it now differently. This different sort of seeing requires some imaginative work. It requires one to assume, let's say, that there is something invisible within the work that has to be looked for. On some level, one has to *believe* that the conventions in question here really exist.

A final thing to note in this vein concerns the seemingly contradictory nature of icons, the sense in which an icon itself might be thought of as iconoclastic. The reason this is possible would seem to have much to do with what it means to say that, in an icon, one sees Christ. For the implications of such a seeing go in two completely different directions at the same time. According to the earlier discussion of Girard, first of all, to see Christ is essentially to see the innocence of all victims. It is to see, in other words, that the human social order is typically founded upon violence. "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with truth" (John 8:44). Another way to put this might be to say that to see Christ is to see the reality of sin. The strangeness here, however, is of course that to see Christ is also to see him "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Apparently, sin is both foregrounded and obliterated here in a single act of seeing. We see that we are sinful. Yet the fact that we can see this has an effect on our sinfulness. It is in some measure an escape from it.

Turning back to romance, we find a similar sort of movement going in two different directions at once. This is perhaps easiest to show with reference to some remarks made by Hitchcock. On the one hand, "believability" is important for Hitchcock: "[you've got to maintain a reality, a believability] at all times. As authentic as you can possibly be, because you're dealing with fantasy. When you tell that little boy the story on your knee, whether it's Red Riding Hood,

you've got to make it sound real."[77] At the same time, however, the fact that the story is *not* real – i.e. that it is wildly implausible – often seems like something that we are supposed to notice, something that is integral to the film's meaning. Hitchcock has little patience, for instance, when it comes to critics who think that everything in a movie should be "plausible."[78] Somehow, then, the story is supposed to be both real and implausible at once. What does this amount to? Arguably, it amounts to a kind of commentary on what we as viewers are willing to believe in. For we are enthralled by a story, one might say, and then subtly shown that this story is somewhat absurd. What else is this but a kind of demonstration of the fact that we have been taken in? On this reading, in other words, a film would highlight our tendency to treat as reality a kind of fictional construct.[79] It would confront us with the fact that we have this tendency. Is this not on some level comparable to what an icon confronts us with?

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The point that all of these observations are circling around is something that should perhaps be spelled out explicitly. There is a certain sense in which the icon and the phenomenon of romance seem to require or enable a similar way of seeing. Another way to put this might be to say that they allow one to see the same thing, or are ultimately depictions of the same thing. An even more straightforward formulation would be that, after a number of qualifications, what they are both depictions of is Christ, or Incarnation. It goes without saying that this can seem like an odd and unlikely suggestion – how, one might ask, can we see Christ in romance, in love

[77] Alfred Hitchcock, "On Style: An Interview with *Cinema*," in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 299-300.
[78] François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 121.
[79] Compare Robert Pippin writing about "Cinematic Self-Consciousness in *Rear Window*": "[W]e have learned to ignore for the most part that someone is purposefully showing us what we are seeing, has decided what we will not see, that the events are not simply magically present in front of us. But some directors do not want us to forget this feature…. When we do notice, the visible narrational element is what gives the film its reflective form."

stories, in secular literature of any kind? What could this possibly mean?[80] While the preceding pages have begun to *explain* what it might mean, it is perhaps easier to *show* it with the help of examples. We have already seen in the previous chapter how basic scenes from the Bible are sometimes detectable within the apparent content of Hitchcock films. There is an Annunciation in *Shadow of a Doubt*; in *The Lady Vanishes* we see John the Baptist predict the Resurrection; *North by Northwest* – it could be shown - contains its own "noli me tangere" (John 20:17) scene.[81] A number of other examples might be cited in this same vein.

Certainly one of the most striking is *The Trouble with Harry* from 1955. In the context of a discussion of icons, this film is worth considering in some detail. To summarize the basic storyline of the film, what most essentially happens is that one man's death – it is the Harry of the title – allows for the formation of two romantic couples. There are two parallel love stories, in other words, and both of them take shape almost literally over Harry's dead body. The "trouble" in the film is then the quandary over what is to be done with this body. For, if Harry's death is reported to the police, might one of these four lovers be suspected of killing him? They all potentially look guilty for different reasons. Would the whole thing result in a needless scandal? Yet, on the other hand, what if they simply buried Harry and told no one? This route also has its drawbacks. In order for one of the couples to get married, it has to be proven that

[80] Beyond the answer to this question I offer here, another helpful resource is Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park PA, Pennsylvania State UP), 2005. What makes Didi-Huberman's book relevant here are a number of things. For one, he demonstrates the significance of the Christian Incarnation, not only for icons, but for the history of art more broadly. Additionally, though the theorist he draws on is Freud, his argument could be interpreted as Girardian. He essentially shows that paintings and images are actually working to disrupt mimesis, they seek to rebel "[a]gainst the tyanny of the visible presupposed by a totalizing use of imitation" (187). This argument could be framed within the same terms I am suggesting in this chapter. Images, it seems, have their origin in a kind of interruption of mimesis, of imitation. Yet, on Girard's reading, this very process of interrupting mimesis is central to Christianity. There is a logic, in short, to why images that disrupt mimesis could best be made sense of in terms of the Incarnation.

[81] The scene referred to is when Cary Grant climbs into a woman's window at the hospital. Upon recognizing him as movie start Cary Grant, it would seem, she tells him to "stop!" He shakes a finger at her, and goes on. The scene comes right after Grant has faked his own death. There is also something made of a wound he has received on his side. The white towel – the only thing he wears here – could pass as the sort of white cloth a body is wrapped in. Similarly, his hospital room – he is locked inside – is like a tomb he escapes from by climbing out the window.

Harry is dead. As the lovers contemplate their options, they bury and then dig up Harry a total of three times. And a resolution is only provided when the local doctor, upon inspecting Harry, determines that "it was his heart," i.e. that he died "from natural causes." As this summary probably suggests, the film contains some dark humor. To the extent that it culminates in a double marriage and is set in idyllic Vermont, however, it can also be described as a "pastoral romance."[82] Of interest to us here is the fact that this pastoral romance grants a prominent place to an icon of sorts.

Let's begin by taking a closer look at the figure of Harry. The main thing to note is that Harry has many of the typical features of a victim or scapegoat. He is a stranger to this part of New England, a man from afar. He is spoken of, moreover, as a kind of monster, someone the world is simply better off without. Also pointing in this direction, of course, is the fact that his death brings a community together: neighbors who haven't visited each other in three years literally fall in love upon discovering his corpse. This sense that Harry's death brings about a social renewal is most wondrously conveyed when he is buried for the third time. The four lovers – it is the first time they are all at Harry's grave together – hold at this point a sort of funeral ceremony. And what happens immediately after this is remarkable. We've seen earlier in the film, namely, how Sam, the male protagonist, tries in vain to sell the modernist-looking paintings he produces; after the third burial, a "millionaire" declares that he wants to buy "all" of these paintings. One way to make sense of this sequence of events is to say that the ceremonial offering of Harry has evidently been successful. It is telling, for instance, that, when they meet with the millionaire, each member of the film's little community is able to ask him for whatever it is they "like most in the whole world." Desires, in other words, are granted all around;

[82] Tom Gunning, "Hitchcock and the Picture in the Frame," in *Alfred Hitchcock: Critical Evaluations of Leading Film-makers, Volume IV*, ed. Neil Badmington (London: Routledge, 2014), 141.

impediments to them are removed. And what about these paintings and the fact that the millionaire is interested in them? To put it as simply as possible, we can perhaps think of these paintings as idols that a god has finally deigned to invest with his presence. This millionaire, for one thing, has clearly come from a different world of some kind; it is rather preposterous when we see him inspecting paintings on the side of a road in small town Vermont. Why is he there? The impression created is that the displayed paintings have somehow lured him there. He senses, let's say, that he is being asked to invest himself in these paintings. After Harry's funeral it seems that he finally does this.

Of the paintings or drawings that Sam creates, however, one of them is not like the others – it isn't included, for instance, among the paintings bought by the millionaire, it "isn't for sale." The work in question is a drawing of Harry that Sam sketched upon finding the dead man. If Sam's other works are idols, we might begin to wonder if this one could be thought of as an icon. An initial point of interest here is the fact that Sam's creation of this work seems to imply that he is capable of a certain kind of imitation. The order of events in this respect is notable. In one scene we are shown Sam drawing Harry:

Figure 2.2: Sam draws Harry in *The Trouble With Harry*

In almost the very next scene, then, we are shown Sam walking over to Jennifer's (Shirley MacLaine) house and beginning to court her. This is interesting when one considers that, technically, Harry is – i.e. was - Jennifer's husband. If Sam draws or copies Harry, therefore, it seems that he really does this in two senses. Harry is, on the one hand, an artistic "model," to quote the film; yet what this also means is that he is a model of desire, a mediator. It is remarked later on, for example, that Sam and Harry might seem to have been rivals in love for Jennifer. The reason to point this out is that it helps to clarify, and reinforce, something that was earlier suggested in the context of John of Damascus on images. Implicit in John's argument is that, if God can be drawn – i.e. if he can be seen – then he can be imitated. There is a relationship, in other words, between the possibility of drawing God and the possibility of imitating him in real life. We in some sense literally see such a relationship when we see Sam draw Harry and then move immediately to court his wife.

Let's consider as well now the role that this drawing of Harry plays toward the film's end. When Harry's image next appears, the context is that - after the scene with the millionaire and the granting of wishes - the town sheriff, Calvin Wiggs, discovers it lying on the floor next to a bag of onions. Concerning the notion that this drawing is an icon, noteworthy first of all is simply what the drawing looks like and how it is described. Sam could have portrayed Harry in an infinite number of ways. It is important, therefore, that he chose to focus solely on the face. Almost needless to say, the image that results is vaguely reminiscent of certain images of Christ.[83] What also seems to be in the background here is the Biblical notion of seeing the "face

[83] It would certainly be wrong simply to say categorically that Harry is a Christ figure. Hitchcock even seems to go out of his way to avoid overt references to Christianity here, and that should be taken into account. At the same time, it seems it would be just as wrong to say that he is absolutely not a Christ figure. Details from the book *The Trouble With Harry* by Jack Trevor Story are noteworthy. For one thing, when Harry is discovered in the book, the first words uttered are "Christ Almighty!" And consider also this extended reflection on Harry's face: "The dead face of this man held the millions and millions of dead faces of all the centuries. In that dead face lay all dead humanity; all cold history; all the odd attitudes and mistakes. He would paint the faces of the world that had been. All the

of God." Consider, for instance, a detail related through the dialogue. A beggar who took Harry's shoes, and was then taken in by the police for stealing them, is shown Sam's drawing. His reported reaction is striking: "he almost fainted, said it was the same face." This is not the reaction of someone who is merely happy to be exonerated. Also worth pointing out here is the way in which Hitchcock visually contextualizes Harry's image when the sheriff finds it:

Figure 2.3: Harry's image is discovered in *The Trouble With Harry*

Sheets of paper are covering it and must be removed; there is thus an unveiling, a revealing of the image. What literally performs the unveiling is the sheriff's shoe; instead of being handled carefully, therefore, this image is, at least by association, trodden underfoot. And since this

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thousands of faces massed together. All the staring eyes of the people as they stood wondering, laughing, weeping, and dull with misunderstanding and ignorance. The faces of the Jews and the Gentiles, the Romans and the Egyptians and the Greeks." Brigitte Peucker notes that Harry is portrayed in the film from the same angle that Mantegna famously portrayed his dead Christ. Brigitte Peucker, *The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 170.

image is lying right next to food, is there perhaps a hint that it too, or at least what it depicts, is something that is meant to be eaten?

Crucial as well in this regard is how the sheriff understands or interprets the image. He discovers it, as was just mentioned, right after the third burial of Harry and the scene with the millionaire – which, again, is to say that he discovers it after a successful sacrifice of sorts. With this in mind, it is telling that his interpretation of the drawing, if one could put it that way, is that there is a dead man somewhere, that a crime was committed. Remarkable, for instance, is that the sheriff sees Sam's other paintings too, and suspects nothing: *these* images, apparently, do not reveal the presence of a victim. The drawing, however, is different. Unlike the idols in the room, the drawing tells the truth about the ceremony that has just taken place. When the sheriff confronts Sam with the drawing, Sam tries to explain it away as a wholly original creation. "I don't have to have a model to draw from," he insists. And, in order to demonstrate this, he proceeds to alter the drawing in accordance with the many faces he claims to have in his "vast subconscious." To a certain extent, however, if the drawing was comparable to an icon before Sam altered it, it is even more so afterwards. For the main change he makes is to remove a certain feature that was arguably not quite right: he opens Harry's eyes:

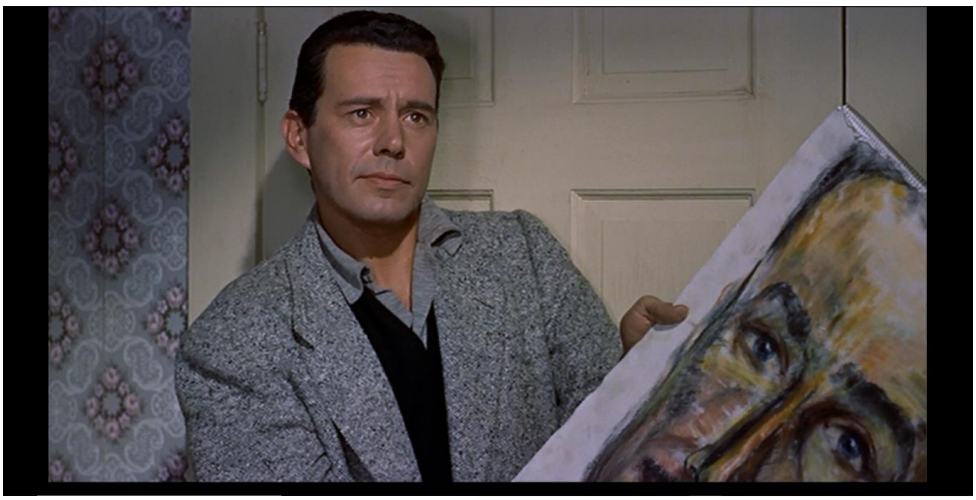

Figure 2.4: Sam opens Harry's eyes in *The Trouble With Harry*

The effect – especially since Sam could not possibly have drawn *these* eyes in real time – is rather stunning, as if the image itself has quite simply woken up or come alive. Is this a kind of half-joking challenge to us on Hitchcock's part? He is presenting us with a subtle yet blatant impossibility. Regardless of how we are supposed to understand – or if we are supposed to notice – this miracle, the main thing seems to be that the drawing of Harry eventually ends up looking *back*. We don't just see this image; it also sees us.

What ultimately needs to be pointed out in the present context, however, is not only that the drawing is evocative of an icon. Just as significant is that the drawing can be thought of, it seems, as entailing a kind of reflection on the film itself – as if the drawing is in some measure comparable to the film, *is* the film. Sam actually begins to draw Harry inadvertently. He thinks he is drawing a landscape, but, since Harry is partially exposed within this landscape, he starts to draw him – specifically, his feet – as well. Two things are interesting here. To begin, when Sam notices that there is something in the landscape, he glances first at his drawing and then at the scene; in both cases we are given a subjective shot from his viewpoint. It is remarkable that what this effectively resembles is a kind of storyboard image followed by its filmic realization:

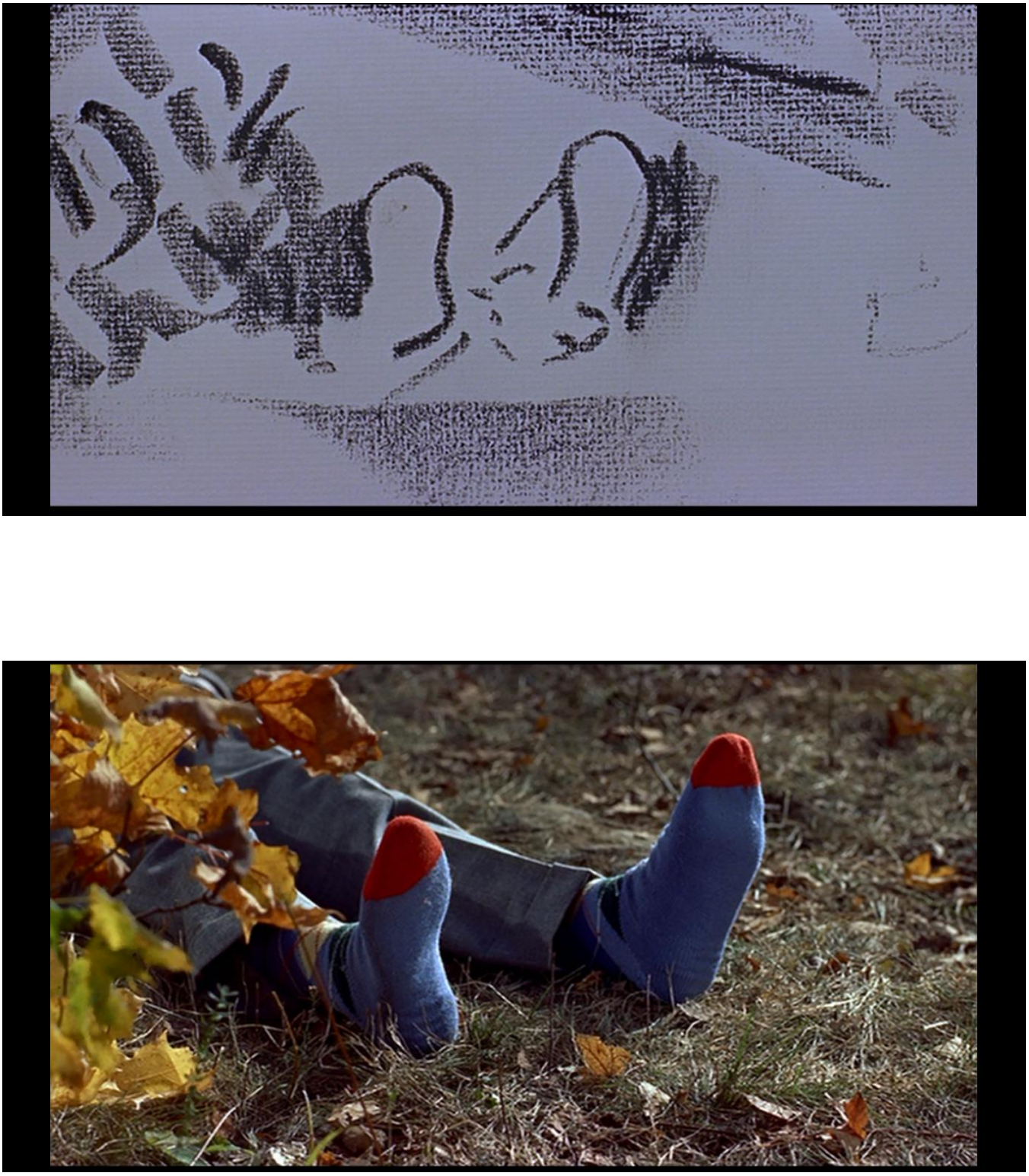

Figure 2.5: Sam's sketch of Harry followed by the real thing in *The Trouble With Harry*

At the exact moment when Harry becomes the object of an artist's gaze, therefore, we get a kind of reference to how the very film we are watching was made.[84] Secondly, consider also what Sam says at this point: "Hey! Would you mind getting out of my picture?" A film is of course sometimes also called a "picture." And the one we are watching is obviously one in which Harry is included – Hitchcock doesn't tell Harry to "get out." So when Sam changes his mind and decides to draw Harry intentionally, is there not some basic relationship between the drawing he produces and the film? A final detail adds some support for this. In Sam's other paintings, after all, Harry is nowhere to be seen. It is interesting, therefore, that Hitchcock on some level takes no notice of these other paintings. His cameo in the film comes just as the millionaire arrives in town for the first time. The millionaire stops his car in order to inspect Sam's paintings. Hitchcock, travelling on the same street, apparently just keeps on walking:

Figure 2.6: Hitchcock walks past Sam's paintings in *The Trouble With Harry*

[84] This point is strengthened by the fact that, in the book by Jack Trevor Story that the film is based on, this scene is quite a bit different. Sam isn't drawing when he sees Harry; there is no glance from the drawing to the landscape. Other parts of the film follow the book closely, yet this is Hitchcock's invention.

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If the Christian image and the notion of romance are indeed parallel phenomena, *The Trouble with Harry* provides one example of what this can mean in practice. Obviously, it doesn't mean that Hitchcock's film is literally an icon, is literally a depiction, say, of Christ. It means rather that it performs, in its own way, something of the same work that the icon performs. This work, when it comes to Hitchcock, is of course often described in psychoanalytic terms. Hitchcock's films perform a powerful critique of ideology. Is perhaps another way to put this, however, to say that these films are essentially iconoclastic pictures?[85] As Girard notes,

> True religious thought, the great novels, psychoanalysis, and Marxism have this in common, that they are all opposed to any "idolatry" or "fetishism." […] The accusation of fetishism is turned today against a Christianity that has often deserved it and deserves it still; but it is this Christianity, it must not be forgotten, that has handed on to us horror of fetishism in all its forms.[86]

Yet Hitchcock's films are only one particular manifestation of romance. What happens when we consider romance in some of its more traditional guises? If there is a relationship between icons and these other sorts of romance too, how exactly does it express itself?

A certain feature of the writings of John of Damascus might be pointed out here. It is worth recalling, namely, that John actually has a rather broad conception of what an image is. He isn't just talking about pictures of Christ or the saints. Among other things, what he also has in mind are "words written in books" recording "the lives and deeds of holy men."[87] Written stories about "those who have struggled valiantly," in other words, are essentially also icons in his view. And this is notable when one considers the broad lines of filiation that exist between romance literature and hagiography. "[T]he typical hero of *romance*," according to Northrop Frye,"

[85] The argument for a Girardian, and ultimately a Christian, reading of Hitchcock has recently been made in a book-length study. See David Humbert, *Violence in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock: A Study in Mimesis* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2017).
[86] René Girard, *To Double Business Bound* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 6.
[87] *On the Divine Images*, 77.

performs marvelous...actions" but "is himself…a human being…prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him…."[88] Such a statement almost makes it sound as if the "typical hero of *romance*" is a saint. Though there does not appear to be a straightforward consensus on the matter, scholarly accounts indeed often suggest that hagiography and romance have steadily influenced each other. If this is so, then there is arguably an extent to which the notion of romance is not entirely different from what John has in mind under image. The preface to the most famous English rendition of King Arthur - that of Thomas Malory - is interesting in this regard. It was noted earlier that, for John, the purpose of images is to provide good models for imitation. The preface to Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, penned by his first publisher, might, in places, almost seem to echo John: "And I, according to my copy, have done set it in imprint to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry…that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same…."[89]

A reader of romances who will heed such advice perhaps too well is of course Don Quixote. With such advice in mind, the apparent madness of Quixote can seem to become the expression of a certain literary paradigm, i.e. these books are *supposed* to encourage in their readers the desire to engage in imitation. Concerning the possible link between romances and images, an episode toward the end of Cervantes' novel is striking. Riding through the countryside, Quixote and Sancho come upon a group of men who claim[90] to be transporting "some images carved in good hard wood for the altarpiece we're making in our village." There

[88] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 33. Frye at one point makes the connection explicit: "Romance divides into two main forms: a secular form dealing with chivalry and knight-errantry, and a religious form devoted to legends of saints" (34).
[89] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur Volume I* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 5-6.
[90] Is there possibly a hint in Cervantes that the men have stolen the images? They are very aware of how much the images cost. Something about the episode seems to suggest such a subtext, though this is mere conjecture.

are four images in all – of St George, St Martin, St James, and St Paul – and Quixote offers words of praise for each one:

> This knight was one of the finest errants in the heavenly army; his name was St George and what is more he was a defender of maidens […] This knight was another of the Christian adventurers, and in my opinion he was more generous than courageous, as you can observe, Sancho, in the fact that he is dividing his cloak and giving the beggar half of it […] Now this one really is a knight, belonging to Christ's own squadrons, he's called St James the Moor-killer […] This man was the greatest enemy that the Church of our Lord God had in his time – and also the greatest defender that it will ever have, a knight errant in life and a steadfast saint in death, a tireless worker in the vineyard of the Lord, the teacher of the Gentiles, with heaven his school and Jesus Christ himself as master.[91]

Obviously, in Quixote's eyes, there is a link to be drawn between the saints in images and the knights in books of chivalry. And it seems important to note as well that, if Quixote thinks this, it isn't because he misunderstands the images, or misreads them. On the contrary, his account of what they depict is rather remarkably orthodox, let's say: he knows what he is looking at. He doesn't just mistake saints for knights. If a link is suggested here, it seems that Cervantes gestures toward it just as much as Don Quixote does.

The reference to Cervantes' novel, however, opens up a new dimension of our topic. As was noted earlier, romance literature is an occasional object of critique even in the middle ages. If there is a critique of romance in *Don Quixote*, however – as the premise of the book suggests - it seems to be of a different sort. On the one hand, the extent to which there *is* a genuine critique is not necessarily as clear as is often assumed. Characters within the book certainly take issue with romance. Yet isn't the book itself almost a celebration of it? It seems difficult to say exactly where Cervantes stands. Regardless, what is certain is that the possibility of the critique of romance becomes the driving force, in *Don Quixote*, behind one of the most powerful narrative premises in all of literature. Romance is critiqued here, according to one scholar, in the name of a

[91] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Rutherford (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 874-75.

new kind of literature, with the first appearance of *Quixote* in 1605 signaling, by this account, nothing less than the invention of fiction as we know it.[92] Even if this is an overstatement, there is no denying that the critique of something called "romance" is a latent element in the subsequent development of the novel in Europe. "Both Richardson and Fielding saw themselves as founders of a new kind of writing…both viewed their work as involving a break with the old-fashioned romances."[93] Romance was perhaps critiqued and disparaged before. Yet romanciers themselves are now the ones doing it. This is a new sort of phenomenon.

A certain development in the realm of images and painting seems relevant here to a degree. The Reformation was of course not the first time in the church's history that its own images came under attack. That said, however, there does seem to be a sense in which the critique of images associated with the Reformation represents something new, or springs from an unprecedented source. For it isn't just that images were critiqued and destroyed during this period. According to Hans Belting, what ultimately happened is that they "[lost their] power."[94] Not only in the reformed church but in Catholic contexts too, images *de facto* acquired a new sort of status. Simply put, they ceased to be viewed as cult images. And it was essentially, in Belting's view, the modern notion of the work of art that gradually filled the resulting vacuum. "The crisis of the old image and the emergence of the new concept of art are interdependent."[95] "Images, which had lost their function in the church, took on a new role in representing art."[96] In light of Belting's observation, is there a sense in which we might say that, like images, romance at a certain point lost its "power" too? And is the novel as we know it what steps in and fills the

[92] William Egginton, *The Man Who Invented Fiction: How Cervantes Ushered in the Modern World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).
[93] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 10.
[94] *Likeness and Presence*, 14-16, 459-490.
[95] Ibid., 16.
[96] Ibid., 458.

power vacuum it leaves behind? Assuming that images, or romance, really did lose their "power," however, what exactly should we attribute this loss to? Why did this happen?

Needless to say, this is a question to which there is not just one answer. We might approach this question, however, by considering an aspect of Girard's thought that was not emphasized earlier. By Girard's own account, namely, all of his writings imply an "historical theory" of sorts, a certain understanding of the "history of human relations."[97] On the one hand, Girard's claim is that, thanks ultimately to the influence of Christianity, human societies have become increasingly aware of the presence of scapegoats in their midst, increasingly aware that scapegoats are innocent.[98] This spells something of a quandary for these societies, however. For Girard's other claim is that essentially all human institutions have their origin in the scapegoat mechanism. Society, in other words, is founded upon collective violence. The implication here is that, as societies seek to protect victims, they also end up undermining the very institutional structures on which their order is based. To be sure, they come up with new "more humane" institutional structures. Yet they must do this over and over again. "The true engine of progress is the slow decomposition of the closed worlds rooted in victim mechanisms. This is the force that destroyed archaic societies and henceforth dismantles the ones replacing them, the nations we call 'modern.'"[99] In summary, the course of history for Girard is one in which human institutions are gradually losing their viability. Indeed, "for about three centuries all rituals and institutions have been crumbling."[100] The real gain this represents is that there are fewer victims. In the absence of certain institutions, however – such as traditional warfare - when violence does again break out, we will have no means of channeling or controlling it.

[97] *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, 31.
[98] René Girard, *Battling to the End*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2010), xi.
[99] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 166.
[100] *Battling to the End*, 2.

How might Girard's basic point help us here? Let's focus just on the question of romance. Might it be possible to say that the process Girard describes is what *Don Quixote* is virtually about, as it were? The novel largely implies, for instance, the unviability of a certain cultural institution: chivalry. It is transparent to us, the readers, that this institution is driven solely by mimesis: Quixote is just copying his idol. And this is evidently not a mimesis we are susceptible to. There is no chance that Quixote might convince us of Amadis' greatness. To be sure, the profundity of the book lies in the fact that things are actually not so straightforward: Quixote is not the only person who is mad in this world; mimetic desire runs rampant. Yet the book's basic narrative premise seems nevertheless to situate it historically to a degree. Broadly speaking, what seems to be registered is that certain institutional structures – for which "chivalry" is of course only a kind of stand in – are losing some of their force. Or the fact that even these structures have victims is becoming possible to see.

Naturally, the kinds of structures we might talk about here are not just institutional ones. Relevant as well, especially in a book like *Don Quixote*, are literary structures. In other words, literary structures too can lose their force; they can start to seem implicated in a kind of violence. To say that "conventions wear out," on this reading, is really to say that their basis in mutual imitation becomes transparent: we see they are merely human conventions. When this happens, for a book to be of any real interest, it is going to have to meet its readers halfway, so to speak. It cannot just hit them with the very structures they are suspicious of. These structures rather have to be hidden. At a certain juncture, what gradually emerges out of this situation, it seems, are the nascent beginnings of an aesthetic of absorption. Readers must in some measure be made oblivious of something if they are going to keep reading at all. It seems at least worth mentioning in this regard that Michael Fried indeed situates the "invention of absorption" in precisely those

decades around 1600 when Cervantes was at work.[101] And isn't there a sense in which Don Quixote might truly be described as absorbed? Like the reader, he is in his own world of projected fantasy, and nothing at all can break the illusion. Incidentally, certain paintings and illustrations of *Quixote* could undoubtedly be described in terms of an absorptive aesthetic program.[102]

The notion of absorption is actually one we might dwell on for a moment. It is helpful, when thinking about romance, to the extent that it serves as a kind of foil. This is especially apparent when we consider absorption in its fully formed, eighteenth-century manifestation. A good example is the attempt to reform the German theater, spearheaded by Johann Christoph Gottsched. Theater, it might be noted in passing, is similar to romance in the sense that it too – and likely for much the same reasons – is a perennial object of critique.[103] As Christopher Wild has shown,[104] playwrights of the German Enlightenment somewhat paradoxically incorporated this critique into their very notion of what a play should look like. One way of putting it is to say that Northern German Protestants didn't just reform the institution of the Church; they reformed the institution (*Anstalt*) of the theater too. Prevailing in the religious sphere was an understanding of the theater as inherently immoral, a detriment to society. And playwrights, having internalized this understanding, attempted to change the theater accordingly. The way they went about doing this is essentially by trying to make theater absorptive. They tried to purify the medium of theater, in other words, in order to render it transparent, in a sense. The goal is for an audience to be able to watch a play without actually seeing, or becoming aware of, the theatrical medium that is conveying it.

[101] Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010).
[102] Of interest are mainly the paintings of Quixote in his study or library, immersed in his books.
[103] Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
[104] Christopher Wild, *Theater der Keuschheit-Keuschheit des Theaters* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2003).

Interesting for us here is that, in practice, what it basically means to make theater absorptive, or to purify it, is to remove from the stage anything that one might associate with romance. Let's just take a look at the kinds of stories that, according to Gottsched, a respectable theater should *not* use as material for a play:

> die Erzählungen und dazu gehörigen Fabeln, [die] mit den alten Ritterbüchern und schlechten Romanen mehr Aehnlichkeit haben; als mit der Natur.
>
> ...unnatürliche Romanstreiche und Liebesverwirrungen, lauter pöbelhafte Fratzen und Zoten...
>
> [Der Inhalt der moralisch verwerflichen Oper] ist allezeit, eine seltsame Liebes=Geschicht, darinn allerhand fantastische Roman=Streiche, bloß zu dem Ende erdichtet werden, damit das zarte Gifft desto begieriger möge eingesogen werden.[105]

Some of the other things he takes issue with are also quite telling. What he generally wants to get rid of, for one thing – i.e. the harlequin, the devil – are vestiges of the popular theater tradition; he aims for a register that is higher than that of romance, we might say. Similarly, it is crucial for Gottsched that everything seems probable [*wahrscheinlich*] or believable [*glaublich*]. Anything that doesn't would remind the audience that it's all just a play, would stand in the way of the audience's absorption. Gottsched thus sounds a bit like the critics that Hitchcock refers to sardonically as "the plausibles." ("A critic who talks to me about plausibility is a dull fellow.") Further in this same direction, he opposes any indications of artificiality; plays, in his view, should not be recognizable as the products of "handiwork." And a final tactic employed by Gottsched effectively works to support the claim that the preceding pages have rested upon. For the theater he criticizes is not only a kind of romance theater, let's say, it is also branded by Gottsched as idolatrous: "Die alten Heydnischen Götter kommen…bey uns viel häufiger auf die Schau=bühne; als vormahls bey ihren Anbetern; welches unserer Religion eine treffliche Ehre

[105] *Theater der Keuschheit*, 222, 225-26, 252.

ist."[106] His argumentation, in other words, suggests an implicit link between "Ritterbücher" and pagan idols.

Speaking very generally, of course, we can say that the Reformation and Enlightenment represent the sort of "progress" with regard to social institutions that Girard has in mind. These are periods of an unprecedented demythologization of sorts. In other words, there truly was an Enlightenment. And this is inevitably reflected in the aesthetic program of the period. What it now means for an image to have "power" – i.e. for it to strike us as real or as rendering something present – is for it to appear as essentially natural. The illusion has to be created that the medium is clear. For no enlightened person, it seems, can be taken in by a work that naively puts on display its own artifice. It must eventually be noted, however, that the kind of project that the Enlightenment thus sketches out is not exactly practicable. The medium, for one thing, cannot ever truly be purified. Regarding theater, for instance, what would this even mean? What is a theater with no theatricality? And Girard's point concerning his "historical theory" actually implies something similar. The idea is that the sacrificial origins of our institutions cannot ever be completely eradicated. In theological terms, that is, the Fall cannot be undone. Needless to say, therefore, an aesthetic that completely eschews artificiality cannot possibly be the last word, the last stage in a progression. At this juncture, however, it becomes a matter of remembering how it might be possible to recognize an image *as* an image and still believe in it. It has to be remembered that one can accept an artificial image as real for reasons other than that one is unenlightened.

Two things might be noted here by way of concluding. The first is something that suggests itself when one considers the earlier reading of *The Trouble With Harry* in light of Belting's claims about the cultic image. If the image lost its power during the Reformation,

[106] Ibid., 227.

namely, can we say that it in some sense regains it with the emergence of cinema? Or to focus just on Hitchcock, it seems relevant here that Hitchcock was raised and educated Catholic, and that some of his films exhibit overt traces of this. To what extent might his cinematic aesthetic draw on the same resources that once allowed images to play a part in ritual? Regardless of whether or not the image ever regained its power, however, what is certain is that, when it was losing it, this phenomenon did not go unnoticed. Certain literary texts, for instance, seem to comment upon it. Generally at stake is the question as to what exactly it means for a literary work to be recognizably fictional or imaginary. Is this somehow grounds for rejecting it? Does the work now acquire the status of a mere fairy tale? Or should it perhaps be viewed now as the relic of a bygone age? Yet, at the same time, wouldn't such conclusions miss something fundamental about the specific kind of truth that literature conveys? It is with these questions that the following chapters will mainly be concerned. They will investigate works that might be thought of as both romances themselves and reflections on the disappearance of romance. We will begin by considering a work essentially contemporaneous with *Don Quixote*: Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, a play in which the presence of imaginary elements seems to function as a kind of challenge to the audience. This will serve as the basis, finally, for a reading of a work that not only thematizes the loss of romance but also seems to draw directly on Shakespeare's play: Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*.

Chapter 3. The Test of Faith in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*

Something that has been either demonstrated or discussed in the preceding chapters is the significance of textual parallels for the notion of romance we are pursuing. Romance is fundamentally related, it seems, to the literary conventions or *topoi* that various works share. And, to be clear, the thing to focus on in this regard is not necessarily the specific shape of these *topoi* themselves. When we're dealing with romance, it is perhaps more correct to say that what we're dealing with is the way of seeing that gets these *topoi* into view. Romance, in other words, is just as much a way of seeing as it is a thing seen – a way of reading as it is a kind of story. And what often characterizes this way of reading is that disparate works can be read in light of each other. Important to note here is that there is of course a well-known precedent for this. The notion of reading works, or passages, in light of each other influenced how the Bible was read virtually until the Enlightenment. The hermeneutic method in question is that of figural– sometimes typological or allegorical[1] – interpretation, as it was developed by the Church Fathers. This kind of reading depends upon "often vague similarities in the structure of events or in their attendant circumstances."[2] Traditionally, the "events" said to be similar are from the Old and New Testaments respectively. For "the new covenant is presented, in a veiled manner, in the old."[3] The New Testament, that is, is thought of as fulfilling the Old, the implication being that the Bible forms a unified whole. Certain examples of this method are found in the New Testament itself: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). And, in

[1] The nature of the difference between figural, typological, and allegorical interpretation is a matter of debate. See Frances Young, "Typology," in *Crossing The Boundaries*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce, and David E. Orton (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1994).
[2] Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984). 29.
[3] Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 687.

light of the previous chapter, it might be mentioned in passing that such textual similarities are sometimes thought of as images. "The fifth kind of image," writes John of Damascus, "is said to prefigure what is yet to happen, such as the burning bush or the fleece wet with dew, which are foreshadowings of the Virgin Theotokos."[4]

There is a certain aspect of figural interpretation that, in much of the literature about it, seems to be ignored. What is the basic operation, for instance, that this method rests upon? Simply put, an event from the past takes place again, yet in a rather different way, i.e. in rather different circumstances. Is this not reminiscent of a kind of literary device that everyone is familiar with? Northrop Frye speaks in this connection of the technique of "displacement." A given story can be "displaced" from one historical setting into another, or perhaps from one literary form into another. An "example of such a technique is Ibsen's *Vikings at Helgeland*, a displacement of the Sigurd saga. Here Fafnir the dragon has become a tame bear, the changing shapes in the original is accounted for by the heroine's being slightly drunk, and so on."[5] Anyone could probably list a set of similar examples at will. Most famously, Joyce's *Ulysses* is a displacement of Homer. The novels of Richardson take the beautiful souls of Greek romances and displace them into eighteenth-century England. The point here is not that the Biblical phenomenon can shed light on the literary one – as if *Ulysses* is somehow a fulfillment of the *Odyssey*. It's rather the other way around. That is, might the Biblical examples also be thought of as displacements to a degree? A figural reading would suggest, for instance, that the wood carried by Isaac for his own sacrifice in Genesis 22 becomes, in the Gospel, the cross that Christ

[4] St. John of Damascus, *On The Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980). 77. The relationship between the notion of *figura* and image is also discussed by Auerbach.
[5] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976), 37.

carries for a similar purpose.[6] Can we perhaps speak here of a kind of displacement? Even if the term could only apply to such an example with reservations, the fact that it might apply at all is noteworthy. For the notion of displacement potentially sheds a great deal of light on why it is that the Bible and figural interpretation have traditionally been wedded.

To show why, it is necessary to point out that the notion of displacement might actually sound somewhat familiar. A certain kind of displacement [*déplacement*], after all, plays an important role in Girard's understanding of sacrifice. Sacrifice is based on a displacement. In a time of crisis, the community's antagonistic impulses are displaced onto the victim. And crucial as well in this context is that this phenomenon of "sacrificial displacement"[7] is related to the emergence of a story that will have a predictable set of structural moments. More specifically, it is related to the emergence of what Girard calls myth. The idea here, again, is that the efficacy of a scapegoat's death is in some sense explained by a story that the rest of the community tells itself. Inevitably, this is a story that contains certain "stereotypes of persecution," as Girard puts it.[8] There is usually a "crisis"; a figure – often a god – will commit a crime, or will fly into a rage; when he is pacified, the crisis will be over. The details are of course different from case to case. What Girard aims to show, however, is that the same basic structure is always there. Summarizing, it seems that the widespread practice of sacrifice effectively results in a body of stories that all parallel each other to a degree. Or to put this a bit more pointedly, it seems that a *literary* displacement of sorts follows in the wake of the *sacrificial* one. For all of these stories or myths, on Girard's reading, are basically recounting the same events. If we were to put one of them next to the other, we could almost think that a literary displacement had occurred. The

[6] Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 694. "…as the Lord carried his cross, so Isaac himself carried to the place of sacrifice the wood on which he too was to be placed."
[7] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977), 291.
[8] René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 84.

reason for this, however, would actually be that both of them are based on a displacement of a different kind, i.e. on sacrifice.

The trajectory of these observations starts to become clear when one final thing is added to the picture: in order for sacrifice to work, it is necessary that the displacement it is based on remains concealed; the celebrants cannot see that displacement is occurring. With all of this in mind now, the fact that there is a relationship between the Bible and a figural method of reading becomes remarkable. Or, as one could also put it, the fact of such a relationship might begin to make sense. For, as was just suggested, what figural interpretation can look like in practice is that the reader observes how one event reoccurs later in a different context. In other words, the reader becomes aware of a certain sort of displacement. To say that displacement is now something that one can become aware of, however – something one can see – would ultimately be to imply that the mechanism of sacrifice cannot function anymore. For sacrifice depends on ignorance in this regard. The idea here, in short, is that a figural method of reading is itself almost a kind of deterrent to sacrifice: you cannot read this way and still believe in a victim's guilt. Yet, if this is so, then it arguably stands to reason that the text this method would preeminently apply to would be the Bible. For what, after all, is the message of the Bible? According to Girard at least, it is most essentially that victims are innocent. Another way to frame this point might be to say that a figural reading of the Bible ends up relating virtually everything that happens in the Bible to Christ.[9] To look for figures in the text, in other words, is virtually to see Christ everywhere. Yet what does it mean to see Christ? In a word, it means to see the innocence of all victims. There is thus a sense in which the content of the text here is perfectly reflected in the way the text is read. The relationship between this specific text and this

[9] See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 16. "Paul and the Church Fathers reinterpreted the entire Jewish tradition as a succession of figures prognosticating the appearance of Christ…."

specific interpretative method is not arbitrary. Method and text rather determine each other here to a degree.

When we consider figural interpretation from this vantage point, certain conceptions of what exactly it is appear in a new light. Friedrich Ohly points out, for example, that this method of reading is fundamentally related to "the doctrine of the *sensus spiritualis*." For the Church Fathers and into the Middle Ages, it was understood that the Bible signified on two basic levels. The words themselves signified, of course; yet the things in the text signified too, i.e. they had a "spiritual sense." (This understanding of Scripture was gestured towards in the introductory discussion of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana.*) The wood carried by Isaac might signify the cross; the city of Jerusalem might signify the Church. Remarkable is how Ohly describes what the spiritual sense is supposed to amount to: "Here we are dealing with the unveiling of the meaning of the language of God."[10] Or, as Hugh of St. Victor puts it in the twelfth century, "the signification of things is…by far more excellent than the signification of words…. The latter is the word of men, the former the word of God to men."[11] Why should the signification of things be thought of as the word of God? We might venture an answer to this question on the basis of the reflections made above. To attend to the signification of things is largely to read for figures or types, i.e. to draw connections between events. And to read for figures, as was just suggested, seems in a certain sense to undermine a way of seeing that would allow sacrifice to function. The implication is that the *sensus spiritualis* would not adhere to the logic of sacrifice. As a language,

[10] Friedrich Ohly, *Sensus Spiritualis: Studies in Medieval Significs and the Philology of Culture*, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 15.
[11] Ibid., 14.

that is, the signification of things – as opposed to words – tells the truth. It's a kind of institution that fallen man did not create, but rather discovered.[12]

Another scholar whose work on figural interpretation is fascinating in this context is Frances Young. With Girard in the background, it is interesting that Young consistently draws on a notion of mimesis in order to account for this way of reading. To begin with, she suggests an intriguing explanation for the sorts of textual "correspondences"[13] that this way of reading depends on. Essentially, the idea is that a relationship of "mimesis" is what links two corresponding passages together:

> Somehow an "impression" of the future is etched into the scriptural texts, so that the oracles are not just verbal riddles but "representations" of what is to come. The element of *mimesis* is what makes it a "type." The other examples in the Epistle of Barnabas make this clear: the bronze serpent, and Moses stretching out his arms during the battle with Amalek, are models or parables with particular significations, not because of a dramatic replication of the event to which each belongs, but because of particular features which bear the same "impress" – the arms outstretched on the cross enabling victory, the serpent placed on a tree giving healing and life.[14]

Two corresponding passages, on this reading, would seem essentially to be mimetic copies of each other. To recognize such passages would be to recognize that a kind of mimesis is occurring. It is striking that this idea is not all that different from the claim, suggested above, about a potential link between textual figures and displacement. In both cases, the truth of the text would consist largely of its ability to render a certain phenomenon – i.e. mimesis,

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[12] I am referring to the two types of institutions that Augustine describes in *De doctrina christiana*. "…there are two kinds of learning pursued even in pagan society. One consists of things which have been instituted by humans, the other consists of things already developed, or divinely instituted, which have been observed by them. Of those instituted by humans, some are superstitious, some not." Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 47.

[13] Frances Young, "Typology," in *Crossing The Boundaries*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce, and David E. Orton (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1994), 34-39.

[14] Ibid., 38. The language of Young's claim here seems to reflect that of patristic sources. As St. Basil writes: "The type is a manifestation…of things to come through an imitation (*mimesis*) allowing us to see in advance the things of the future…." The passage is quoted in V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966), 63.

displacement – perceivable. In other words, the method of reading here would again be a reflection of the text's content. Mimesis is demonstrated, that is, not only by the events in the text – recall the example of Peter's denial – but also by how these events are related. The very form and structure of the narrative, in other words, would allow mimesis to be seen, thereby working to dispel its power. Mimesis would thus be repurposed, in a sense, put to a use that is not ultimately implicated in violence.

A final thing to note in this vein is that, if it is really the case that figural interpretation has anything to do with violence and sacrifice, we can perhaps find support for such a claim in the fact that this way of reading fell out of favor when it did. As Hans Frei has well documented, figural interpretation became virtually unintelligible as a practice by the time of the Enlightenment:

> As a literary…device, figuration offended against the elementary assumption that a propositional statement has only one meaning. As a historical argument…it strained credulity beyond the breaking point by the suggestion that sayings and events of one day referred predictively to specific persons and events hundreds of years later.[15]

Yet what exactly does the Enlightenment entail? What is "the coming of modernity," as Frei also puts it? This is an answer the Enlightenment would probably agree with, to be sure, but we're generally moving further and further away here from a time in which the scapegoating of a victim might actually function as a means of maintaining order, from a time in which society might still resort to this. Another way to put it is to say that the Enlightenment wouldn't fully be able to understand the basic anthropological situation that figural interpretation is related to. And, if this is the case, it is only natural that this way of reading would gradually begin to seem "arbitrary"[16] and indefensible. It's as if this method of reading is responding to a human problem

[15] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale, 1974), 6.
[16] The Open Text, 103.

that the Enlightenment is not exactly aware of in the same way. What this method of reading is aiming to communicate, let's say, is something the Enlightenment just takes for granted.

But let's turn our attention now to something else now - namely, to the possibility of the continued relevance of this method of reading. What happens, for instance, when we reconsider, in light of the above discussion, some of the examples from the introduction and first chapter? None of these examples are Biblical, of course. But can the notion of figural interpretation nevertheless help us to account for them? In "Die Braut von Corinth," for instance, there is the moment when the mother, "auf dem Gange," hears a "sonderbarer Ton;" in *The Lady Vanishes*, then, we see Miss Froy, in the hallway of the hotel, complaining of a "horrible noise." On the surface, of course, what's literally happening here in the two scenes is completely different. At the same time, however, there is clearly a reason to draw some sort of connection. Could we perhaps borrow the metaphor that Frances Young suggests? Could we say that these two scenes "bear the same 'impress,'" as she puts it? Or another thing we might consider in this regard is the matter of belief. When it comes to the Bible, of course, the fact that figural interpretation indeed implies belief is obvious. A person will only read the Old Testament in light of Christ if he or she *believes* in Christ. It is only on this basis, for instance, that the wood carried by Isaac might start to look like a cross. The situation is certainly different when it comes to, say, Goethe and Hitchcock. Yet is there not a sense in which, even here, some kind of belief still plays a role? The point is simply that, on a certain level, this is a parallel that one can almost choose to see or not. In other words, it seems wrong to think that we could ever really *prove* that this parallel exists. But wanting to prove this would seem somehow misguided anyway. You have to believe that the parallel exists. Seeing it, that is, can only be a function of adopting a certain way of

seeing. If we can indeed start to make sense of the Goethe/Hitchcock parallel in such terms, then it seems helpful to have the tradition of figural interpretation at least in the background.

In some cases, however, it seems that it is actually more than just in the background, more than just a kind of model we might draw on. In some cases, a work almost explicitly seems to call for this way of reading. It is with this in mind that the following pages will address a romance of a somewhat different variety: Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. In this play of around 1610, essentially all of the themes and questions that we have so far discussed seem to converge. To begin, though the title of the work would suggest it is a mere tale, what this tale is arguably based on is nothing less than Genesis. For this and other reasons, the play is thoroughly Biblical. At the same time that it is Biblical, however, it is just as imbued with elements of what we might call the romance tradition. *The Winter's Tale* was clearly written in the wake of the rediscovery of Heliodorus in Europe. At the end of the play, moreover, the question of images and idol worship, discussed in the previous chapter, literally takes center stage. And perhaps most important here, finally, the play is also well aware of the demands it places on its audience's belief or "faith." Indeed, before the play is over, we will be told: "it is required you do awake your faith."[17] The following pages are largely an attempt to explain what this statement means. *The Winter's Tale,* it will be argued, essentially demonstrates for its audience why even the unbelievable can be believed in, why even "winter's tales" might be understood as true.

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Let's begin by sketching out a general overview of what happens in the play. Rather famously, the play's action can be divided into two halves, the first being a kind of tragedy, the second a virtual undoing of this tragedy. What sparks the tragedy is that Leontes, king of Sicilia,

[17] 1.3.94-95. All quotations from *The Winter's Tale* are from William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

wrongly suspects that his best friend (Polixenes, king of Bohemia) and his pregnant wife (Hermione) have become lovers behind his back. Captive to his jealous delusion, Leontes tries – unsuccessfully – to have his friend killed, snatches his young son (Mamillius) from his wife, and then has the pregnant woman thrown in prison. When Hermione soon after gives birth, Leontes orders the baby girl – a "bastard,"[18] he thinks - to be carried "to some remote desert place"[19] (where shepherds end up finding and raising her). Everything – even the oracle of Apollo – points to Hermione's innocence. Yet Leontes only comes to his senses after the death of his son; and, right after the boy's death, Hermione dies too: through his own fault, Leontes has lost everything. The play's second half takes place sixteen years later. The baby girl – aptly named Perdita – has grown up in Bohemia as a shepherd's daughter. And, as it turns out, the son of king Polixenes, prince Florizel, is in love with her. Naturally, king Polixenes objects to this union; and he surprises the pair when they are together at a country "sheep-shearing feast."[20] In their plight, the young lovers seek refuge in Leontes' Sicilia. When Polixenes follows them there, the stage is set for a scene of recognition and reconciliation: Perdita is found; Leontes and Polixenes are able to meet again, this time peacefully. And all of this is actually just a prelude to a reunion even more miraculous. As everyone is beholding what is apparently a statue of Hermione, the statue comes to life; or it seems that it's not really a statue. Hermione is alive. She has somehow "preserved [her]self"[21] for the time when her lost daughter would be found.

It was mentioned above that *The Winter's Tale* contains a number of nods toward the Greek romances. It deserves to be pointed out as well, however, that this is by far not the only literary tradition that has gone into the play, as it were. As a matter of fact, when the other likely

[18] 2.3.73.
[19] 2.3.175.
[20] 4.3.36.
[21] 5.3.127-28.

influences are gathered together, the resulting list is rather astounding. There is almost something encyclopedic about *The Winter's Tale*, it seems. The story that it tells resonates across a wide range of material. The death and ultimate reappearance of Hermione, it has been well documented, is reminiscent of Euripides' *Alcestis*; clearly in the background as well are the medieval stories about patient Griselda, one of which is the crowning novella of *The Decameron*; the trio of Leontes-Perdita-Hermione corresponds in some measure to Hades-Persephone-Demeter; the concluding statue scene is commonly related to the myth of Pygmalion. And we might talk as well here about works that appeared well after Shakespeare's time. Stanley Cavell singles out *The Winter's Tale* as the work that provides the blueprint for the films he defines as comedies of remarriage.[22] Yet, while most of these parallels – among others, as we will see – have been pointed out many times, there seems to be one story in the background of *The Winter's Tale* that has not yet been commented upon. Certain aspects of the play, namely, can seem to conjure up the infamous circumstances of Genesis 22, the Binding of Isaac. On this reading, in other words, Leontes, like Abraham, also hears a kind of call from God to sacrifice his son. The thing is simply that Leontes doesn't have Abraham's faith: he is tested by God, and fails. And it is only in the course of the play, then, that the resulting devastation will gradually give way once again to life.

By way of introducing this reading of the play, a number of things might be said as a kind of primer. Certain background information, that is, helps to prepare the possibility of this reading. The first thing to note is that, if the story of Abraham and Isaac is indeed discernible in *The Winter's Tale*, this would certainly not be the first time that these Biblical personages appeared on an English, or European, stage. The sacrifice of Isaac was one of the most important

[22] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981), 19. I note in this connection that, although it has to my knowledge not been written about, Ernst Lubitsch's classic comedy *Ninotchka* contains what seem to be references to *The Winter's Tale*.

episodes in the so-called Corpus Christi plays, performed in various parts of England from the fourteenth century until shortly after the Reformation. It is contained in all known Corpus Christi cycles due to "the relative importance of the things these incidents prefigure," i.e. because "Isaac is…a figure of Christ."[23] Shakespeare, it has been shown, was well aware of this theatrical tradition, and, in some measure, inherited its allegorical aesthetic. As one scholar has noted about *The Tempest*, "imagery from the Corpus Christi play is woven into its fabric;" *The Tempest* is itself, on some level, "a mystery play."[24] Another scholar suggests, similarly, that, in *King John*, Shakespeare draws directly on the "Abraham and Isaac play" in the Brome Corpus Christi cycle.[25] It seems likely that the influence of these cycles extends to *The Winter's Tale* too. It is fairly common to speak of the play's concluding statue scene, for instance, as being somehow Eucharistic. And *The Winter's Tale* even contains an explicit reference to "Whitsun,"[26] or Pentecost, the celebration of which sometimes included performances of the Corpus Christi plays.[27]

In the same vein, the story of Abraham and Isaac would actually not be the only Biblical figure from the Corpus Christi cycles that *The Winter's Tale* adapts. Another episode that "all [of the] cycles stage [is] the Harrowing of Hell."[28] And, as has recently been argued by Christina Romanelli, a moment towards the middle of *The Winter's Tale* is strongly evocative of the Harrowing. After the pregnant Hermione is thrown into prison, Paulina, the wife of a lord at Leontes' court, goes to visit her. The initial words she has for the jailer, Romanelli suggests, are a variation on the words typically spoken by Christ, in the mystery plays, at the gates of hell.

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[23] V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966), 71-75.
[24] Grace R. W. Hall, The Tempest *as Mystery Play* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999), 22.
[25] Jane K. Brown, *The Persistence of Allegory: Drama and Neoclassicism from Shakespeare to Wagner* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 73.
[26] 4.4.134.
[27] Kolve, 47-49.
[28] Ibid., 60.

"The keeper of the prison, call to him; Let him have knowledge who I am."[29] Moreover, Paulina might indeed be said to perform a kind of harrowing. She rescues the newborn baby from prison; she "harrows" Leontes when he is in some sense possessed by a devil;[30] she will ultimately minister over Hermione's resurrection. The example of the Harrowing is also interesting in this context for another reason. As was noted above, even if Leontes is comparable to Abraham – as will be suggested - he is still a *failed* Abraham: though the Biblical scene is in the background, it isn't just repeated, it follows a new course. The same thing is perhaps true of Paulina's Harrowing. For, technically, she is not successful, at least not at first. Hermione dies; the baby girl is lost; Leontes remains intransigent until the worst has happened. Both scenes, in short, are to a certain extent rewritings of their originals – a fact that would seem to place the play historically. The course of world history as the Corpus Christ plays present it cannot be taken for granted here.

A final thing to consider as background concerns the play's implicit commentary on images and idolatry. An image, i.e. a statue, will of course literally appear at the end of the play. It has been noted, however, that we can possibly speak of images with regard to the beginning of the play too. For Julia Reinhard Lupton, for instance, the tragic half of *The Winter's Tale* stands squarely in the shadow of the Decalogue: "the tragic *mythos* of Acts I-III structurally depends on the breaking of biblical commandments…."[31] And the second of these commandments is the injunction against idolatry. The delusions that Leontes gives in to, on this reading, are in some sense idols; his "jealousy is a species of idolatry."[32] This general approach to the play is

[29] Christina Romanelli, "'Dear Life Redeems You': *The Winter's Tale* and the Harrowing of Hell," in *South Atlantic Review*, Vol 1. 1 (Spring 2016), 15.
[30] Ibid., 9.
[31] Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Afterlives of The Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 194.
[32] Ibid., 187.

significant here for two main reasons. First, an implication of this approach is that there is, as Lupton puts it, a "'Hebraic' mood"[33] about the play's first half – a claim certainly in line with the notion that we might think of Leontes in terms of Abraham. Lupton, in fact, almost seems to suggest this notion: "Leontes may derive…some of his stature and pathos from the great Jewish kings."[34] Second, to say that Leontes breaks a Biblical commandment is potentially another way of saying that he is an Abraham who fails. Technically, of course, Abraham does not have a Decalogue. Yet he certainly has a commandment – "Take now thy son…" – that he fulfills. Leontes proves no match, it will be argued, when faced with what is in some sense a similar situation.

The first sign that the story of Abraham and Isaac could be of relevance to *The Winter's Tale* appears in the play's opening scene. As two courtiers discuss the longstanding friendship between king Leontes and king Polixenes, their attention finally shifts to a related topic: "prince Mamillius," Leontes' son. Here is what they have to say about the boy:

> ARCHIDAMUS: […] It is a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into my note.
> CAMILLO: I very well agree with you in the hopes of him. It is a gallant child, one that, indeed, physics the subject, makes old hearts fresh. They that went on crutches ere he was born desire yet their life to see him a man.
> ARCHIDAMUS: Would they else be content to die?
> CAMILLO: Yes, if there were no other excuse why they should desire to live.
> ARCHIDAMUS: If the king had no son, they would desire to live on crutches till he had one.[35]

At least two things are interesting about this passage. The first is the association of Mamillius with "the greatest promise." For a child of "the greatest promise" is of course what Isaac is too. Quite literally, God promises Abraham that Sarah will bare him a son; and when this son is born, Isaac becomes the bearer of God's promise with regard to the fruitfulness of Abraham's seed.

[33] Ibid., 194. Lupton is partially quoting an essay on the *The Winter's Tale* by G. Wilson Knight.
[34] Ibid., 195.
[35] 1.1.33-43.

Second, what is also curious about this passage are its references to "old hearts," or to those who "live on crutches" in anticipation of the kingdom's heir. For when God first tells Abraham that he will have a son, Abraham is a hundred, and Sarah ninety, years old.[36] Both prospective parents "laugh" at the thought of people so elderly having children. Summarizing, it seems that, in both cases, two basic elements appear, albeit in different ways, in tandem: there is a child of great promise, who is also an heir; and there are people of advancing years awaiting this child.

In Genesis 22, however, there is of course a third important figure in addition to Abraham and Isaac. More to the point, if this parallel really holds, where shall we say that we find God in *The Winter's Tale*? A closer look at the figure of king Polixenes in Act I may suggest an answer. Let's consider Polixenes' first lines in the play. They announce his imminent departure from Sicilia, and are addressed to Leontes:

> Nine changes of the watery star hath been
> The shepherd's note since we have left our throne
> Without a burden. Time as long again
> Would be filled up, my brother, with our thanks,
> And yet we should for perpetuity
> Go hence in debt. And therefore, like a cipher,
> Yet standing in rich place, I multiply
> With one 'we thank you' many thousands more
> That go before it.[37]

To begin, it is curious that, when we first see Polixenes, he is in the act of "multiply[ing]" something: "I multiply…." For the use of this particular verb evokes the vocabulary of Genesis (and of the Corpus Christi plays[38]):

> And the angel of the Lord said unto [Hagar], I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.[39]

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[36] Genesis 17:17.
[37] 1.2.1-9.
[38] As we find, for example, in the Coventry Mysteries: "Thi seed xal multyplye, wher so thou duelle." *Ludus Coventriae: A Collection of Mysteries, Formerly Represented at Coventry on the Feast of Corpus Christi*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell (London: The Shakespeare Society, 1841), 55.
[39] Genesis 16:10

> And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.[40]
>
> …for because though hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son…I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore.[41]

In a word, both the God of Abraham and Polixenes "multiply" things until the result, in both cases, is an uncountable number. Moreover, what is it that they multiply? It seems, of course, that, while God multiplies progeny, Polixenes multiples thanks. Is there not a sense, however, in which the passage is telling us that Polixenes multiplies progeny too? As Stanley Cavell observes, "the clause 'like a cipher / Yet standing in rich place, I multiply' is a latent picture of sexual intercourse."[42] And other features of the passage are noteworthy for the same reason. "Nine" months have passed, i.e. the length of a pregnancy; Polixenes' thanks have perhaps "filled up," not only "time," but Hermione's pregnant belly. The suggestion here, clearly, is that Polixenes, rather like the God of Abraham, is somehow involved in the multiplication of Leontes' seed.

Essentially this same argument can be made from a somewhat different angle. A particular line spoken by Leontes is especially telling in this regard. When Leontes first accuses Hermione of adultery, she tells him that he must be mistaken, that he "but mistake[s]." Leontes' reply is that it is actually the other way around. He has not mistaken anything, but rather:

> LEONTES: You have mistook, my lady,
> Polixenes for Leontes.[43]

[40] Genesis 17:2
[41] Genesis 22:16-17
[42] Stanley Cavell, "Recounting Gains, Showing Losses: Reading *The Winter's Tale*," in *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1987), 209-210.
[43] 2.1.81-82.

To be sure, this is just one sentence. There is a way, however, in which it contains within itself an entire play. Leontes has basically summarized the plot of *Amphitryon*.[44] And, in the present context, it is interesting that what *Amphitryon* is about is the visitation of a God, i.e. Alcmena is visited by Jupiter and mistakes him for Amphitryon, her husband. The implicit suggestion of Leontes' succinct formulation, in other words, is that, at least at the beginning of the play, Polixenes is somehow in the role, say, of Jupiter, of God. And a passage from a bit further on in the play provides some subtle support for this. In light of the present argument, it is striking that myths about the transformation and visitation of gods are at one point, in Act IV, referred to:

> FLORIZEL: […] The gods themselves,
> Humbling their deities to love, have taken
> The shapes of beasts upon them. Jupiter
> Became a bull and bellowed; the green Neptune
> A ram and bleated; and the fire-robed god,
> Golden Apollo, a poor humble swain….[45]

In context, of course, it is certainly not that these lines are directly gesturing towards the Polixenes of Act I. They do not have to do so, however, to be relevant. The point is simply that myths about visiting gods belong to the play's textual fabric, to its network of allusions. The fact that the play is led to think about these myths would seem to have something to do with the basic plot structure it unfolds from its outset.

Yet, if it is possible to think of Polixenes in Act I as playing the part of a kind of god – of the God of Abraham even – how does the rest of this parallel develop? In Genesis 22, after all, God asks Abraham to "offer [his son]…for a burnt offering." Does Polixenes somehow ask Leontes to sacrifice Mamillius? The obvious answer is "no." A certain perspective on the play, however, complicates the matter. For what does it mean if Polixenes and Hermione have become lovers behind Leontes' back? Apparently, what it most immediately means, in Leontes' eyes, is

[44] I am referring to the plays of this title by Plautus, Molière, and Kleist.
[45] 4.4.25-30.

that the pedigree of Mamillius has to be reconsidered. To put this another way, when Leontes first becomes suspicious of his wife and best friend, his initial reaction is to wonder if Mamillius is really his son. "O, this entertainment / My bosom likes not, nor my brows. Mamillius, / Art thou my boy?"[46] Again, this is certainly not the same thing as being asked literally to sacrifice his son. The implication, however, is that the boy might belong, in a sense, to someone else. There is a threat that Leontes would have to give up the boy, or, similarly, that his royal lineage would be compromised. The basic idea here is that, in Genesis 22, Abraham clearly faces a similar threat. With respect to their sons, in other words, Leontes and Abraham are in comparable situations. And certain details almost make it appear that the play is aware of this.

It is at least curious, for instance, that, at the exact same moment that Leontes first questions Mamillius' paternity, there is an emergence of vocabulary dealing with livestock animals, i.e. animals that make traditional candidates for sacrifice. As Leontes says to his son while still observing Hermione and Polixenes out of the corner of his eye:

> Come, captain,
> We must be neat – not neat, but cleanly, captain.
> And yet the steer, the heifer and the calf
> Are all called neat. – Still virginalling
> Upon his palm? – How now, you wanton calf,
> Art thou my calf?[47]

With regard to the first word, "neat," what happens is that Leontes realizes it has two meanings: it means not only "cleanly," but also refers to horned cattle (and thus to cuckolds). Does something similar happen with the word "calf"? "Wanton calf" is a proverbial expression. Yet does "calf" acquire a slightly different overtone in the question "Art thou my calf?" To put it bluntly, is Leontes asking if this boy is to be sacrificed? To be sure, it seems possible only to wonder and speculate about this. What might be asserted with greater force is that, in any case,

[46] 1.2.117-19.
[47] 1.2.121-126.

the dialogue that ensues here between father and son recalls what we might think of as the basic dramatic situation presented by Abraham's plight. For it is not simply that Leontes has, say, discovered some love affair and is upset about it. He has seen something, rather, that throws him headlong into an almost philosophical crisis.[48] He is thinking in colossal terms, as if what is threatening is the undoing of the world as he knows it: "Is this nothing? / Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing…If this be nothing."[49] And, in the brief exchanges with Mamillius, all awareness of this present crisis is on the side of the father. Naturally, that is, Mamillius is unsuspecting. He has no sense for what Leontes has apparently just learned, no sense for what is about to transpire. This is an information asymmetry that mirrors the one that exists between Abraham and Isaac.

Ultimately, however, the parallel that we are tracing of course breaks down. For the point is that, while Abraham keeps God's commandment in a time of crisis, Leontes does not. He diverges from the course set by Abraham. Yet what exactly does this divergence look like in practice? How, concretely, might we say that Leontes turns his back on God? On the one hand, we could cite Lupton and others, and say that he begins to worship "idols," i.e. to believe more in his jealous fantasies than in the innocence of Polixenes' and Hermione's "friendship."[50] There is another way to frame this state of affairs, however. What essentially happens in the first half of the play, namely, is that, when Leontes is faced with a crisis, his reaction is to look for a scapegoat. He tries to solve his problem initially, that is, by having Polixenes killed. And when Polixenes escapes, his attention simply turns to someone else, his wife. As Leontes says to himself in one of the play's most disturbing passages:

> Nor night nor day no rest. […]

[48] Cavell's reading in *Disowning Knowledge* points in this direction, for instance.
[49] 1.2.289-293.
[50] 1.2.108.

…if
The cause were not in being – part o'th'cause,
She, th'adultress; for the harlot King
Is quite beyond mine arm, out of the blank
And level of my brain, plot-proof; but she
I can hook to me – say that she were gone,
Given to the fire, a moiety of my rest
Might come to me again.[51]

Leontes embodies here the state of mind that lends fuel to the hunt for a victim.

And there is a way in which giving into this state of mind is essentially the same thing as, say, not following God's commandment. *The Winter's Tale,* in other words, seems to make a certain sort of equivalence plain to see: we could say that Leontes fails when placed in the same position as Abraham, or we could say that he tries to solve a crisis by looking for a scapegoat. Both of these statements would be true, they would express the same thing. And the equivalence here sheds light, not only on the play, but also on the episode in the Bible. God's tempting of Abraham, for instance, means that there is a crisis in this text too. The question, then, is simply how it will be resolved. Will Abraham resort to the search for a scapegoat? Or will he follow God's commandment - a commandment which, of course, is to "offer [Isaac] for a burnt offering?" The paradoxical nature of this dilemma helps to explain why Isaac is so naturally seen as a figure for Christ. For the idea is evidently that, if you sacrifice Isaac, this is the only form of sacrifice that will actually work against violence. This is the only form of sacrifice that will legitimately solve the crisis, i.e. solve it without doing so at the expense of an arbitrary victim. In other words, it's as if Abraham is participating in a sacrifice, yet only so that the mechanism of sacrifice will be undone. This is a contradiction that Leontes is unable to sustain. If he were able to, then he would endure – not give in to - the apparent impression that perhaps his son isn't his, or that he has to give up his son, i.e. that his friend and wife seem to have deceived him.

[51] 2.3.1-9.

What is the result, finally, of Leontes' failure? Simply put, it is that his story, at least in the first half of the play, becomes a kind of reversal of Abraham's. The one story, that is, is the negative image of the other. Abraham, for instance, is a man of faith, and, at the end of this episode, his son is alive; Leontes, we might say, does not have faith, and, in Act III, his son dies. Similarly, in Genesis 22, the fact that Isaac is saved by the appearance of the ram can be taken as a kind of resurrection – as if there really is a sacrifice, and Isaac's salvation stands for the harmony this act brings about. In *The Winter's Tale*, however, there is no resurrection when it comes to the boy. Perdita is found, and Hermione is seemingly raised from the dead. Yet, this makes it all the more conspicuous that, in Act V, Mamillius never comes back.[52] In anthropological terms, his death, it seems, is a kind of failed attempt at sacrifice. It is perceived as what it is, i.e. a kind of murder,[53] and therefore has no salvific consequences. As the reference to Hermione suggests, there will indeed be a kind of resurrection in the play. Yet we need to go through a detour to get there. Leontes' faith has to be tested again. And, as will be argued in what follows, our faith – the faith of the audience – has to be tested as well.

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The caesura in *The Winter's Tale* that divides the play into two parts is fairly easy to identify: at the beginning of Act IV, the personification of "Time" appears on stage, and tells us that "sixteen years"[54] have passed. If the play can indeed be said to have two halves, however, the reason is not just that time goes by. As we transition from Act III to Act IV, we not only jump over sixteen years, we also shift from one generic mode to another. The tragic atmosphere of Acts I-III dissolves into what would seem to be the serene light of pastoral. What exactly is it

[52] One could say, of course, that the boy reappears, in a sense, as Florizel, Leontes' son-in-law. Yet should this really count as resurrection? The question is broached by Cavell in his reading of the play in *Disowning Knowledge*.
[53] Cavell 196.
[54] 4.1.6.

that separates the one generic mode here from the other? How exactly do we get to pastoral, in other words? A simple answer to this question is that, essentially, what happens is that all signs of social crisis are eliminated. The first half of *The Winter's Tale* is plagued by what Leontes perceives as a catastrophic rivalry between himself and his friend. Generally speaking, however, the pastoral does not know of such rivalries. Before turning back to the play – and to what seems to be its specific commentary on pastoral – it will be helpful to ask briefly just how it is that the pastoral world is so relatively peaceful.

As Paul Alpers has argued, the building block of pastoral is "the representative anecdote of herdsmen and their lives."[55] As the very word "pastoral" suggests, in short, pastoral literature is literature about shepherds.[56] When we assess this fact in light of Girardian anthropology, there is arguably something curious about it. We can almost say, namely, that the inhabitants of pastoral – i.e. men watching over flocks of animals – possess an abundance of ready candidates for sacrifice. If the pastoral world is so characteristically serene, is this because the institution of sacrifice is a well-oiled machine in this world? Does everyone get along, that is, because there is a way for potential conflict to be channeled?[57] What would speak for this, first of all, is that, in the classical examples of pastoral, these musical herdsmen do indeed offer up sacrifices. To cite

[55] Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 26.
[56] I note in passing that this point is debatable. In his *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, Jean Paul has a fascinating discussion of the idyll. He remarks that it is a mistake, the result of a "Verwechslung," to associate this kind of literature merely with "das Hirten-Leben."
[57] The overall claim of this section could be strengthened by focusing on the figure of Perdita. She is obviously a victim of sacrifice in Act III, Leontes orders that she be exposed to the elements. With this in mind, it makes sense that, when we next see her, she lives in a pastoral setting. In other words, the only way for Perdita to survive is for her to end up in a place that needs no human sacrifices. It's as if she is exposed in a place where they have ample candidates for animal sacrifice; it is peaceful here. So, naturally, she can be rescued. This general claim could be expanded upon in a way that would shed light on a wide body of literature. Two texts that are immediately relevant in this context are *Daphnis and Chloe* and *King Oedipus*. In *Daphnis and Chloe*, it is clear that the title heroes survive and live in a pastoral setting thanks to animals: they are both suckled by goats; they live in a world where animals literally save humans from death. *Oedipus*, on the other hand, is like a pastoral play gone terribly wrong. For Oedipus, too, is saved by shepherds. His life begins in the exact same way that Perdita's does. At the beginning of *Oedipus*, however, it is clear that sacrifice has ceased to work. Following these reflections further would seem to lead us to the root of the distinction between tragedy and romance.

just one instance in Theocritus, "I sacrificed two goats to [the Muses] a few days ago," a goatherd remarks. Or, even more strikingly, in Virgil:

> O Meliboeus, a god has given me this ease -
> One who will always be a god to me, whose altar
> I'll steep with the blood of many a tender lamb from my sheep-folds.
> It's by his grace, you see, that my cattle browse and I
> Can play whatever tunes I like on this country reed-pipe.[58]

But it isn't simply the fact that offerings are made. What is more, the general atmosphere indicates that these offerings are effective. Sacrifice *works* here, in other words. To be sure, there is indeed a kind of rivalry that exists in this world. Specifically, the herdsmen vie to outdo each other in song. Characteristic of these poems, however, is that the song contest always remains civil. If one herdsman responds to another like this,

> Lycidas, my friend, all men assert that among herdsmen and reapers you are by far the best of pipers…yet I reckon myself your equal…. Men call *me* the best of singers…

it is still possible for their exchange to end like this,

> I finished my song; and he, with a cheerful laugh as before, Gave me the stick, pledging friendship in the Muses.[59]

The forces that usually lead to conflict have seemingly been exorcised from this world. The result is apparently the serene harmony with which the word "pastoral" is generally associated.

Another way to put this is to say that, in actuality, the serenity of the pastoral world is rather hollow. It's not that the problem of violence has been solved in the pastoral world. It's rather that this problem cannot really be gotten into view. The shepherds in these hills truly are naïve about something, it seems. According to Girard, this naiveté with regard to violence is something that Shakespeare well recognized in pastoral and sought to criticize. *As You Like It* is

[58] Virgil, *The Eclogues and The Georgics*, trans. C. Day Lewis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 3. The passage is from Eclogue I.
[59] Theocritus, *Idylls*, trans. Anthony Verity (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 25-28.

both Shakespeare's most full-blown exercise in pastoral and, as Girard notes, his only play in which mimetic rivalry is nowhere to be found. The reason, in Girard's view, is precisely that Shakespeare is giving his audience a play "as they like it," i.e. a play in which the problematic aspects of human nature can be overlooked. You can watch pastoral, in short, and never realize that mimetic desire exists. "For the avoidance of mimetic rivalry, the most elaborate kinship rules of the Australian aborigines are less effective than pastoral literature." "The pastoral genre gives free rein to our tendency to deny the possibility of acute conflict among close relatives and friends…and an amused Shakespeare discreetly underscores the most outrages features of its self-deception."[60] Against the background of this subtle critique of pastoral, the pastoral elements in Act IV of *The Winter's Tale* appear in a new light.

In *The Winter's Tale*, namely, it seems that Shakespeare allows the illusion of pastoral to rupture. We see here that it's a kind of façade, in other words. This is a pastoral scene that proves unable to conceal the threat of rivalry and social collapse. The seed of discord is that Florizel, the son of Polixenes and heir to the throne, has fallen in love with Perdita, who of course seems to be a mere shepherd's daughter. Florizel has been able to court Perdita by pretending that he too is a shepherd: it is as a "swain" named "Doricles" that he comes to the sheep-shearing feast in Act IV. By this time, however, Polixenes has caught on to his son. And, to keep an eye on him, he also comes disguised to the feast. The result of this situation is predictable. The disguised Polixenes asks Florizel if his father knows about Perdita, i.e. about the "choice" of a future wife he has made.[61] When Florizel answers that his father doesn't need to know, Polixenes removes his disguise, revealing himself as a kind of blocking *senex* figure: "Mark your divorce, / young

[60] René Girard, *A Theater of Envy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), 92-99.
[61] 4.4.413.

sir, / Whom son I dare not call…thou a sceptre's heir, / That thus affects a sheep-hook!"[62] At this point, as Alpers notes, it becomes explicit that we are dealing with "a disruption of pastoral."[63] The festive atmosphere is spoiled; the gathering of would-be shepherds disperses.

We can make an observation here about the overarching structure of the play. In the play's first half, a kind of love triangle – or what Leontes perceives as a love triangle – spirals out of control. The discovery of what seems to be an illicit affair leads to the needless attempt, on Leontes' part, to set things right by looking for a victim. At the beginning of the play's second half now, this basic course of events, albeit in a very different context, is repeated to an extent. Polixenes discovers what, in his eyes, is an illicit affair between his noble son and a "sheep-hook." Once again, a crisis results. And there are even hints in the background – although the tone is far less serious now – of a kind of search for a victim. After King Polixenes storms off the scene in a violent rage, the wandering rogue Autolycus tells the pair of shepherds who raised Perdita that the king is going to make an example of them, is going to punish them publicly:

> Some say [the old shepherd] shall be stoned…Draw our throne into a sheepcote! All deaths are too few, the sharpest too easy.
>
> He has a son, who shall be flayed alive, then 'nointed over with honey, set on the head of a wasps' nest, then stand till he be three-quarters and a dram dead, then recovered again with aqua vitae or some other hot infusion, then, raw as he is, and in the hottest day prognostication proclaims, shall he be set against a brick wall, the sun looking with a southward eye upon him, where he is to behold him with flies blown to death. […] O, that's the case of the shepherd's son – hang him, he'll be made an example.[64]

As the comic tone suggests, this is something of a case of "first time tragedy, second time farce." Yet there is a certain structural echo here. In both the first and second halves of the play, a

[62] 4.4.414-17.
[63] Alpers, 207.
[64] 4.4.774-810.

kingdom is unsettled, is in a state of crisis. In both cases, the king turns into a blind tyrant recklessly threatening his subjects with violence.

Summarizing, it seems that the turn to pastoral in Act IV allows Shakespeare to restart the play, so to speak.[65] It allows him to stage a kind of mock reenactment of the precipitous descent into crisis that characterized Act I. Sixteen years later, we are given what seems to be a clean slate. The curtain opens onto a scene to which the tragic conflict of the play's first half is apparently foreign. As just suggested, however, this is an unusual scene of pastoral. Its calm serenity cannot be maintained. Here, too, the social fabric starts to rend. We saw what happened at this point in Acts I-III. Leontes attempted to solve the crisis in his kingdom by staging a kind of witch hunt. The result was disastrous. How could he have responded to this crisis differently? The pastoral world, it was argued, implicitly depends on sacrifice for *its* peace and harmony. Yet how might we restore peace and harmony without resorting to sacrifice? How else might an apparent crisis be solved? It is largely these questions that the finale of the play seeks to answer. To do so, it has to undergo one more generic shift. While we've already gone from tragedy to pastoral, we might say that, as the play nears its conclusion, we go from pastoral to romance.

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The fact that *The Winter's Tale* draws, perhaps directly, on the *Aethiopica*, or *Ethiopian Story*, of Heliodorus has been well documented.[66] The point in the play at which this becomes incontestable is the beginning of Act V. What happens is that Perdita and Florizel, fleeing the wrath of Polixenes, seek refuge at the court of Leontes in Sicilia. The conclusion to the *Ethiopian Story* is set up narratively in a largely analogous fashion. In the midst of a war, Theagenes and

[65] Alpers suggests as much in his reading: "The pastoralism of Bohemia frees the play" from the tragedy of the previous acts (208-09).
[66] Carol Gesner, *Shakespeare & The Greek Romance: A Study of Origins* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky, 1970). See also Samuel Lee Wolff, *The Greek romances in Elizabethan prose fiction* (New York: Columbia UP, 1912).

Chariclea are delivered as prisoners to Hydaspes, the Ethiopian king, who also happens to be Chariclea's natural father. The two works run parallel from this juncture in various ways. In both cases, the romantic couple must initially lie about their identities; the father beholds the girl before him with a kind of presentiment that she could be his daughter; the father is also a person who, in both cases, has a history of being mistrustful and suspicious – there is reason to be wary when approaching him. There are also certain stylistic resonances. When the truth comes out in Heliodorus, "joy and sorrow combined, tears mingled with laughter"[67]; in Shakespeare, "sorrow wept to take leave of them, for their joy waded in tears."[68] And it goes without saying that the identity of the girl is proven in both stories with reference to a "fardel" or "swathe" that was left with her when she was exposed.

Among the elements in Heliodorus that are also observable in Shakespeare, however, one of them, it seems, is not quite like the others. It also seems to have gone completely unnoticed in the secondary literature – likely because it only comes into view when one approaches the play from a specific angle. In the preceding pages, it was suggested that the phenomenon of sacrifice is germane to the events that unfold in the play's first half. It was suggested, for instance, that these events have a contour roughly similar to that of a Biblical story explicitly about sacrifice. At the play's beginning, we might say in summary, there is a sacrificial crisis. The fact that Polixenes agrees to stay when invited by Hermione is somehow disruptive socially. It throws a wrench into the existing social order, into the way things are done. Figuratively, that is, it's as if the mechanism of sacrifice breaks here, ceases to function. Order cannot be maintained as it was before. The result is that rivalry and violence bubble to the surface. And Leontes, we saw, tries to address this crisis in the way that humans have done from time immemorial: he searches in a

[67] Heliodorus, *An Ethiopian Story*, trans. J. R. Morgan, in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 586
[68] 5.2.45-46.

paranoid frenzy for the guilty party. The reason to come back to this now is that it proves to be of the utmost relevance to Heliodorus. For, with regard to the *Ethiopian Story*, we do not need to develop a nuanced reading in order to show that sacrifice is somehow what the book is about. The fact that the book deals with sacrifice is obvious; it is on the surface of its plot. As will be shown, this helps explain why Shakespeare so heavily draws on Heliodorus; it sheds light on the specific work his references to Heliodorus are performing.

The thematic of sacrifice has a prominent place at both beginning and end of the *Ethiopian Story*; it bookends the *fabula* in a certain way. The story begins, chronologically speaking, with Hydaspes and Persinna, king and queen of Ethiopia. Their marriage is childless for ten years before Persinna finally becomes pregnant with "an heir." There is something peculiar, however, about the conception of this child. "During [her] intimacy" with Hydaspes, Persinna beholds an "image of Andromeda, who was depicted stark naked, for Perseus was in the very act of releasing her from the rocks."[69] The result is that the child born to them, Chariclea, looks like Andromeda, i.e. she has white skin, unlike her parents. Fearing that no one will believe this explanation, and that her husband will brand her an adulteress, Persinna exposes the baby girl – along with certain tokens of recognition, of course – and tells Hydaspes that the child died at birth.

The "image of Andromeda" that Persinna sees is worth dwelling on. What does this image depict? Obviously, a girl with white skin. More crucially, however, what one can also say of the girl in the image is that she is being saved from sacrifice. According to the myth in question, Andromeda's mother – Cassiopeia, queen of Ethiopia - claimed that her daughter was more beautiful than the Nereids, which caused an angry Poseidon to plague Ethiopia with a sea-monster. The only way to appease the god's wrath, it was said, was to offer up Andromeda. At

[69] Heliodorus, 433.

the last moment, Perseus caught sight of this scene, and saved the girl from the rock she was chained to.[70] Evidently, to say that Chariclea takes after, or resembles, Andromeda isn't to say simply that she has white skin. It is to say moreover that she takes after someone who was meant to be sacrificed but wasn't. This is a state of affairs that ultimately emerges into clarity as the *Ethiopian Story* builds to a conclusion. For the question discussed almost interminably at the end of the book is precisely whether or not Chariclea – and/or Theagenes – is to be sacrificed. There is an Ethiopian custom that "the firstfruits of the war" must be offered to the gods "for the nation's safety."[71] And, as noted above, Chariclea and Theagenes are these "firstfruits," i.e. they are presented as prisoners of war to Hydaspes. How might they be saved? Chariclea has no Perseus to rescue her, to be sure. But what she has instead is both her own ingenuity and a meticulously orchestrated recognition scene. Upon telling Hydaspes that she is his daughter, she shows him the swathe that she was originally exposed with; she also gives him a ring that he himself once gave to Persinna; the man who first found her as an abandoned baby tells his story; and her white skin is explained when, upon comparing her to the "image of Andromeda," all are "struck" by "the exactitude of the likeness."[72] Even after all this, Hydaspes is somehow still willing to sacrifice her, if need be. Yet the crowd of Ethiopians on hand urges him to desist from the ritual. When all is said and done, it is concluded that the practice of "human sacrifice" should be abolished.[73] And one figure, the "gymnosophist" Sisimithres, even suggests – though apparently the suggestion is not taken up – that they should "put an end to all animal sacrifice as well and be satisfied with offerings of prayers and incense…."[74]

[70] A version of the myth is told in Book IV of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
[71] Heliodorus, 562.
[72] Heliodorus, 569.
[73] Ibid., 587.
[74] Ibid., 565.

Act V of *The Winter's Tale*, to say it again, presents us with an extended recognition scene that is in many respects similar to the one in Heliodorus. It seems, however, that, unlike in the Greek romance, sacrifice is not really an issue at the end of the play. There is no custom in Leontes' Sicilia that would require someone to be offered up for the nation's safety; it is thus not obvious that the play ends as it does because a sacrificial ritual is overturned. As will be argued in what follows, however, even if this thematic is not on the surface at the end of the play, it is still powerfully present. The debate over sacrifice in Heliodorus, that is, is observable in *The Winter's Tale* too. It's simply that it manifests itself in a somewhat indirect way. More specifically, it only comes into view in light of the fact that *The Winter's Tale* is a play, i.e. that its story unfolds in a theatrical setting. To put this a bit differently, we could say that, in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare turns the audience into one of the *dramatis personae*; he requires the audience to participate in the drama. And the actions of the audience, if we could call them that, prove fundamentally related to the rootedness of theater in a particular kind of ritual.

By way of introducing this reading, we need to turn our attention to the play's most spectacular moment: the concluding statue scene. And we should consider as well the extent to which what happens in this scene is a repetition of something we've already seen earlier. When Hermione, as the supposed statue, begins to move here, it is clearly important to Shakespeare that she performs a specific gesture; for he embeds this gesture within the play's dialogue. As the onlookers Polixenes and Camillo remark:

> POLIXENES: She embraces him [i.e. Leontes]
> CAMILLO: She hangs about his neck - [75]

[75] 5.3.111-12.

The detail is interesting because it resonates with an earlier moment in which a similar gesture is mediated through dialogue. In Act I, Leontes tells Camillo that his wife is "infected." And, in response to Camillo's question as to "who…infect[s] her," he says:

> LEONTES: Why, he that wears her like a medal, hanging
> About his neck.[76]

Regardless of whatever the actors are doing on stage, Leontes sees Hermione embracing Polixenes, "hanging about his neck." And, in the concluding statue scene, we evidently see her doing the same thing with Leontes. To put this more pointedly: the scene we observe at the end is in some sense the same scene that Leontes observed earlier. *We* see now what *he* saw before. And there is another interesting detail that seems to support this claim.

In the statue scene, namely, a woman made of stone turns out to be made of flesh and blood; or a woman who is thought to be dead turns out to be alive. Certain signs suggest that a similar kind of transformation is discernable in the earlier scene as well. When Hermione is referenced for the first time in the play, what is highlighted is the fact that she has been silent. Leontes wonders why she isn't helping him persuade Polixenes to prolong his visit:

> LEONTES: Tongue-tied, our queen? Speak you.
> HERMIONE: I had thought, sir, to have held my peace until
> You had drawn oaths from him not to stay….[77]

Freud, of course, has an idea about what it generally means for someone to be silent or mute in a dream or work of art. "Stummheit ist im Traume eine gebräuchliche Darstellung des Todes."[78] If Leontes sees Hermione suddenly go from silent to speaking here – for she indeed begins talking, and successfully persuades Polixenes – could we say that he sees her suddenly come alive, in a

[76] 1.2.304-305.
[77] 1.2.27-29.
[78] Sigmund Freud, "Das Motiv der Kästchenwahl," in *Der Moses des Michelangelo: Schriften über Kunst und Künstler* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008), 47. The claim that Hermione might in some sense be thought of as dead here is strengthened by the fact that something similar is true at the opening of Euripides' *Alcestis*, a play with which *The Winter's Tale* is clearly in dialogue. As is spoken of Alcestis in the opening scenes, "How can the same person be dead and still see the light?"

sense? Does he witness a sort of transformation? It is notable, for instance, that the issue of speech naturally plays a role in the later statue scene too:

> What you can make her do
> I am content to look on, what to speak
> I am content to hear; for 'tis as easy
> To make her speak as move.[79]
>
> If she pertain to life, let her speak too![80]

The point of these observations is just to reinforce the claim made above. When we see a mute statue come to life and embrace Leontes in Act V, we're seeing something that is not all that different from what Leontes himself saw in Act I.

Yet we know how Leontes reacted to seeing this in Act I. He perceived it as a crime, or as the sign of a crisis in his kingdom. And this of course raises the question: how are *we* going to react to seeing it in Act V? The idea here is that there is something potentially disruptive or unsettling about the statue scene. It is potentially just as unsettling to us as the earlier scene was to Leontes. Paulina, who orchestrates the scene, suggests as much by prefacing the statue's awakening as she does: "those that think it is unlawful business / I am about, let them depart."[81] Leontes is clearly prepared to countenance whatever Paulina has to show. As he responds to her: "Proceed. / No foot shall stir." And, indeed, Leontes and all the other figures on stage welcome Hermione back into life. Yet what about the figures *off* stage? What about the audience? Will they accept the appearance of a woman who apparently died sixteen years ago? Will they heed Leontes' pronouncement that "no foot shall stir"?

A glance back at the *Ethiopian Story* is necessary at this point. For the same sort of question with regard to the audience seems to arise there too. Obviously, it cannot arise there in

[79] 5.3.91-94.
[80] 5.3.113.
[81] 5.3.96-97.

the same way, i.e. a prose narrative has no conventional audience. Nevertheless, the *Ethiopian Story* is imbued with a certain theatrical ethos. This is clear simply from the terminology it makes use of. Reflecting on the manifold trials they have endured, Theagenes can remark: "To wage this campaign against us is heaven's sport, as if our lives were a drama played on stage for its pleasure."[82] Similarly, the narrator can describe two characters reuniting, and then call it explicitly a "recognition scene."[83] Another scene will be labeled by a figure in the story as a "*deus ex machina* [like] in the theater."[84] Over and over again, the analogy is suggested. We are invited to think of what we are reading as if it were a drama that is being performed.

And this tendency seems to go so far that Heliodorus even includes an audience of spectators in the world of the story. The audience in question was actually already referred to above. It is the crowd of Ethiopians that gathers for the book's concluding events. This crowd is initially brought together by a sacrificial rite. "An outbreak of shouting [arose], as incoherent and disorderly as one might expect from so immense and nondescript an assembly…. Hydaspes understood that they were demanding the human sacrifice that was always performed to celebrate victories…."[85] As the crowd stands by, however, what happens is that the final recognition scene takes place, i.e. the people gathered see how Chariclea reveals the swathe and is compared to the image of Andromeda; they see the touching moment when Persinna recognizes her lost daughter, and is reunited with her: "Persinna could contain herself no longer. Suddenly she leapt from her throne, [and] ran to Chariclea…."[86] Though the people arrived there demanding a sacrifice, witnessing these events causes them to have a change of heart:

[82] Heliodorus, 450.
[83] Ibid., 453.
[84] Ibid., 567.
[85] Ibid., 562.
[86] Ibid., 569.

> ...they would not allow Chariclea to take so much as a single step towards the altar, and exclaimed loudly, as with one voice: "Let the girl live!...The gods have preserved her; you must do the same! We are satisfied; the requirements of the law have been met as far as we are concerned…. May the gods forgive this apparent infringement of the law…[87]

When one turns back to *The Winter's Tale* now with this Ethiopian crowd in mind, a fascinating suggestion emerges. This crowd, namely, seems to be in Shakespeare as well. The only thing is that it isn't on the stage. This crowd, in a word, is the audience, i.e. the crowd is "us." *We* are the Ethiopians, let's say, who have arrived to take part in some sort of ritual. This idea sheds light on the play in at least two remarkable ways. First of all, it has to be pointed out that, in the unfolding of events in Heliodorus, the opinion of the crowd is not irrelevant; what the crowd thinks, rather, crucially determines the course that the story takes. For, after the final recognition scene, Hydaspes turns to the crowd, and devotes an entire speech to inquiring as to what exactly its will is:

> My people…as you can see and hear, the gods, beyond all expectation, have shown me to be a father…But so all-surpassing is my devotion to you and the land of my birth that…I am resolved to sacrifice her to the gods for your sake. […] Whether it is the gods' wish to bestow her on me and take her from me in the space of a single instant…I cannot tell…[this is a question] I leave you to ponder. […] [N]ow that this girl is revealed as my daughter, I shall not flinch from offering her up in sacrifice, for it is your will that I should.[88]

The crowd responds as was already quoted above – i.e. "Let the girl live!" – and becomes thereby virtually the most important figure present.

With this example in the background, we might reconsider the lines spoken by Paulina as a preface to the statue's awakening:

> PAULINA: It is required
> You do awake your faith. Then all stand still –
> Or those that think it is unlawful business

[87] Ibid., 571-572.
[88] Ibid., 570-71.

I am about, let them depart.[89]

These lines are directed, of course, at Leontes and the other visitors to Paulina's "chapel."[90] It seems fairly clear, however, that they can also be taken as a nod to the play's audience. In order for the play's recognition scene to achieve its fullest realization, therefore, what we as the audience "think" is evidently of some significance. We need to view this scene, in other words, in a specific way. Namely, we need to view it with "faith," according to Paulina. Faith, it was argued earlier, is precisely what Leontes did not have in Act I. His faith was tested, and it failed. In more concrete terms, he did not have faith that the relationship between his wife and his best friend was innocent. He perceived it, rather, as "unlawful business," we might say. In Act V, however, we are now in Leontes' place to an extent, beholding a scene that is not unlike what he saw before. The implication is that this, too, as Paulina notes, might potentially strike us as "unlawful." In the play's recognition scene, that is, it can potentially appear that a law of some sort is being infringed. Like the crowd in Heliodorus, however, it seems that we have to allow for this apparent infringement. Some sort of activity is necessary on our part in order for the play to proceed in a certain direction.[91]

The second thing that the example of the crowd brings into focus has to do with the ritualistic aspect of theater. The people gathered in Heliodorus are quite simply there to witness a "human sacrifice." With this in mind, it is impossible to ignore the sacrificial elements inherent within the earliest forms of drama. According to Northrop Frye, "anyone accustomed to think archetypally of literature will recognize in tragedy a mimesis of sacrifice…. As a mimesis of

[89] 5.3. 94-97.
[90] 5.3. 86.
[91] Paulina emphasizes this idea that how we respond to Hermione is crucial. As she also says: "Do not shun her / Until you see her die again, for then / You kill her double." In other words, it's not simply that Hermione is going to wake up regardless of how we feel about it. We have to welcome her back into life. We have to see her in a way that will allow her to live again.

ritual, the tragic hero is not really killed or eaten, but the corresponding thing in art still takes place, a vision of death which draws the survivors into a new unity."[92] René Girard, of course, would agree wholeheartedly. As he puts it:

> Upon closer inspection, Aristotle's [*Poetics*] is something of a manual of sacrificial practices [un véritable manuel des sacrifices], for the qualities that make a "good" tragic hero are precisely those required of the sacrificial victim. If the latter is to polarize and purge the emotions of the community, he must at once resemble the members of the community and differ from them […] …a certain degree of weakness, a "tragic flaw" is needed, to neutralize the goodness [of the hero] and permit the audience to tolerate the hero's downfall and death.[93]

To be sure, lest these remarks sound too implicitly critical, it should be pointed out that tragedy, for Girard, represents a great cultural achievement.[94] The point is that, though tragedy is essentially a reenactment of a crisis and its solution, it is *only* this, i.e. it is only a play. No violence, neither to humans nor to animals, ever takes place. In this sense, tragedy represents a certain step beyond sacrifice. Yet it is still sacrificial: like sacrifice, its aim is to replicate a scapegoat's downfall. It is simply able to do this with the non-violent means of theater.

Something that is curious in this connection is the tendency to associate tragedy with mimesis. It is often taken for granted that tragedy is somehow more mimetic than other genres, the idea being that it is somehow more true to nature, or evinces a greater degree of probability. When one considers the plots of tragedies, of course, this idea is rather absurd. It's obviously not the case that *Oedipus the King* somehow depicts a typical day in the life. The play isn't exactly realistic, let's say. But if this is so, then what are the critics from Aristotle onwards talking about? What does it really mean to say that tragedy depicts things as they are or could be?

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[92] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 214-215. It must be noted, however, that Frye rejects any relationship between tragedy and actual sacrifice: "We notice…that playing at sacrifice has nothing to do with any historical descent from sacrificial ritual" (46).
[93] René Girard, *Violence and The Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977), 291.
[94] *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, ed. Michael Hardin (Lancaster PA, JDL Press, 2015), 43. "What is tragedy? Tragedy is acting out a myth without the conclusion, since it is only a story. In other words tragedy tells the story, it reenacts the crisis, but it does away with the actual violent ending. The genius of great culture is all there."

Girard's sense that tragedy is a reenactment of a crisis seems at least worth considering here. It will be recalled that his basic claim about sacrifice is that those participating in it

> are striving to produce a replica [modèle], as faithful as possible in every detail, of a previous crisis that was resolved by means of a spontaneously unanimous victimization.[95]

Or as he also writes, "I wish to draw attention to the essentially mimetic character of sacrifice."[96] If tragedy is indeed related to sacrifice, would it not make sense that it, as well, would have an "essentially mimetic character"? In other words, what would make tragedy mimetic is the extent to which it too is engaged in the production of a "replica" of sorts. With regard to the original crisis and its solution, that is, we might say that tragedy sticks to the program. Aristotle is right, it seems, to say that "tragedy is a mimesis of a serious, complete action."[97] The thing to add is just that, ultimately, there is really only one possible candidate for what this "action" could be.

Let us return now to the words of Paulina, spoken before Hermione's reappearance: "you'll think, / Which I protest against, I am assisted / By wicked powers. […] Or those that think it is unlawful business / I am about, let them depart." What could appear "unlawful" about what Paulina is planning to do? What laws could she seem to be breaking? Is it simply that she will appear to be assisted by witchcraft and black magic? This evidently has something to do with it. More generally, however, it seems that the laws she is about to infringe upon are poetic laws. Or, in light of the above discussion, we might say further that she is about to overstep certain laws pertaining to the performance of ritual. In other words, there is about to be a departure from the typical program. Something is about to happen that will upset the usual sort of "mimesis of an action" that the ritual generally strives for. Mimesis, in the usual sense, will not be achieved. With this idea on the table, for instance, Paulina's reference to the "wicked

[95] *Violence and The Sacred*, 94.
[96] *Violence and the Sacred*, 102,
[97] *Poetics* 49b25.

powers" of witchcraft actually makes good sense. She is suggesting that she is about to do something that could make *her* appear like a potential candidate for victimization, i.e. like a witch. She feels the need to stress that "my spell is lawful."[98] What she is about to do could potentially seem almost evil or monstrous, that is, to the extent that it essentially amounts to upsetting the course of a ritual. If ritual here is a kind of perfectly mimetic reenactment, then Paulina is in some measure about to prevent a ritual from occurring. And her quoted lines would seem to be preparing the audience for this.

The fact that the question of mimesis is indeed crucial at this juncture of the play is something that Shakespeare especially draws our attention to. The introduction of the statue – i.e. a work of art - into the play's recognition scene, most notably, clearly allows him to thematize this question. When report of the statue is first made, what is emphasized is precisely how lifelike it is. The language used to describe it is evocative of a mimetic phenomenon. The statue is said to be

> a piece many years in doing and now newly performed by that rare Italian master Giulio Romano, who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape. He so near to Hermione hath done Hermione that they say one would speak to her and stand in hope of answer.[99]

Shakespeare seems to be winking at us here. There seems to be some sort of joke in these lines. This is suggested, first of all, by the mere fact that a specific Renaissance artist is named. The time in which *The Winter's Tale* is set is wonderfully imprecise, but seems to be a kind of vague pagan past. So how do these people know who Giulio Romano is? More importantly, however, what is perhaps also made fun of is the hyper-realistic aesthetic that the name Giulio Romano is

[98] 5.3.105.
[99] 5.2.93-98.

traditionally associated with.[100] It is not exactly the most flattering compliment to say that an artist is the "ape" of nature. There is rather a fairly audible critique here of the notion that the final measure of a work of art is how mimetically precise it is. And this critique is expanded upon in an amazingly subtle yet breathtaking way when the supposed statue itself appears on stage in the next scene.

To describe what happens in this next scene, we might say that there is an inverse relationship between the mimetic realism of the statue, on the one hand, and the mimetic realism of the play itself, on the other. For the duration of about 60 lines, the statue is virtually becoming more and more lifelike in the eyes of its beholders:

> LEONTES: But yet, Paulina,
> Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing
> So aged as this seems. […]
> PAULINA: So much the more our carver's excellence,
> Which lets go by some sixteen years, and makes her
> As she lived now.
> […]
> PAULINA: I'll draw the curtain.
> My lord's almost so far transported that
> He'll think anon it lives.[101]

When Hermione finally "descend[s]" and "is stone no more," it is as if the apparent dream of an artist who aims simply to "ape" nature is realized. The statue *is* Hermione. Yet, in the moment that this transpires, what happens to the play? In a word, it becomes - if it wasn't already - wildly improbable. Its own claims to mimetic precision, that is, are essentially exploded. For a sort of miracle has just occurred. It is possible to understand this inverse relationship in terms of the critique of mimetic realism. The implied suggestion here, in short, is that, if a work of art were

[100] As Stephen Orgel notes in his edition, Giulio Romano's epitaph is likely why Shakespeare chose this artist. It reads "Jupiter saw sculpted and painted bodies breathe and the houses of mortals made equal to those in heaven through the skill of Giulio Romano." In his reading of the play in *A Theater of Envy*, Girard also suggests that Shakespeare's praise for Romano's realism is meant to be ironic.
[101] 5.3.27-32, 67-69.

genuinely to succeed at representing truth or reality, this work of art would actually strike us as mimetically deficient in some sense. In other words, there is a kind of paradox. A work of art comes into being that actually represents truth. Yet what does it look like? Probably not what we were expecting it to look like. Simply put, it looks like a "winter's tale." It is as if Shakespeare is saying, in a sense, "here, in this statue, I give you a work of art that is true to life. Being true to life, however, actually requires a departure from straightforward imitation." It requires, that is, that the play turn into a romance.[102]

There is perhaps another way to get at this phenomenon. Girard's account of tragedy is largely that the first tragedians walked a kind of tightrope, held a delicate balance. On the one hand, they were presenting a reenactment of an original crisis and its solution. The problem, however, is that, if they succeeded at this too well, they would end up undermining the very myths that tragedies are based on. If they truly rendered how the crisis started and was solved, they would end up showing us an innocent Oedipus, a scapegoat condemned to death arbitrarily. The result is that there are only hints of this in tragedy: the outline of the myth is preserved, however hazy it sometimes becomes.[103] Important for us now are the implications of this fact.

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[102] This claim could be explored further by comparing more closely *The Winter's Tale* to Euripides *Alcestis*. The fact that *The Winter's Tale* is so similar to *Alcestis* could seem to undermine my argument. I think, however, that it actually strengthens it. For the departure from mimesis I am suggesting here does not amount to a complete departure from tragedy. Tragedy, rather, is partially right, we might say. It doesn't need to be undone and revised completely. Additionally, the end of *The Winter's Tale* is actually far more different from *Alcestis* than it may seem at first. The crucial thing to note, in my view, is that, at the end of *Alcestis*, Hercules leaves the stage. In a certain sense, what it means here that Heracles rescues Alcestis is that he replaces her. It's as if she is saved at the last moment because another victim is found. In short, a vestige of sacrifice is discernible in these events. This becomes clear when Admetus asks Heracles to stay, and then he leaves anyways. For this is the scenario at the beginning of *The Winter's Tale*. In Shakespeare, however, Hermione speaks, asks Polixenes to stay, and he accepts – which triggers a crisis. At the end of *Alcestis*, by contrast, the title figure is prohibited from speaking. She would be incapable of asking Heracles to stay. What this signals is that things are back to normal at the end of the play. But this world is still a sacrificial world. The solution at the end of *The Winter's Tale* cannot be explained in the same way. Polixenes is allowed to stay at the end of the play – he doesn't need to leave in order to perform mythological "labors"; and Hermione, unlike Alcestis, has speech. Additionally, Leontes has already proven earlier on in Act V that he welcomes guests – i.e. Florizel, Perdita, Polixenes – in his house. He doesn't need to learn the lesson about xenia that Admetus apparently learns thanks to Heracles.

[103] *Violence and The Sacred*, 74.

Simply put, if a story is genuinely true to life, genuinely relates the action society is founded upon, it seems that it won't really look like a conventional tragedy anymore. In other words, the kind of mimesis that tragedy typically performs actually distorts things somewhat. In order for real mimesis to be achieved, the typical program of tragedy has to be departed from in a certain way. A story has to be told that is a bit different from society's myths. When observing the performance of its myths, society might say to itself "yes, this is how it happened, this is an accurate telling of the story." When observing a performance that is true to life, however, it might say "this is not what happened, this has to be made up." The performance that is true to life is going to test the audience. It is going to present them with something they are perhaps not expecting, something that might cause a part of them to object to what they are seeing.

We arrive at a thought here that seems crucial to both Christianity and Girard's anthropology: the thought that there are in some sense two kinds of mimesis, two kinds of possibilities for it. In a word, there is a good kind and a bad kind. The precise imitation of a model, it seems, can have a dark side – can stand in the service of something other than just straightforward "truth." A certain work that has often been praised for its mimetic realism is surprisingly of interest in this context. It has become common, thanks to Auerbach, to think of Dante as a poet of "real life."[104] In a fascinating essay, however, John Freccero makes some remarkable claims about the specific purpose that Dante's realism is meant to serve. As Freccero notes, most of the examples cited to demonstrate Dante's realism are taken from *Inferno*. This is for good reason, he argues. The mode of representation we perceive as realistic here is rendering a way of seeing that is peculiar to the inhabitants of hell. According to Freccero, *Inferno* is the

[104] *Mimesis*, 189.

realm of what Augustine termed "corporeal vision."[105] The essential point is that, in the eyes of the damned, nothing points beyond itself. Signs are evacuated of all referentiality. They just stand there like mute, dead letters. It's as if things are especially present to us, since they can refer only to themselves. Certainly, this creates a landscape with an element of realism. Yet it's also a hopeless landscape. It's the landscape of hell. Freccero ultimately argues, in this sense, that the "replication of reality is by no means the benign esthetic representation described by Auerbach…."[106] Rather, "mimesis is peculiarly infernal."[107] Taken by itself, such a statement might almost read as a summary of Girard's anthropology. The phenomenon of mimesis has the power to turn human life into hell on earth.

For a reading of *The Winter's Tale*, Freccero's remarks on Dante's *Inferno* are more apt than they may initially seem. It was noted earlier that, according to one commentator, the play contains within itself a retelling of the Harrowing of Hell; and it seems fair to say that, in Acts I-III, Leontes is possessed. A certain detail at the end of the play is also interesting. When Hermione returns to life in the conclusion, Polixenes raises the obvious question: "[let her] make it manifest where she has lived, / Or how stol'n from the dead." [108] To some extent, this question as to the whereabouts of Hermione in the intervening sixteen years is necessarily unanswerable. There is no explaining here: it's a miracle. If she has "stol'n from the dead," however, could we perhaps say that she was in Hades? Obviously, the claim would not be that she was among the sinful. It would rather be that Leontes' infernal glance had somehow robbed her of life, had turned her into a kind of dead letter, into stone. When she returns to life, therefore, it would seem to be because Leontes can look at her differently now. This is a kind of successful Eurydice

[105] John Freccero, "Infernal Irony: The Gates of Hell," in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986), 93.
[106] Ibid., 103.
[107] Ibid., 96.
[108] 5.3.113-114.

story, in other words. But what makes it successful is not exactly a function of, say, "not looking back" (as in the Orpheus and Eurydice myth). It's rather that a mimetic enthrallment is ended. Explicit reference is made, for instance, to the romance, or fairy tale-like, quality of what is unfolding: "That she is living, / Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale."[109] What is the source of this characteristic romance quality? How might it be accounted for as a literary, and/or anthropological, phenomenon? One answer is that what is registering here is the suspension, or disruption, of mimesis. It's as if an unhealthy mimesis were being departed from, as if a reprieve from it were granted. Only this would explain why the quality in question can seem to have quasi-religious overtones. It is no coincidence, that is, that the story is as unrealistic as an "old tale" *and* that it speaks of redemption and forgiveness. There is a relationship between these two things. For the story to end as it does – i.e. with a miracle, with an unhoped for reunion – a certain departure from mimesis is necessary.

But we should return, in concluding, to the notion that there is something potentially unsettling about this ending. Paulina's preface has to be recalled: "It is required / You do awake your faith." Why is this required? Is it just because something is about to happen that is hard to believe? Clearly, this is so. There is, however, a more deep-seated reason. What it means for the play to be so patently miraculous, or non-mimetic, it has been argued, is that it in some sense participates in a departure from ritual. Given what we know of human nature, it only makes sense that any such departure can seem unsettling. In the form of sacrifice, ritual is a force for social cohesion and continuity. Naturally, therefore, any departure from it is going to require a certain amount of faith – faith that the result of this departure will not be social collapse or divine vengeance. The example of the story of Abraham might again be invoked. It seems, in this story, that following God's commandment will bring about certain disaster. Abraham has to have faith,

[109] 5.3.115-117.

therefore, that it won't. Is the faith that we, and Leontes, need at the conclusion of the play not of a related variety? It's as if we're expected to go along with something that doesn't exactly match up with our usual conception of what is lawful. We have to have faith, however, that it takes place according to thoughts and ways that are simply higher than our own. As Paulina might put it, we have to have faith in "our carver's excellence."[110]

[110] 5.3.30.

Chapter 4. A World without Romance: Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*

In the preceding discussion of *The Winter's Tale*, reference was made to a number of works that Shakespeare's play resonates with. A work that was not considered there, however, is Goethe's novel of 1809, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. According to Ilse Graham, already the first sentence of Goethe's novel was arguably written with *The Winter's Tale* in mind.[1] A moment during the "sheep-shearing feast" of Act IV has Perdita and Polixenes debate the merits of plant granting. Grafted plants are objectionable in Perdita's view, products more of "art" than of "great creating nature."[2] Polixenes tries in vain to persuade her otherwise: "You see, sweet maid, we marry / A gentler scion to the wildest stock, / And make conceive a bark of baser kind / By bud of nobler race. This is an art / Which does mend nature – change it rather – but / The art itself is nature."[3] In the *Wahlverwandtschaften*, we meet "[ein] reich[er] Baron" who does not have Perdita's scruples: "Eduard hatte in seiner Baumschule die schönste Stunde eines Aprilnachmittags zugebracht, um frisch erhaltene Pfropfreiser auf junge Stämme zu bringen."[4] Unlike Perdita's garden, Eduard's has its fair share of plants that are products of "art." As Graham observes, this detail is programmatic for the entire book. Virtually everything we are about to encounter in this world has an air of artifice about it. And a fundamental question the book poses, according to Graham, is what exactly the status of this artifice is. Would Polixenes' argument be correct even for the world of the novel? Can we say, even here, that "the art itself is nature"?

[1] Ilse Graham, "*Wintermärchen*: Goethes Roman '*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*'", in *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 99 (1982), 41-75.
[2] 4.4.87-88.
[3] 4.4.92-97.
[4] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers, Die Wahlverwandtschaften, Kleine Prosa, Epen*, ed. Waltraud Wiethölter (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), 271.

Though Graham focuses for good reason on the topic of art and nature, there are other things we might point to in order to suggest a relationship between Shakespeare's play and Goethe's novel. One thing is the title of the novel. As Goethe himself notes, the term "Wahlverwandtschaft" is "eine chemische Gleichnisrede."[5] What this means seems to be fairly clear: the scientific discourse of the day borrowed its vocabulary from the realm of human society.[6] This is at least the basic explanation provided by both Goethe and the book's characters. To leave it just at that, however, is in some measure to overlook something. When we say where the scientific term "Wahlverwandtschaft" comes from, namely – or what this term conjures up, what it evokes – there is something else that we might add. This term doesn't only capture an aspect of human social life; it is also a kind of structural moment in countless literary texts. The way it appears in *The Winter's Tale*, for instance, was already referred to in passing in the previous chapter. At the sheep-shearing feast, it will be recalled, the issue is whether or not Florizel's father knows that his "choice" of a bride is Perdita.[7] The use of the word "choice" here may seem rather casual, yet the word appears – along with "election"– in other texts with a remarkable degree of consistency.

To give a general feel for this, a good place to start is with the other so-called romances by Shakespeare. For the element of a choice or election is referred to somewhere in all of them. In *Pericles,* the title hero, upon arriving as a stranger in a foreign land, is victorious in a tournament of knights. The next day, the king's daughter wants to marry him. She informs her

[5] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers, Die Wahlverwandtschaften, Kleine Prosa, Epen*, ed. Waltraud Wiethölter (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), 974. The quotation appears in Goethe's announcement of the book's imminent publication, printed on September 4, 1809 in the "Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände."

[6] For a comprehensive account of the scientific discourse from which the word derives, see Jeremy Adler, *"Eine fast magische Anziehungskraft": Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften und die Chemie seiner* Zeit (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1987).

[7] 4.4.413.

father of "her choice": "she'll wed the stranger knight."[8] In *Cymbeline*, the choice is again made by a king's daughter. Innogen, daughter to the title hero, is supposed to marry, for the sake of Cymbeline's royal line, her base and conniving stepbrother. Yet she secretly marries someone much more worthy of her. The other figures in the play remark about this that she has made "a true election;"[9] as she herself puts it, "I chose an eagle, / And did avoid a puttock."[10] In *The Tempest*, finally, the king's son, Ferdinand, seemingly the sole survivor of the shipwreck, finds himself stranded on an island. The choice is made here when, on the promptings of Prospero and Ariel, Ferdinand encounters Miranda and the two of them fall in love. "I chose her," Ferdinand will ultimately say, "when I could not ask my father / For his advice, nor thought I had one."[11]

To be sure, it is not only in works that we are accustomed to call romances that a certain notion of choice is highlighted. This notion can appear as a theme, rather, whenever the context is generally one of courtship and marriage. A particularly conspicuous example is provided by the various casket scenes in *The Merchant of Venice*. These scenes are the occasion for a veritable meditation on the act of choosing or electing:

> PORTIA: O me! The word 'choose'! I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike.... Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one, nor refuse one?
>
> NERISSA: …the lottery that [your father] hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly but one who you shall rightly love.[12]

Or as we find later on, when Bassanio approaches the caskets:

> PORTIA: I speak too long, but 'tis to peace the time,
> To eke it and to draw it out in length
> To stay you from election.

[8] 2.5.15-22.
[9] 1.2.20.
[10] 1.1.139-140.
[11] 5.1.190-191.
[12] 1.2.19-29.

BASSANIO: Let me choose.
For as I am I live upon the rack.[13]

The fact that literary texts conceive of choice or election in this way seems fundamentally related to the peculiar experiment that Goethe's novel recounts. The "election" Portia speaks of here, in other words, seems in some sense to be the same thing as the "Wahl" of Goethe's title.[14]

In light of the Shakespearean examples just now cited, what can we say about this "election"? At least two things immediately stand out. First of all, it is obvious that the act of choosing here does not pertain to just *anything*. What we're talking about, rather, is the choice of an object of desire. A romantic partner is being a chosen, a husband or wife. Second, something the above examples also begin to hint at is that, without exception, this choice stands in some sort of relationship to a father figure. Speaking just to these examples, we can actually specify the nature of this relationship. What generally happens is that the choice of the romantic pair ends up aligning with the father's will. In *Pericles* and *The Tempest*, though the father outwardly objects to the choice, we are informed through asides that he does this just for show. As King Simonides says: "Well, I do commend her choice / And will no longer have it be delayed. / Soft, here [Pericles] comes. I must dissemble it."[15] Or, similarly, Prospero: "They are both in either's powers. But this swift business / I must uneasy make, lest too light winning / Make the prize light."[16] In *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, the fathers truly do object. But then the unfolding of the play allows their objections to vanish. Circumstances change such that the choice of the

[13] 3.2.22-26.
[14] On the basis of the play's alchemical imagery Elizabeth Sewell reads *All's Well That Ends Well* together with *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. Elizabeth Sewell, "Alchemical-Chemical Love Knots: *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*," in *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Summer 1995), 293-319. Sewell doesn't draw attention to this, yet it is interesting that *All's Well That Ends Well*, like the other Shakespeare plays discussed above, also reflects on the phenomenon of the "choice." One example among others is when Helena asks permission from the king to "choose" herself a husband (2.1.808). It seems worth considering whether or not this presence of the theme of choice is perhaps related to the other links between the two works that Sewell identifies.
[15] 2.5.20-22.
[16] 1.2.448-450.

pair ends up agreeing perfectly with what the fathers would have wanted anyways. It is discovered in *The Winter's Tale*, for instance, that Perdita is not a "sheep-hook" but a princess. In this sense, we might say that the romantic pair was acting in accordance with the father's will all along. It simply takes the course of the play for this to become manifest.

These observations create a helpful context in which to reconsider Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*. They demonstrate, first of all, that the very notion of a "Wahlverwandtschaft" resonates, not only with a scientific, but also with a literary discourse. Beyond this, however, they begin to suggest something that is unique about Goethe's novel. For, when we compare the novel to the examples above, a certain discrepancy comes into view. It has to do with the role of the father figure. In the plays just mentioned, the romantic pair has to take this father figure into account. If the father doesn't agree with the choice that is made, for instance, the pair has a serious problem on its hands. In one way or another, the father's blessing is required. What do we find, however, when we turn to the *Wahlverwandtschaften*? In a word, a rather different state of affairs. For, to begin, the father figures here are either conspicuously absent or deceased. And, in cases where their presence is still faintly felt, the characters are free simply to disregard it. Likely the most striking illustration of this is the exchange between Eduard and Ottilie about the "Miniaturbild" of Ottilie's father. This image causes Eduard "tausend Ängsten," its closeness to Ottilie – apparently because she could fall on it - is "gefährlich" in his eyes. The problem is easily resolved, however, when Ottilie agrees simply to remove the image from her necklace. Eduard's reaction to this gesture makes it clear that much more is at stake than just Ottilie's safety: "Ihm war…als wenn sich eine Scheidewand zwischen ihm und Ottilien niedergelegt hätte."[17] What this episode helps to suggest is that, if the *Wahlverwandtschaften* is at all a romance like the examples mentioned above, then it is a very

[17] Goethe, 323.

peculiar one. For the choice or election of the pair here can simply override the father. It doesn't really matter here what the father thinks about this choice.[18] In a sense, the father is not an element in the equation.

Support for this reading might be gleaned from a brief glance at a work that appeared only six years before *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. Schiller's tragedy *Die Braut von Messina* deals very explicitly with the absence of paternal authority. The event that triggers the start of the drama, that largely conditions what happens in it, is the death of an imposing figure who was at once "Fürst," "Vater," and "Gemahl." We might also say that this figure was a kind of embodiment of the law. When he was alive, we are told, the strictest imaginable order was observed:

> [Als] der Vater noch gefürchtet herrschte,
> Hielt er durch gleicher Strenge furchtbare
> Gerechtigkeit die heftigbrausenden im Zügel,
> Und unter Eines Joches Eisenschwere
> Bog er vereinend ihren starren Sinn.
> […]
> So hemmt' er…mit strengem Machtgebot
> Den rohen Ausbruch ihres wilden Triebs...[19]

As one of his sons describes the former situation:

> …es herrschte…im Lande
> Des Vaters Macht, und beugete gewaltsam
> Der Jugend starren Nacken in das Joch...[20]

This figure's death, however, is apparently the occasion for a welcome change. The observance of law and order can seemingly be relaxed. At the beginning of the play, this relaxation manifests

[18] A similar claim about the novel is made by David E. Wellbery. "Schließlich manifestiert sich als dritte Tendenz in diesen Ritualen die Annullierung der väterlichen Autorität; die gesetzgebende Funktion des Vaters oder des Herrn fällt aus. [...] Die 'Scheidewand' zwischen Eduard und Ottilien, in dieser Geste beseitigt, ist nichts anderes als das väterliche Verbot, das die beiden trennt." David E. Wellbery, "Die Wahlverwandtschaften (1809): Desorganisation symbolischer Ordnungen", in *Goethes Erzählwerk: Interpretationen*, ed. Paul Michael Lützeler und James E. McLeod (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1985), 291-318.
[19] Friedrich Schiller, *Klassische Dramen*, ed. Matthias Luserke-Jaqui (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1996), 296.
[20] Ibid., 316.

itself in two ways. First, when the father was alive, he forced his two sons – who were always at odds for some reason[21] – to keep their distance from each other. Now that the father is gone, the two brothers are able to meet and be reconciled. Second, another thing the father did was order his wife to get rid of their newborn daughter, to throw "die neugeborene…ins Meer."[22] The wife secretly saved the girl, however, giving her to a convent. And, with the father's death, it seems that the girl can now be brought back into the open, welcomed, finally, into the family.

There is a remarkable symmetry between these events and the basic situation at the beginning of Goethe's novel. In a subtle way, these two events that signal a kind of relaxation of the law seem to occur in the novel as well. It is interesting, for example, that, in the play, the order in which these two events take place is significant: it is made explicit that the two brothers have to meet first before the long-lost daughter can be retrieved from the convent. For, in the novel, two comparable events take place in the exact same order. First, Eduard and the Hauptmann are reunited; and second, Ottilie arrives. Let's consider these two events in light of the play. To be sure, it doesn't exactly seem that Eduard and the Hauptmann were previously at odds. Once they come together, however, they form a pair not unlike the brothers in the play. In both cases, reunion begins with a handshake:

> DON CESAR So will ich diese Bruderhand ergreifen –
> *er reicht ihm die Hand*.
> DON MANUEL *ergreift sie lebhaft*[23]
>
> ...unseres Freundes Ankunft behandeln wir billig als ein Fest.... Beide Freunde reichten sich die Hände über den kleinen Tisch.[24]

[21] It is perhaps worth recalling that a similar sort of inexplicable, seemingly innate, animosity occurs in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* too. It determines, namely, the childhood relationship between the "Nachbarskinder."
[22] Schiller, 335.
[23] Schiller, 310.
[24] Goethe, 288.

And there is a strange sense that the two men are almost one person, so that what is happening is clearly much more than just two old friends meeting up. As one of the brothers in Schiller says: "...wir sind jetzt Ein Haupt und Ein Gemüt."[25] And the Hauptmann is once referred to as Eduard's "zweites Ich."[26]

What about the second event in this sequence, the arrival of Ottilie? With the play in mind, a number of things are interesting here. When the long-lost daughter in Schiller – her name is Beatrice – is reunited with her mother, the scene is comparable to what happens when Ottilie greets Charlotte. Consider the two scenes together:

> DIEGO: Was macht sie? Auf die Knie senkt sie sich.
> BEATRICE: O schönes Engelantlitz meiner Mutter!
> ISABELLA: Kind meines Herzens! Komm in meine Arme!
> BEATRICE: Zu deinen Füßen sieh die Schuldige.
> ISABELLA: Ich habe dich wieder! Alles sei vergessen![27]

> Ein Wagen der Ottilien brachte war angefahren. Charlotte ging ihr entgegen; das liebe Kind eilte sich ihr zu nähern, warf sich ihr zu Füßen und umfaßte ihre Knie. Wozu die Demütigung! sagte Charlotte, die einigermaßen verlegen war und sie aufheben wollte.[28]

In the same vein, both Beatrice and Ottilie are recognized as victims of chance or cruel fate. Because of a dream and prophecy, Beatrice's father wanted to have her killed; only her mother saved her. It seems that Charlotte similarly looked after Ottilie:

> …du bedauertest – as Ottilie recalls – mein Schicksal, als eine arme Waise in der Welt geblieben zu sein; du schildertest meine abhängige Lage und wie mißlich es um mich stehen könne, wenn nicht ein besondrer Glücksstern über mich walte.[29]

Certainly, the pension where Ottilie stays is not exactly a convent (as in Schiller).[30] Yet both Beatrice and Ottilie do not belong where they are placed; they are not like the other girls there.

[25] Schiller, 350.
[26] Goethe, 296.
[27] Schiller, 364.
[28] Goethe, 311.
[29] Ibid., 499-500.

Finally, it is curious that, in the father's dream in Schiller – the source of his fear about the girl – Beatrice takes the form of "eine Lilie" (which, when it turns into a flame, destroys his house).[31] Might we begin to hear the name "Ottilie" in this word?

Yet, if the meeting of the brothers and retrieval of the daughter indicate, in the play, a relaxation of the law, what are the consequences of this relaxation? What happens in the play now that the father is out of the picture? Simply put, both brothers fall in love at about the same time; and, though they don't know it, the girl that both of them are in love with is their sister, i.e. Beatrice. Before all of this completely comes to light, the mother asks the brothers who their prospective brides are, and how they chose her: "Laß hören / Was deine Wahl gelenkt."[32] In the present context, the language of their responses is astonishing (I have added the italics):

> *Wahl* meine Mutter?
> Ists *Wahl*, wenn des Gestirnes Macht den Menschen
> Ereilt in der verhängnisvollen Stunde?
> […]
> Das ist der Liebe heilger Götterstrahl
> Der in der Seele schlägt und trifft und zündet,
> Wenn sich *Verwandtes* zum *Verwandten* findet,
> Da ist kein Widerstand und keine Wahl,
> Es löst der Mensch nicht, was der Himmel bindet.[33]

To return to the question just posed, it seems that, when the figure of the strict father leaves the picture, what results is a kind of "Wahlverwandtschaft." A rather peculiar choice is made, that is. Like in the scientific discussion in I.4 of the novel, it is ambiguous if this really even counts as a choice: "…ich würde hier niemals eine Wahl, eher eine Naturnotwendigkeit erblicken...."[34] And

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[30] That said, it is clear that Ottilie nevertheless has some sort of connection to religious life. There is the potential derivation of her name from Saint Odile. William J. Lillyman has also suggested that Ottilie embodies in the novel an "instinctive monasticism." William J. Lillyman, "Monasticism, 'Tableau Vivant,' and Romanticism: Ottilie in Goethe's 'Die Wahlverwandtschaften,'" in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol 81, No. 3 (Jul., 1982), 347-366.
[31] Schiller, 335.
[32] Ibid., 339.
[33] Ibid., 340-341.
[34] Goethe, 304.

in both cases, what this choice would evidently lead to is incest. This is obvious in Schiller: we're dealing with two brothers and a sister. Things are not so straightforward in the novel. Even there, however, Goethe gives each figure in the quartet virtually the same name: Otto.[35] There is a sense that all of these figures are mysteriously related.

Another way to put this is to say that, in Schiller, the result of a choice that disregards the law is essentially tragedy. For what the peculiar "Wahl" made by the brothers precipitates is the family's downfall. Confusion over the brothers having chosen the same girl leads at first to fratricide. And when the surviving brother realizes what has happened he kills himself. On the one hand, we might say that the result of such a "Wahl" in Goethe's novel is the same. *Die Wahlverwandtschaften,* after all, has often been described as a "tragischer Roman."[36] Yet, while the course of the novel is undeniably tragic in some sense, it seems at the same time that such a generic label would need to be qualified. The statement made earlier about the novel as a romance might thus be used in this context too: if the *Wahlverwandtschaften* is a tragedy, then it is a peculiar one. This could be said simply with reference to the "Tragödie" here by Schiller. In the novel, for instance, it's not that the relationships are *literally* incestuous. The sense that these relationships are forbidden is not nearly so black and white. The possibility is entertained until well into Part Two that the original quartet might legitimately be reconfigured. In the same vein, Eduard and the Hauptmann may have their differences at moments. Yet there is no "fratricide" here. There is never even a stray hint that, say, Eduard might be jealous of the Hauptmann. The point here is that, if the novel becomes tragic, this doesn't happen because social discord erupts.

[35] See Heinz Schlaffer, "Namen und Buchstaben in Goethes 'Wahlverwandtschaften,'" in *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften: Kritische Modelle und Diskursanalysen zum Mythos Literatur,* ed. Norbert W. Bolz (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 211-229.
[36] Helmut Hühn, "Ein 'tragischer Roman'? Überlegungen zu einem Romanexperiment," in Goethes "Wahlverwandtschaften": Werk und Forschung, ed. Helmut Hühn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 149-173.

Something is obviously not right about the society in the novel. Yet this fact seems to manifest itself uniquely; the particular way in which things go wrong here is special.

The goal in what follows will be to illustrate what this apparent uniqueness derives from, to suggest what exactly is registering when it seems that the novel is somehow singular. To preview the explanation, the novel gives us a world in which a choice can be made without any consideration for the law of the father. Or as one could also put it – and this will become clearer in the following – a choice can be made without any consideration of religious law. In other words, such a choice actually becomes viable in this world. It has none of the consequences that it usually has. To give an example of what this means, it's almost as if incest were suddenly rendered unproblematic. Or as if adultery were suddenly allowed. It isn't quite clear here why there should be a law prohibiting such things. It isn't quite clear, to put it differently, why human desire should only be channeled in certain socially acceptable ways. For it to some extent seems in the novel that desire can be unchecked without causing any issues. So – the question would go – what is the point of putting checks on it? Why can't it be free? Why can't the "Wahl," the "magische Anziehungskraft"[37] between the pair, be the only thing that matters?

The way this topic will be approached will be by looking not backwards – i.e. to works written before the novel, to potential influences on it – but rather forwards. As the following pages will demonstrate, Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* seems to possess a sort of afterlife in cinema. For there are at least a handful of films that are reminiscent of the book, that unmistakably pick up the book's thematic threads. This in and of itself is of course already noteworthy. Again, however, what the following comparisons will help bring to light is a certain aspect of Goethe's novel that is unique. In the case of the films, we might say that the above question with regard to human desire is answered far more quickly. The films show us more

[37] Goethe, 516.

plainly and clearly why human desire needs to be guided along specific channels. *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, by contrast, is more serious in considering the possibility that desire could truly know no limits. In this sense, the following pages will show that the novel is really far more radical, far more experimental, than the films.

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The first film we might turn our attention to is *Guest in the House* from 1944, starring Anne Baxter and Ralph Bellamy. In this context, it is worth noting that its director, John Brahm, is no stranger to German culture and literature. He was born in Hamburg in 1893, and was active in the Berlin theater scene until he emigrated after the Nazi rise to power.[38] Given that *Guest in the House* is not currently a well-known film, a short description of its plot is especially in order. The action takes place in the home of an American family. It seems that the members of this family have invited a distant relation to come stay with them. The eponymous guest (Anne Baxter) is a young woman named Evelyn who apparently is an orphan of sorts, and who moreover seems strangely weak. The idea is that, by giving Evelyn a room in the house, the family will be helping her along, providing her with a temporary refuge and place to convalesce. When Evelyn arrives, however, what happens is that she stealthily begins to wreak havoc. She falls in love, for instance, with the husband in the house, Douglas Proctor (Ralph Bellamy). And in order to have him for herself, she spreads rumors that cause discord between husband and wife. In a word, she tries to break up their marriage. Eventually, it becomes clear to all parties that Evelyn is a "monster," and the family resolves to send her to a "sanitarium." On the day she is to leave, however, something strange happens - we might say that Evelyn suffers an "accident." A theme in the film, namely, is that Evelyn is terrified of birds. And on the day of her

[38] This information is from a website that seems to have been created by Brahm's daughter (www.sumishta.com/pages/johnbrahm.html). Beyond this, there is very little in the way of secondary literature about Brahm's life and work.

departure, she is told that a bird is loose in the house. The result is that she runs out of the house screaming, heading for a rocky precipice by the sea. The film ends with what seems to be Evelyn's crazed suicide.

What does all of this have to do with the *Wahlverwandtschaften*? We might begin by pointing out just the most obvious similarity. In the film, the presence of a "guest in the house" threatens the integrity of a marriage. Ottilie, meanwhile, is also such a guest: "Sie ward den Männern vorgestellt und gleich mit besonderer Achtung als Gast behandelt."[39] And her presence threatens the same thing. In addition to this, there is a similar sort of atmosphere or mood in both works. One of the few pieces of critical commentary on the film, a short yet memorable review by Jack Shadoian from 1974, is fascinating in this regard. As Shadoian writes:

> *Guest in the House* seems to go its way unmindful of any historical reality whatsoever. One notices first and foremost, the chilling sensuality of Anne Baxter; next, perhaps, cinematographer Lee Garmes' prodigiously inventive lighting. […] But underneath the surface technical finish and affective immediacy…, one can often find bristling ant-nests of social and historical implications. [The film is] ultimately about something that interests and/or bothers the culture [it] grows out of.

He could almost be writing about the *Wahlverwandtschaften*. For the novel, too, it is sometimes noted, can seem deceptively self-enclosed and "unmindful of…historical reality." Let's consider some of Shadoian's other observations:

> *Guest in the House* is a Gothic-inflected[40] example of a common theme: the invasion of a smoothly functioning American family by a dangerous outsider. […] Typical in such films, the pressure of the situation locates problems and releases emotions the family has been hiding from itself. […] In retrospect, the family seems (prior to the invasion), to have been complacent, guilt-ridden, and unnaturally isolated from the instabilities that plague the world outside it. It

[39] Goethe, 312.
[40] It is worth recalling, in light of this description of the film, that the *Wahlverwandtschaften* has been read as an early instantiation of Gothic fiction. See Susan Bernstein, *Housing Problems: Writing and Architecture in Goethe, Walpole, Freud, and Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008).

> deserves to be visited by disaster; the experience jars the family from a spurious and mechanical contentment.[41]

There is more that these two works share, however, than just general themes or moods. Certain details in the film – almost too many to list – mirror the novel with an amazing degree of precision.[42] Let's begin with the episode when Evelyn arrives. Not only is she a guest like Ottilie, she is an emphatically beautiful guest: "you're so beautiful," the little daughter in the family says upon meeting her. The "Schönheit" of Ottilie is similarly highlighted.[43] Further, Evelyn claims that she "never really had [a family]," while Ottilie is without parents in the world. The making of Ottilie's "Anzug" – "Die neuen modischen Gewänder erhöhten ihre Gestalt"[44] – also appears in the film. Shortly after Evelyn arrives, the family designs and sews a dress for her. The way the characters react to her new appearance certainly suggests that the dress "erhöh[t] ihre Gestalt":

[41] Jack Shadoian, "Guest in the House," in *Film & History* Vol. 4, 1 (Feb. 1974), 15-16.
[42] When considering all of the following parallels, it needs to be kept in mind that many of them also occur in the play that the film *Guest in the House* is based on. This fact renders somewhat complicated the question of any straightforward influence of Goethe's novel on the film. The writers of the play, Hagar Wilde and Dale Eunson, were both American, and it simply seems very unlikely, when one reads the play, that they had any notion of Goethe's novel in mind.
[43] Goethe, 312.
[44] Ibid., 313.

Figure 4.1: Evelyn tries on her new dress in *Guest in the House*.

Finally, it is important to note, with the novel in mind, that Evelyn technically isn't the only guest. She arrives at the house with Douglas' brother, "Uncle Dan." When we first see Evelyn, for instance, she and Dan are shown together as a kind of pair of new arrivals:

Figure 4.2: Evelyn and Dan arrive as a pair.

In one basic sense, Uncle Dan seems to occupy the place of the Hauptmann. He is the brother of Douglas, i.e. the husband figure, with whom Evelyn will fall in love. And, while it is initially assumed that Evelyn and Dan will be the romantic pair, Evelyn wants nothing to do with him.

Other parts of the film present details that are even more interesting. There is a scene right after Evelyn's arrival that shows the husband and wife (Ann) of the house together late at night. One could say that it's the film's version of the infamous scene "[in] der Lampendämmerung"[45] between Eduard and Charlotte. For one thing, the pair in the film is also portrayed in a "Lampendämmerung." The lighting and shadows in this scene – it helps to see them in real time – are unforgettable:

Figure 4.3: shadows of husband and wife in *Guest in the House*.

[45] Ibid., 353.

Figure 4.4: husband and wife dancing
at night in *Guest in the House*.

And there is much more to take note of. Let's consider first the scene's curious obsession with feet and footwear. In the novel, of course, Eduard tells Charlotte that he has vowed "heute Abend noch deinen Schuh zu küssen." And indeed:

> Er warf sich vor ihr nieder und sie konnte nicht erwehren, daß er nicht ihren Schuh küßte, und daß, als dieser ihm in der Hand blieb, er den Fuß ergriff und ihn zärtlich an seine Brust drückte.[46]

In the film, then, Douglas first tells Ann to "take your slippers off" (they are dancing); the camera confirms she has done this by showing us the slippers:

[46] Ibid., 352.

Figure 4.5: Ann's slippers

And a few shots later we see Douglas holding Ann's foot and tickling her:

Figure 4.6: Douglas tickling Ann's foot in *Guest in the House*

It is fairly obvious – especially at the point when Ann first takes her slippers off – that the pair's dancing without shoes is a kind of figure for intercourse. What the film shows us, therefore, is just about as sexually explicit as the scene in the novel. Beyond this, it is remarkable that the narrator's words about Charlotte would apply perfectly to Ann as well: "Niemals reizte sie den

Mann, ja seinem Verlangen kam sie kaum entgegen; aber ohne Kälte und abstoßende Strenge glich sie immer einer liebevollen Braut, die selbst vor dem Erlaubten noch innige Scheu trägt."[47] For Ann has to let Douglas talk her into the apparently scandalous idea of "dancing barefoot." Even the most notorious aspect of the scene in the novel – i.e. the married couple imagining Ottilie and the Hauptmann –expresses itself subtly in the film. Just as Douglas and Ann are on the verge of kissing in earnest, they are interrupted by a scream from Evelyn's bedroom. Obviously, this is not the exact same thing we find in Goethe. Yet the point is that Evelyn's presence in the house disturbs and breaks up the married couple's tryst. The sequence of events here largely speaks for itself: instead of kissing his wife, Douglas ends up rushing to Evelyn's bedside. Could we say he is really thinking about her during all of this?

For the sake of brevity, some of the other links between film and novel might be listed a bit more quickly. It cannot escape notice here that, just like Ottilie, Evelyn keeps a "diary." We are shown pages of it (pictured below), and it ends up playing a certain role in the plot.

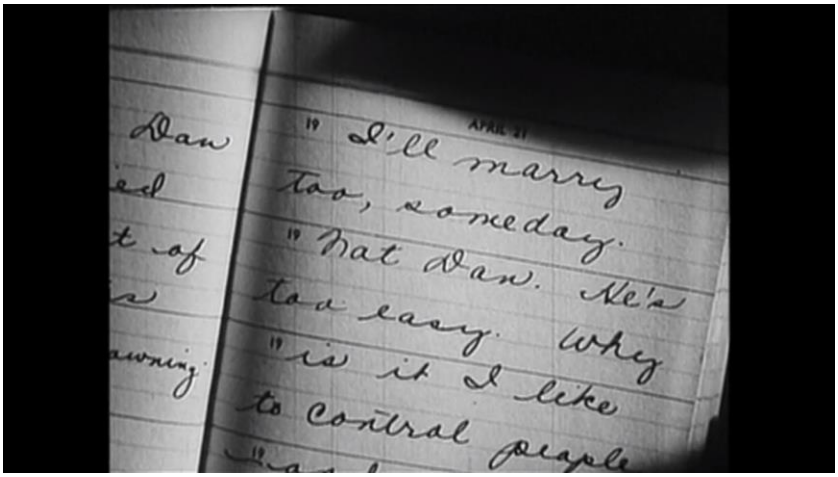

Figure 4.7: Evelyn's diary in *Guest in the House*.

Further, there is something curious about Evelyn's taste in music. She listens obsessively to a record of Liszt's "*Liebestraum"* – the German word is used in the film. Once again, this casts her

[47] Ibid., 352.

as a sort of Ottilie figure. For there are moments in the novel when Ottilie loses herself in a "Liebestraum" of her own. Here she is after Eduard's departure in Part I:

> Sie sprang in den Kahn, und ruderte sich bis mitten in den See: dann zog sie eine Reisebeschreibung hervor, ließ sich von den bewegten Wellen schaukeln, las, träumte sich in die Fremde und immer fand sie dort ihren Freund; seinem Herzen war sie noch immer nahe geblieben, er dem ihrigen.[48]

Of interest as well is the peculiar sense in which Ottilie is so easily turned into an image – when she stars, for instance, as Mary in the *tableau vivant*, or when all the faces painted by the architect in the chapel begin to look like her. A similar sort of phenomenon is associated with Evelyn. After the scene when Evelyn's scream brings Douglas to her bedside, what he ends up doing is drawing a picture of her on a lampshade:

Figure 4.8: Douglas draws Evelyn.

And, later on, the scene with Ottilie and the architect in the chapel is virtually recreated with Evelyn. For Douglas, it seems, has promised to paint a "mural" of St. Cecilia in a local church.

[48] Ibid., 384-385.

When it occurs to him that Evelyn would be the perfect model for this mural, he has her pose for him on the scaffold (compare: "Die Frauen waren zu ihm aufs Gerüst gestiegen"[49]):

Figure 4.9: Douglas paints Evelyn as St. Cecilia

At least one more thing, finally, is too curious to be ignored. The immediate cause of Ottilie's death, it will be recalled, is that she stops eating:

> Der ärtzliche Hausfreund eilt herbei; es scheint ihm nur eine Erschöpfung. Er läßt etwas Kraftbrühe bringen; Ottilie weist sie mit Abscheu weg, ja sie fällt fast in Zuckungen als man die Tasse dem Munde nähert. Er fragt mit Ernst und Hast, wie es ihm der Umstand eingab: was Ottilie heute genossen habe?...Das Mädchen bekennt, Ottilie habe nichts genossen...sie gesteht, daß Ottilie schon lange so gut wie nichts genieße.[50]

With this in mind, let's consider a remark from towards the end of the film. It is the day that Evelyn is to leave for the sanatorium, and she has for some reason not yet left her room. Ann wonders how they might get her to come downstairs: "Maybe if I took a frying pan with some bacon in it and waved in front of the keyhole…." To which Douglas responds sarcastically: "No, she'd probably go on a hunger strike."

[49] Ibid., 405.
[50] Ibid., 521-22.

At this point, we might take something of a step back in order to reflect on all these observations. What do these observations suggest about the two works in question? What is their payoff? On the one hand, they obviously suggest that the two works are similar in certain respects; it almost seems that film and novel must, on some basic level, be about the same thing. More interesting than this, however, is one glaring difference that these observations bring to light. In each remark made above comparing Evelyn to Ottilie, namely, there is always something that doesn't quite fit. Simply put, Evelyn is the embodiment of evil – so much so that, when the film was re-released, it was entitled nothing less than *Satan in Skirts*. At the end of the novel, by contrast, the narrator is left recounting Ottilie's "seltene, schöne, liebenswürdige Tugenden."[51] Something that crystalizes this contrast perfectly is the example of the two girls' diaries. Ottilie's diary – her "Tagebuch" - contains meditations on art, nature, society, the afterlife; a mysterious red thread is said to course through it. What do we find in Evelyn's diary? "I'll marry too someday. Not Dan. He's too easy. Why is it I like to control people?" (This is just one entry among others). Essentially, we find a record of her scheming, of her devious plans to break up the family. If Evelyn and Ottilie can be seen as similar in so many ways, why is Ottilie's character so much deeper and richer? Why is it only Evelyn who turns into a "monster"?

One approach to this question is to consider what motivates the family to invite Evelyn – or Ottilie - in the first place. In the eyes of the married couple in these works, it seems that the initial state of affairs leaves something to be desired. Like Charlotte's "Mooshütte," something about this marriage, about this initial arrangement, is "zu eng."[52] The arrival of a "guest" or two is apparently going to solve the matter. Though the couple claims to be helping others, that is, they are really helping themselves. As Ann puts it (this is from the play the film is based on):

[51] Ibid., 526.
[52] Ibid., 272.

> Sometimes I make bargains with God. I give something and ask him to let me keep something…Doug and I have so much…Why shouldn't we share it? I don't mean money. We spend every cent Doug makes. I mean happiness and fun.[53]

Ann's question here as to "why [they shouldn't] share it?" is an echo of Eduard's: "Was ich im Garten leiste, du im Park, soll das nur für Einsiedler getan sein?"[54] The novel makes it clear that, in raising such questions, Eduard is pursuing his "Wünsche."[55] And the same thing is generally true of the pair in the film. It is telling that, when Douglas draws Evelyn on the lampshade – a pictorial medium which is already very telling – he is actually not so much drawing as "remodeling" her, as he says: he adds things that aren't there, "a smile," "a dimple," "pure body lines;" he depicts her as she "is going to look after a couple of weeks here." The suggestion seems to be that Evelyn is a kind of living fulfillment of Douglas' fantasy. She's a projection, on some level, of what he thinks would ultimately satisfy his desire.

Yet what happens once this object of desire is attained, once Evelyn indeed becomes, as Ann says, a member of the "family?" In a word, the family starts to disintegrate. Rumors are spread; tensions among everyone in the house bubble to the surface;[56] the wife suspects the husband of infidelity; the husband upbraids the wife for her suspicions, etc. We can find in Girard's mimetic theory a simple explanation for this chain of events. Girard's insight is largely that the structure of human desire naturally, almost necessarily, generates conflict. To pursue a transfigured fantasy-object is inevitably to be disappointed, or to come into conflict with a rival who seems to possess this object. When such conflict or discontent breaks out, the common path toward reconciliation is that the feuding parties all vent their anger on a mutual enemy. Something akin to this is quite plainly what happens in the film. The "House of Proctor" is in

[53] Hagar Wilde and Dale Eunson, *Guest in the House* (New York: Samuel French, 1940), 11.
[54] Goethe, 276.
[55] Ibid., 279.
[56] As Jack Shadoian puts it in his review of the film, "the latent frustrations of all start bubbling visibly under the tutelage of Baxter's surreptitious villainy."

shambles. No one in the family understands each other. Eventually, however, they all figure it out: Evelyn is to blame for this. The trouble clearly began, they say, when she arrived.

The claim here, of course, is that Evelyn is a scapegoat. In other words, it's not really that some evil young woman infiltrated this family and almost brought it to ruin. This family, rather, almost brought itself to ruin. Evelyn is simply the screen upon which the family can project its guilt. Her name is already one sign of this. When the family turns on her, it's as if they are all echoing the words of Adam: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree…."[57] It's *her* fault, they say, the scheming temptress is to blame for this mess. The peculiar demise that Evelyn meets also points in this direction. Apparently, she is driven to suicide by a flock of imaginary birds, i.e. by a kind of hallucinated bird attack.[58] It's not difficult to discern traces of collective violence in this event, especially considering the shot that follows upon Evelyn's final scream. It shows us a kind of Tarpeian rock by the sea[59]:

[57] Genesis 3:12.

[58] The end of the film is very clearly related to the end of Hitchcock's *The Birds*. There are shots where Hitchcock has Melanie Daniels recoil in fear before something – i.e. the birds – that we can only hear, something that is not obviously present in reality. It is also clear in the film that there is an attempt to scapegoat Melanie, to blame the apocalyptic events in Bodega Bay on her arrival.

[59] The detail is significant considering the numerous examples of cultures designating a cliff or precipice as a place of sacrifice. As Girard notes: "Just like stoning, falling from a high cliff has collective, ritual, and penal connotations. This was a widespread practice among both ancient and primitive societies…. Rome has its Tarpeian rock. In the Greek universe the ritual *Pharmakos* was periodically put to death in the same way, especially in Marseille. The unfortunate man was made to throw himself into the sea from such a height that death was inevitable." *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 176.

Figure 4.10: The cliff where Evelyn meets her end in *Guest in the House*

Significant as well is how quickly the relationship between Douglas and Ann becomes all smiles once they are both convinced that Evelyn has to go. They suddenly talk with each other as if they are "honeymooners." It's clear that what drives them back together is Evelyn's imminent departure. They have exorcised the strain in their relationship by blaming everything that happened on her.

The reason any of this is worth mentioning is that it creates a unique perspective from which to view the case of Ottilie. In some sense, we might say that what happens in the film is what typically happens: in such a scenario, this will typically be the result. If this is so, however, then it becomes all the more remarkable that this is *not* what happens in the novel. Like Douglas and Ann, Eduard and Charlotte have allowed a "Gast" into their home. Certainly, things go downhill after this. Yet this descent manifests itself rather peculiarly. For one thing, we don't see quite the same build-up of antagonisms that we see in the film. With Evelyn in the house, everyone is at odds with each other. The atmosphere towards the end of the novel is interesting, therefore: "Jedes unerfreuliche unbequeme Gefühl der mittleren Zeit war ausgelöscht. Keines

trug mehr dem andern etwas nach; jede Art von Bitterkeit war verschwunden."[60] These people are not exactly looking for a victim whose death would put things right again. To be sure, we do see a sort of victim in the form of the child, Otto - Eduard and the Hauptmann, at least, see him as an "Opfer" that is "nötig zu ihrem allseitigen Glück."[61] Yet sacrifice here, if that is what it is, would be functioning very differently from how it does in the film. It would be working for the happiness, the "Glück," of the "Wahlverwandtschaften," not to reaffirm the initial marital arrangement. Ottilie here, in short, is not the "Opfer" that they think is necessary. No one is saying that she is a "monster."

Certainly, it has to be said that Ottilie does indeed become something like the novel's tragic victim.[62] What's simply remarkable, in light of the film, is that, though she might become a victim, she never exactly becomes a scapegoat. She never becomes a mere token that might absorb the guilt of the other figures. This is notable since the other characters seemingly would indeed have things to accuse her of. She is largely responsible for Otto's death; and, in her own words, she is "befangen…in [einem] Verbrechen," has committed certain "Vergehen."[63] No one else, however – neither the figures in the book, nor the narrator – seems to echo her words. On the one hand, there is indeed the attempt to get rid of Ottilie, in a sense – a solution that Mittler is especially keen on: "[er] überredete Charlotten: es sei das beste, Ottilien gleich nach der Pension to schicken."[64] Yet the idea for her to go back to the pension is of course Ottilie's own. And, moreover, this plan doesn't work: upon seeing Eduard, Ottilie returns the day after she left.

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[60] Goethe, 517.
[61] Ibid., 498-99.
[62] Benjamin's essay points in this direction: "Also nicht allein als 'Opfer des Geschicks' fällt Ottilie – geschweige, daß sie wahrhaft selbst 'sich opfert' – sondern unerbittlicher, genauer, als das Opfer zur Entsühung der Schuldigen. Die Sühne nämlich ist im Sinne der mythischen Welt, die der Dichter beschwört, seit jeher der Tod der Unschuldigen. Daher stirbt Ottilie, wundertätige Gebeine hinterlassend, trotz ihres Freitods als Märtyrerin." Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 78.
[63] Goethe, 500-01.
[64] Ibid., 507. Mittler seems to be mirrored in the film by the figure of Hackett, a "friend of the family." He is the first one to arrive at the idea that Evelyn has to go.

Unlike in the film, it's as if the forces that would expel Ottilie from the estate are somehow not present, or not strong enough. Needless to say, there's no mob bearing down on her, framing her as some sort of evil intruder. Generally indicative of this state of affairs, for instance, is that Ottilie is cast in the *tableau vivant*, not as Eve – i.e. like Evelyn - but as Mary. Though she might potentially seem guilty of something, the book wants, not to accuse, but to vindicate her.

This leads to an ending that feels very different from the ending of the film. For, in the film, when Evelyn is branded as guilty, the effect of this is that the marriage between Douglas and Ann is – who knows for how long? – given new life. Evelyn's guilt means that the experiment of inviting her was a misguided venture. The pair realizes that they should be content with their married life as it is. If Evelyn was the embodiment of a fantasy, then her guilt suggests that this fantasy has to be scrapped. When we last see Douglas and Ann, they are walking away from Evelyn holding hands. In the novel, however, none of this happens. Ottilie dies, but the result of this is certainly not that the marriage between Eduard and Charlotte is renewed. On the contrary, Eduard remains faithful - if that word at all makes sense in this context – to Ottilie to the very end: "Ich muß ihr nach, auf diesem Wege nach…."[65] In short, there's never any retrograde motion here that would push back, as it were, in the direction of marriage. There's no point where the characters have seemingly learned their lesson, where they might walk off hand in hand, purged of their adulterous passions and "Liebesträume." Unlike in the film, it's as if the floodgates have been opened in the novel, and there's simply no turning back.

In the eyes of one of its first readers, the end of Goethe's novel amounted to a "Himmelfahrt der bösen Lust."[66] From the perspective of the above observations, this

[65] Goethe, 528.
[66] A letter from Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi to Friedrich Köppen, January 12, 1810. See Heinz Härtl, *"Die Wahlverwandtschaften": eine Dokumentation der Wirkung von Goethes Roman, 1808-1832* (Weinheim: Acta Humaniora, 1983), 113.

paradoxical epithet actually makes a good deal of sense. There is, on the one hand, what would seem to be a pronounced Christian streak to the novel, to the extent that Ottilie is never scapegoated. She dies as a victim of sorts, yet the novel clearly doesn't just say good riddance to her. She's not expected, in the way that Evelyn is, to bear the guilt of the community. At the same time, however, because she is never condemned, Eduard's love for her is unchanging. The passion or attraction that draws him to her is never checked. For lack of a better way to put it, this is a strange mixture of circumstances. The novel doesn't want to resort to facile scapegoating – the comparison with the film makes this especially clear. Yet it also has no interest in bringing the married couple back together. "Die Liebenden" who should awake together here - "zusammen erwachen" - are Eduard and Ottilie.[67] How is this mixture possible? How does the novel vindicate a victim, on the one hand, yet practically immortalize adultery, on the other? One way to get a handle on this question is to change our angle on the *Wahlverwandtschaften* yet one more time. Another film that will allow us to do this, as the following pages will show, is Hitchcock's 1952 *I Confess*.

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Unlike in the case of *Guest in the House,* it is not immediately obvious how the plot of *I Confess* would lend itself to a reading of Goethe's novel. Essentially, the film tells the story of a Catholic priest, Father Michael Logan (Montgomery Clift), who is wrongfully suspected of murder. What happens is that, shortly after committing this murder in a burglary gone wrong, the real culprit – it is a German refugee named Otto Keller (played by German actor O.E. Hasse[68]) – confesses to Father Logan what he has done. And, by an amazing coincidence, the murder victim

[67] Goethe, 529.
[68] It has to be noted that what O.E. stands for is Otto Eduard. Thus, in addition to all of the other parallels between the novel and the film that I will point out, the two names of this actor are also the two names of the Eduard figure in the novel. This seems to be just a coincidence. O.E. Hasse's autobiography, at least, says nothing about *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*.

– a certain Mr. Villette – is someone who Father Logan would conceivably have a motive to kill. Years prior to this, Mr. Villette became aware that Logan, before he was a priest, spent a night with a married woman, Ruth (again the actress is Anne Baxter![69]). Since then, Villette had been threatening to blackmail this woman. In a word, there are circumstances that seem to connect Father Logan to the victim. And though Father Logan knows who the real culprit is, he cannot divulge this information, since he obtained it in the confessional. As a result, Logan is tried for murder, and is nearly attacked by a mob when he is acquitted. Things only get cleared up when Otto Keller's wife, Alma (Dolly Haas), mysteriously asks Logan for forgiveness, thus prompting the police inspector (Karl Malden) to realize that he has been pursuing the wrong man.

How is any of this related to the novel? The answer to this question lies in the nature of the relationship between Father Logan and Ruth, the married woman. We learn about this relationship in the form of a flashback sequence that Ruth narrates - in effect, she is telling a story. Ruth and Father Logan, it seems, "grew up together." They start out in the story as a young couple in love. When war breaks out, however, Michael - i.e. Father Logan - volunteers for the army, leaves for Europe, and eventually stops responding to Ruth's letters. With Michael away and apparently uninterested, Ruth ends up marrying someone else. Yet, when Michael returns home from the war, it is clear that Ruth is still in love with him. One day, the two of them are out alone in the country and get caught in a storm. They run to a nearby house, seeking shelter. When it is locked, however, they flee instead to what is referred to as a "summerhouse." Here, they spend the night together. In the morning, the owner of the property they are on – it is Mr. Villette, a "lawyer" – confronts them. Villette happens to know that Ruth is already married. And he insinuates that the couple has just committed adultery. It is not long after this, Ruth relates,

[69] There is clearly a logic to Hollywood's casting here. Anne Baxter is essentially playing the same figure in a number of different films. Another one to add to the two discussed here is *All About Eve*, in which she plays Eve Harrington.

that Michael joins the priesthood. Villette, on the other hand, threatens to use his knowledge of Ruth's affair to blackmail her. We know, however, from the beginning of the film that Villette is now dead.

The virtue of dwelling on Ruth's story is that it shifts our attention to an element of the *Wahlverwandtschaften* that was not mentioned in the preceding pages, namely, to the novella in Part II, "Die wunderlichen Nachbarskinder." Generally speaking, Ruth's story and the novella have something like the same basic shape. They both begin with a boy and girl who, in Ruth's words, "grew up together;" they are both about "Nachbarskinder." In both stories, the boy leaves in order to become a solider. When he is gone, the girl in each case seems to find a proper "Bräutigam." As soon as the boy returns, however, the girl is conflicted; she has feelings for the boy, it turns out. At this point, there is a crisis having something to do with water. In the film, we have a rainstorm; in the novella, there is the boating party, when the girl jumps into the river and the boy after her. Both of these crises, finally, have the effect of bringing the pair together (though the moral implications of this union are very different in the two stories - more about this below). Additionally, the two stories have something of a similar place in the structure of the works in which they are embedded. They are told a little over half way, or about three quarters of the way, through the whole. And, in a certain sense, they are both flashbacks. They depict an episode from a character's past that sheds some kind of light on the events of the present.

All of these observations, however, are made from a sort of bird's eye view on the stories. Other even more striking things present themselves when one zooms in and attends to the details. In the novel, for instance, we are told that the boy in the novella is actually the Hauptmann: "Diese Begebenheit hatte sich mit dem Hauptmann und einer Nachbarin wirklich

zugetragen."[70] It is remarkable, therefore, that, in Ruth's flashback, Michael Logan is essentially portrayed as a Hauptmann too. Hitchcock is very deliberate, it seems, in having Michael wear a captain's hat in this sequence:

Figure 4.11: Michael and Ruth caught in the rainstorm in *I Confess*.

Ostensibly, of course, Michael puts the hat on because it is raining. To think that this is a rock-bottom explanation, however, is to underestimate Hitchcock. Michael wears a captain's hat here, not because it is practical – and how practical would it be in a rainstorm, really? - but because a certain narrative logic calls for it.[71]

[70] 479.
[71] This claim is supported by numerous other captains, and/or captain's hats, in Hitchcock. We find them, for example, in *Suspicion*, *The Trouble with Harry*, and *Family Plot*. The figure of the captain, in Hitchcock, and more generally in literature, seems to possess a peculiar significance, or a consistent sort of meaning.

Also remarkable are the two types of houses that we see in the Hitchcock sequence. To reiterate, Michael and Ruth run first to a little house in the country:

Figure 4.12: Michael and Ruth fleeing to a house in the country in *I Confess*

Figure 4.13: Michael and Ruth locked out of the house

And, when it proves to be "closed" (see above image), they find shelter instead in a far less substantial structure that Ruth calls a "summerhouse:"

Figure 4.14: the "summerhouse" of *I Confess*

In a certain sense, both of these buildings appear in the *Wahlverwandtschaften* too. We might say that the house in the country is in the novella. It is the "einsame Wohnung" where the boy takes the girl after pulling her from the river.[72] (The difference in how the two couples are received at this house is of course crucial. In Goethe, the boy and girl are welcomed inside; in Hitchcock, the house is shut – more about this below). The "summerhouse" here may not be in the novella. But it is most definitely in the novel's main storyline. The figures in the novel spend a good deal of their time planning the construction of a "Lustgebäude" to be used "in der guten Jahrszeit."[73]

[72] Goethe, 477.
[73] Ibid., 326.

Another thing to focus on is the peculiar antagonism between the boy and the girl that exists in the novella. In the present context, one passage in particular deserves to be singled out. It concerns the girl's memory of how she experienced her childhood fights with the boy:

> Auch kam es ihr in der Erinnerung nicht anders vor, als daß sie ihn immer geliebt habe. Sie lächelte über jenes feindliche Suchen mit den Waffen in der Hand; sie wollte sich des angenehmsten Gefühls erinnern, als er sie entwaffnete.[74]

The passage is curious, in light of the film, for a number of reasons. For one thing, there is a moment in the film when Ruth and Michael are quite similarly depicted "mit den Waffen in der Hand." It comes at the point shortly after Michael has joined the army. What literally happens is that Michael, dressed as a soldier, hands his helmet and rifle to Ruth in order to kiss her. He then takes these instruments of war back from her, while she affectionately puts her hands on him:

Figure 4.15: Michael and Ruth in *I Confess*, kissing while holding instruments of war

[74] Ibid., 474.

Figure 4.15 (continued)

Beyond the fact that the pair is passing "Waffen" back and forth, it is interesting to recall that this is of course Ruth's memory that we are seeing, i.e. she is telling the story. For the above passage in the novel, too, takes place in the "Erinnerung" of the girl. Further, in both cases, a certain kind of idealization, or revision, of the past occurs. In the novella, the girl remembers her sparring with the boy as if she actually enjoyed it. In the film, similarly, just based on this pantomime that the pair performs, it would not appear that they get along very well: when the boy wants to kiss the girl, she literally holds up weapons; effectively, boy and girl never really kiss each other at the same time. The weapons in their hands notwithstanding, however, the general picture that Ruth paints is simply that she was hopelessly in love back then. Finally, an apparent discrepancy between the two stories is worth addressing. In the novella, of course, boy and girl start out "hating" each other: they are "hassend, ja bösartig, indem sie sich auf einander bezogen."[75] This aspect of the relationship technically seems absent in the film. It turns out, however, that it just manifests itself there more indirectly. At the point when Michael joins the army, Ruth tells us in her narration: "I hated him for that." Just as in the novella, an element of "Haß" influences the course of this relationship.

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When we step back again, and consider these two stories somewhat more broadly, at least one more similarity between them becomes apparent. While both stories are about a young couple in love, namely, in each case, the couple is not ultimately allowed to stay together. In each case, that is, the romance is thwarted; something ends up preventing it from turning into a marriage, let's say. When it comes to the film, this is obvious. We see quite plainly that the two protagonists in Ruth's flashback are not married. Concerning the novella, this claim may require a bit of explaining. For, judging by the novella's final sentences, it is at least thinkable that this

[75] Goethe, 471.

romance is actually not thwarted: "Gebt uns Euren Segen!...Euren Segen! ertönte es zum drittenmal, und wer hätte den versagen können."[76] Here too, however, something must get in the way. For, as was noted before, the boy in the novella is said to be the Hauptmann; and, when we see the Hauptmann in the present, he is of course not married. Admittedly, it is not clear what exactly went wrong. Did the parents of the couple refuse to give their "Segen"? Or could it even be – as a few hints perhaps suggest – that the girl in the story drowned, i.e. that the Hauptmann failed to save her?[77] The narrator is oddly reticent about such details. In any event, it seems that the union of the "Nachbarskinder" is only short-lived.

Even if the immediate circumstances are not clear here, however, might we still venture an answer as to why this relationship failed? In other words, is it possible that there are things to consider here beyond just immediate circumstances? One thought might be that the relationship does not last due to the *kind* of relationship it is. In the case of Ruth's story in *I Confess*, for instance, such an explanation is readily available. Michael and Ruth are not split up because one of them dies, obviously i.e. because of some chance occurrence. They are split up because their relationship would be adulterous, we might say. In short, there is something about this relationship itself that is questionable. Could we perhaps approach the situation of the pair in the novella similarly? Regarding the novella, however, what exactly is so questionable there? Neither one of these "Nachbarskinder" is married yet. Their relationship would not be adulterous. Moreover, it was even the original hope of the parents of these children to see them one day as husband and wife.[78] Clearly, if there is any sense in which this relationship itself is

[76] Ibid., 478.
[77] This is the suggestion put forth by Friedrich Kittler: "Die Novellenhandlung hat stattgefunden und zwar als einziges Drama im Leben des Hauptmanns. Die Frau, die ihn liebte, ist ins Wasser gesprungen und nur nicht gerettet worden." Friedrich A. Kittler, "Ottilie Hauptmann", in *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften: Kritische Modelle und Diskursanalysen zum Mythos Literatur*, ed. Norbert W. Bolz (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 268.
[78] Goethe, 471.

somehow problematic, it is difficult to specify what the problem could be. It is worth pursuing this question, however. For, as the following pages will show, an answer to it that gradually suggests itself is of wide-ranging significance for a reading of the novel as a whole.

Before turning to the novella, it will be helpful to say a little bit more about the flashback in the film. It was just noted that the love story recounted in this flashback comes to an end because Ruth is already married. To a certain extent, however, to claim that Ruth's marriage is the obstacle is merely to retell the story. That is, it's not a real explanation; it's a bit tautological. Is there not something more fundamental that we could point to? One thing that stands out in this regard was already referred to earlier. It is interesting, namely, that, in the pantomime with the rifle and helmet pictured above, Hitchcock in some sense has Michael and Ruth mirror each other. Ruth holds these "Waffen," and then Michael holds them. The effect of mirroring is strengthened by the fact that we see the pair directly from the side, with Ruth occupying the left side of the shot and Michael the right. What does this pantomime suggest, what does it capture about Michael and Ruth's relationship? Considering that it has them mirror each other, we might say that it portrays their relationship as essentially mimetic. The basis of this relationship, that is, is mimetic desire. Not only the element of mirroring suggests this, for instance, but also the mere fact that they are holding weapons in the first place. For it is the nature of such a relationship to be extremely volatile. Mimetic desire is fueled by illusions and idealizations. Inevitably, such illusions encounter resistance, are disappointed. The natural result, in a love story, might be a kind of symmetrical oscillation between head-over-heels attraction and violent rejection. In a word, it might be two people exchanging kisses while holding onto instruments of war.

The idea that mimetic desire plays a role in the love story of the flashback casts a remarkable light on the rest of the film. This becomes clear when one considers the full weight of

what it means to desire mimetically. In Girard's thinking, mimetic desire quite explicitly acquires a theological significance. It isn't simply a way of accounting for love triangles. At times, rather, one could almost say that it is synonymous with sin. It is to covet the neighbor's possessions. Or, as one might also put it, it is the tendency to join in with the crowd. As was mentioned in an earlier chapter, we see this tendency at work, according to Girard, in the episode of Peter's Denial. To deny Christ here is to give in to the force of mimesis.[79] What this example powerfully demonstrates is that to desire mimetically can essentially mean to contribute to scapegoating. In other words, it is to participate in a social order that implicitly rests upon violence. Or, to express this in a theological register, it is to bear responsibility for the death of Christ. This way of putting it may sound a bit extreme. Yet it is strikingly justified by a certain aspect of the scene in which Father Logan is on trial.

Technically, of course, Father Logan is being tried for the murder of Mr. Villette. The images that Hitchcock shows us, however, can intimate that what's at issue here is actually a somewhat different crime. Twice during the courtroom scene, Father Logan is pictured alongside an enormous crucifix on the wall behind him:

[79] René Girard, "Peter's Denial and the Question of Mimesis", *Notre Dame English Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Summer, 1982), 177-189.

Figure 4.16: Father Logan on trial in *I Confess*

To be sure, this has to mean on some level that he is a Christ figure, i.e. that he is being unjustly persecuted. To say that this is *all* it means, however, doesn't account for the complexity and ambiguity of the film. Christ on the cross, that is, is an image of the crime that Father Logan truly did commit. He may not be guilty of any specific murders, in other words, but he *is* guilty of original sin.[80]

A brief glance back to Ruth's story helps to drive this point home. The property on which Michael and Ruth spend the night together in this story is referred to by Ruth as a "garden." Considering that Mr. Villette owns this "garden" – and also that he is said to be a "lawyer" – the allegory is not hard to discern. Simply put, Villette is a kind of figure for the Lord; when he walks down through the "garden" and approaches Michael and Ruth, he is like God addressing

[80] The chapter on *I Confess* by Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol ultimately supports this understanding of the crucifix images in the courtroom: "…the just man assumes another man's guilt to the very extent that he himself is innocent. But perhaps this innocence is only superficial. […] [Father Logan's] sin, if sin there is, is not that he has been a man before become a man of God, but, on the contrary, to have given way to the intimidation, the blackmail, of wanting to redeem by heroic and paradoxical conduct what need no longer be redeemed: to give way to the temptation of martyrdom. We find ourselves confronted not only with an allegory of the Fall but with a tragic situation worthy of that adjective and having as its mainspring…the traps of sacrifice and sainthood." Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*, trans. Stanley Hochman (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979), 116.

Adam and Eve after The Fall. (Again, therefore, just like in *Guest in the House*, Anne Baxter is in the role of Eve.[81]) With this allegory in view, Michael's reaction to Villette is telling. He gets violent with him, knocking him to the ground:

Figure 4.17: Michael strikes Mr. Villette in *I Confess*

In this moment, two things become especially clear. First, we see that Michael and Ruth's relationship is mimetic, to the extent that it immediately leads to rivalry. As soon as they are together, a triangle spontaneously develops. Second, we see the theological implications of this. Michael ends up in a fight, not with Ruth's husband, but, in some sense, with God Himself. His desire causes him to show violence to the Lord.

The stage is now set for a closer consideration of the novella. Given that the novella and the story have a similar shape, one might think that the above comments would apply to the novella too, i.e. that the relationship between boy and girl in the novella would also amount to a kind of mimetic entanglement. It is amazing to note, therefore, that this is emphatically not the case. Admittedly, at the beginning of the novella, there is indeed a kind of trace of mimetic rivalry. According to the novella's narrator, the reason that the "Nachbarskinder" did not

[81] Another film in which Anne Baxter plays Eve is, of course, *All About Eve*.

originally get along was perhaps that "sie waren einander zu ähnlich."[82] Though this relationship may start out as mimetically determined, however, it doesn't seem that it remains that way. What defines the course of the story, rather, is precisely that the pair is able to disrupt mimesis, to break free from its pull.

We can see this, first of all, in a few places where the novella markedly diverges from the film. When Michael and Ruth get caught in the rainstorm, the house in the country does not open its doors to them. They are forced to seek shelter, it will be recalled, in the "summerhouse." The fact that this is a building designed solely for the purpose of pleasure seems to be a commentary on what it is that brings them together. Evidently, however, the boy and girl in the novella are brought together by something a bit different. For, in their case, the "einsame Wohnung" that the boy spots in the distance actually proves to be open. And, what is more, its inhabitants, who assist the boy and girl in their plight, are "ein junges Ehepaar." Summarizing this state of affairs, we might say that the pair in the novella finds refuge, not in a meagre "summerhouse" – a structure that one is clearly not meant to live in – but rather in the shelter of marriage, so to speak. Their relationship is of a sort that naturally leads them to marriage.

In the same vein, it seems that, like the story in the film, this scene in the novella also has a certain Edenic quality. To be sure, none of this is said to take place in a "garden." Yet who is this "junges Ehepaar" exactly? Is this the home of Adam and Eve that the boy and girl have arrived at? If so, however, then it is clear that, unlike in the film, Adam and Eve here are in some sense unfallen. It is telling, for instance, that the girl's body [*Körper*] is at one point described as "nackt." And when she finally opens her eyes, and recognizes the "Zustand" she is in, we read that "[s]ie konnte sich vor ihrem Liebling, ihrem Retter nicht schämen."[83] It almost seems that

[82] Goethe, 471.
[83] Goethe, 477.

The Fall has been reversed. The couple experiences a kind of reprieve from shame. The point here, generally, would be that the "Ehepaar" is somehow initiating the couple into a kind of prelapsarian state.[84] In any case, Goethe's language indicates that a remarkable transformation is occurring indeed. The "Hochzeitkleid" that the "Ehepaar" gives to both boy and girl is said to be enough "um ein Paar von Kopf zu Fuß und von innen heraus zu bekleiden."[85]

In addition to this, certain structural moments in the novella are noteworthy; they should to some extent be familiar to us from other romance stories.[86] To be specific, there are moments that can come across as faint echoes of *The Winter's Tale*. The fact that the "Abreise" of the boy is imminent – i.e. that he is supposed to depart after all the festivities – puts him in a position similar to that of Polixenes at the start of the play. When the girl jumps into the river, then, it seems that, like Hermione, she is effectively asking him to stay longer. As she indeed says to him after awakening in the home of the "Ehepaar": "Willst du mich verlassen…?" Interestingly, even the gesture of "hanging about his neck," which we see twice in the play, occurs in the novella: "Sie…umschlang seinen Hals mit ihren himmlischen Armen;" "Wir wollen zusammen bleiben, sagte sie, indem sie an seinem Hals hing."[87] Needless to say, the idea is not that there is anything like a one-to-one correspondence here. Structurally, however, the course of the novella is comparable to the play. When Polixenes accepts Hermione's invitation, there is something startling about this. There is a disturbance in the field of social norms. The actions of the boy and girl on the "Wasserlustfahrt" have a similar effect. Prior to this, the society around the girl had taken it for granted that she would marry someone else. "Sie war so oft Braut genannt worden,

[84] To this point, consider also Benjamin's take on the novella: "Wenn dort der Jüngling die Geliebte entblößt, so ist es nicht um der Lust, es ist um des Lebens willen.... Der Dichter wählt nicht müßige Worte, wenn er sagt: 'Hier überwand die Begierde zu retten jede andere Betrachtung.'" Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 131.
[85] Goethe, 477.
[86] Another such romance story is Goethe's poem "Der Gott und die Bajadere." The following pages will address the poem.
[87] Goethe, 477, 478.

daß sie sich endlich selbst dafür hielt...."[88] Things are trending in a certain direction. The "Nachbarskinder," however, upset society's expectations. Their coming together could potentially seem scandalous. Yet, just as everything is innocent between Polixenes and Hermione, so is the same thing true of the pair in the novella.

This train of thought gives rise now to an obvious question. It was just explained that the romance in the film is thwarted because it is mimetic, i.e. because it naturally leads to conflict, or because it implicitly rests on a kind of sacrificial violence. It was then claimed that the romance of the "Nachbarskinder," by contrast, is not mimetic, at least not in the same way. If this is so, however, then why does the romance of the "Nachbarskinder" also come undone? Why does their story not lead to marriage? Why do they apparently meet an obstacle? The explanation is to be found in the world of the novel's present. It seems, namely, that mimetic desire is simply the standard in this world for what love or desire is. In other words, a monstrous reversal of sorts has taken place. A relationship only meets resistance here if it is *not* a mimetic entanglement. Though mimesis typically leads to conflict, that is, it doesn't have the same sort of results here. It's as if it becomes viable to covet the neighbor's possessions, or to desire adulterously. Goethe himself claimed about the *Wahlverwandtschaften* that "Der sehr einfache Text dieses weitläufigen Büchleins sind die Worte Christi: *Wer ein Weib ansieht, ihrer zu begehren....*"[89] This seems to support the idea that the novel is an illustration of a world in which love is essentially equated with lust, with sin. In other words, this is a world in which there is no love. As the novella demonstrates, this leads to a supreme paradox. It leads to a situation in which the romance that is innocent is the only one that gets frustrated. Simply put, the "Nachbarskinder" cannot be together here because their relationship is actually an expression of love.

[88] Ibid., 472.
[89] Letter to Zauper, 7. Sept. 1821.

If it is indeed true that mimetic desire becomes synonymous with love in the novel – true that mimetic desire runs completely free, so to speak – where exactly do we see this? Some remarks made by Ilse Graham are a helpful starting point. As Graham sees it, "one of the most striking features of the milieu" Goethe introduces us to here "[is] its imitativeness:"

> There is, in this novel, an all-pervading air of decadence, or, at least, of derivativeness. Everybody tries his hand at imitating something – Charlotte and the Hauptmann imitate nature in their landscape gardening, the whole company imitates great scenes of art in their living *tableaux*, Luciane imitates apes, Eduard imitates the saintliness of his beloved, and so on.[90]

Or as Graham also remarks, in reference first to the *tableaux*, and also to the images of ancient artefacts that the architect carries around in "Schubladen und Fächern:"

> Copies of originals are passed around and these, in turn, are copied. Nowhere does there seem to be a breath of originality or bold invention; and Luciane's passion for apes, Nature's born imitators, seems an apt if acid comment on all of the aping of life in the raw that is going on, a comment from which not even Eduard's mode of death, by his own resigned admission, is being exempted.[91]

If imitation proliferates in all of the areas that Graham identifies, it stands to reason that it would be observable as well in the realm of romantic attachments. It stands to reason, in short, that there would be an air of "imitativeness" about how people desire in this milieu. And certain hints suggest that this is indeed the case.

There is one thing in this regard that, against the background of the film, is especially noticeable. In Ruth's flashback, a triangular, mimetic desire leads a romantic pair straight to the questionable refuge of a "summerhouse." To be in the "summerhouse" here is on some level tantamount to committing adultery. This demonstrates strikingly– in case it was not already clear – just how radical and monstrous the novel's project of the "Lustgebäude" is. For, in the film, it's simply a wayward pair that ends up in the summerhouse – and they're only there for a night. In

[90] Ilse Graham, "Verwandte Engelsbilder: Apotheosis of an Artist ('Die Wahlverwandtschaften')," in *Goethe: Portrait of the Artist* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1977), 231.
[91] Ibid., 232.

the novel, however, it's as if an entire society gets reorganized around such a building. The whole "Gemeinde" is there to celebrate – in one case, they come right after "Gottesdienst"![92] – each phase of the building's construction. And though the "Lusthaus" is initially intended just as a place to spend "die angenehmsten Stunden" – and this is obviously what it is in Hitchcock - what happens in the novel is that it becomes a place where one might actually live all the time:

> Das Haus selbst war nahezu bewohnbar; […] So wohnten die Frauenzimmer mit dem Kinde nun oben, und von diesem Aufenthalt, als von einem neuen Mittelpunkt, eröffneten sich ihnen unerwartete Spaziergänge.[93]

In a word, it seems that the kind of relationship we find in the film's flashback is characteristic of the world of the present in the novel. Whatever it is that the "summerhouse" stands for in the film, that is – be it wayward desire, pleasure, sin, adultery – this has now taken over. There is nothing preventing it from becoming the "Mittelpunkt" around which society revolves.

Another way of putting this, it seems, is to say that sin is virtually allowed now. It can become normalized. There is no obvious reason why one shouldn't sin. Or it is not clear why desire of the mimetic variety should be seen as so gravely problematic. Regarding this train of thought, one of the most striking passages is when Mittler goes on his small tirade about the Ten Commandments. In his view, the Commandments are due for some serious updating:

> Er pflegte gern zu behaupten, daß...nichts ungeschickter und barbarischer sei als Verbote, als verbietende Gesetze und Anordnungen. Der Mensch ist von Hause aus tätig, sagte er, und wenn man ihm zu gebieten versteht, so fährt er gleich dahinter her, handelt und richtet aus. Ich für meine Person mag lieber in meinem Kreise Fehler und Gebrechen so lange dulden, bis ich die entgegengesetzte Tugend gebieten kann, als daß ich den Fehler los würde und nichts Rechtes an seiner Stelle sähe.[94]

One could say here, of course, that Mittler is just trying to modernize "Verbote" and "Gesetze." What his sentiments actually reveal, however, is that he has no real understanding of the original

[92] Goethe, 330.
[93] Ibid., 464-465.
[94] Ibid., 519-520.

purpose of such "Gesetze." He is a bit naïve, we might say. "Du sollst nicht töten. Als wenn irgend ein Mensch im mindesten Lust hätte den andern tot zu schlagen!...ist es nicht eine barbarische Anstalt, den Kindern Mord und Totschlag zu verbieten?"[95] It's as if the gravity of the human situation that originally brought the Commandments into being is lost on Mittler. This is basically to say that, in his eyes, it is not so clear that human nature is fallen. "Der Mensch tut recht gern das Gute…." The measures taken to deal with man's fallen state, therefore, naturally strike him as misguided or outmoded. An enlightened society, it seems, wouldn't really require such measures. As the action of the novel demonstrates, however, the result of this is simply that an enlightened society, in effect, becomes a society in which lust and adultery have no bounds.

It should emerge into focus at this point that the relationship between the *Wahlverwandtschaften* and *I Confess* is remarkably deep-seated. It isn't just that these two works evince a similar sort of plot structure, for instance. Rather, they are intimately linked on a thematic level too. Given the subject matter of Goethe's novel, along with Mittler's remarks on the Ten Commandments, there is a sense in which the book performs a sort of meditation on sin. And it goes without saying that a film entitled *I Confess* performs a similar mediation. To put this a bit differently: not only do both of these works contain a story about "Nachbarskinder," they are also both thematically Christian – or, more specifically, Catholic - works, i.e. they both unfold in the shadow of Christian art and architecture, or of the Christian tradition more generally. Again, however, if there is a parallel here, what it ultimately enables us to see is just how unique and radical the novel is. For, while it has indeed been argued elsewhere that the Christian paraphernalia in *I Confess* is merely hollow or for show[96], there is something that this

[95] Ibid., 520.
[96] As Robin Wood sees it, "If one looks in this film for any genuine response to the Catholic religion, one looks in vain. The 'impressive' use of church architecture is an external substitute, uneasily offered, for any effective realization of the priest's dilemma – for any conveyed sense of what religion, and the confessional law, mean to

take on the film fails to do justice to. Namely, the film really does portray a genuine confession of sorts. A basic moral law is at least recognized here. When characters sin, it bothers their conscience. And under these circumstances, confession is something it can actually make sense to engage in. Yet what about in the novel? There, the opposite almost seems to be true. Playing off the title of the film, one could almost say that an alternative title for the novel would be something like *I Don't Confess*, i.e. I don't understand what confession would even mean. For a moral law is not something the novel's characters – with the notable exception of Ottilie - run up against in the same way.

What this implies is that, in the novel, the Christian paraphernalia in some sense really *is* merely hollow or for show. The purpose of its presence is just to indicate religion's bankruptcy here. Examples of this abound. At Otto's baptism, Mittler's citation of the words of Simeon – "Herr laß deinen Diener in Frieden fahren..." – inadvertently makes a farce of the Biblical episode; for the priest indeed dies right there on the spot. Similarly, Mittler truly views Otto as a "Heiland" of sorts, hoping his arrival will bring the spouses back together; neither his birth nor death, however, functions as anything like a corrective to the experiment unfolding. The work of the architect in the chapel, to be sure, revives the trappings of a bygone, Catholic "Gottesdienst."[97] The chapel seems to be more a museum piece than an actual place of worship, however. There is little sense that anything like faith or devotion is motivating its restoration. It is in a similar light that we might view Charlotte's reorganization of the monuments in the "Kirchhof." The narrator remarkably refers to this place of burial as an "Auferstehungsfeld."[98]

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him: his vocation comes across as just a factor in the data, nothing more." Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), 82. Other commentators have taken the film's Catholicism more seriously. See, for example, Catherine M. O'Brien, "'Love, What Have You Done to Me?' Eros and Agape in Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess," Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol. 18, 1, Article 44.

[97] Goethe, 400.

[98] Ibid., 400.

Charlotte's blithe removal of the grave markers from their original places, however, contradicts any notion that such an "Auferstehung" will indeed occur. All of these examples, finally, are presaged in a way by the novel's introductory paragraph. We see here the Lord, "der Herr," busy at the work of creation. It's simply that this is not the Lord God, but rather "ein reicher Baron." The novel begins, that is, by showing us a human in the place of God. This is a clear sign that we are being introduced to a world from which divine transcendence is essentially excluded. If humans create here, they don't do so in conjunction with God. And the same thing can be said, it seems, of their desiring. To desire in this world is to have a human mediator. There seems to be little question of potentially sharing one's desire with a divine mediator.

Against this background, the significance of the novella in the novel's overarching structure emerges into yet greater clarity. To some extent, the novella enters the world of the novel as a kind of foreign body. It has a disruptive effect on its audience: "Der Erzählende machte eine Pause, oder hatte vielmehr schon geendigt als er bemerken mußte, daß Charlotte höchst bewegt sei; ja sie stand auf und verließ mit einer stummen Entschuldigung das Zimmer."[99] The telling of the novella, it seems, is a sort of faux pas. The obvious explanation for this – the one made explicit in the book – is simply that the story hits too close to home, i.e. that Charlotte knows who it is about. Arguably, however, the fact that the story is unsettling is also a function of the particular kind of story it is. As Benjamin notes, for instance, the relationship between the larger novel and the novella is describable in terms of "thesis" and "antithesis."[100] It's not just that the story is socially awkward, therefore. It's that there is something about it that is alien, something that fundamentally departs from what surrounds it. To put it in a word, it seems that, in the novella, a divine transcendence of sorts is allowed to be active. Or a kind of

[99] Ibid., 479.
[100] "Also darf, wenn im Roman das Mythische als Thesis angesprochen wird, in der Novelle die Antithesis gesehen werden." Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 107.

desire appears in the novella that the rest of the book doesn't know of. We see here, one could perhaps say, a kind of divinized desire, or, more simply, we see true love.

It is very telling in this regard that a certain poem by Goethe, which has many features similar to that of the novella, happens to be about a god who visits earth. In Goethe's "Der Gott und die Bajadere," the god "Mahadöh" – the poem is based on an "indische Legende" – takes on human form, walks through a town, and meets at its outskirts a young "Bajadere," or courtesan.[101] The young girl invites the god into her "Haus," and proceeds to entertain him. Gradually, the encounter becomes more serious. The girl falls in love with her guest, and he ends up spending the night with her. In the morning, however, the girl awakens to find that the young man is dead; and the village "Priester" are already carrying his body to a "Flammengrube." At this point, the girl rushes to the "Bahre," protesting to the priests that the deceased is her "Gatt[e]." They inform her she is mistaken: "Dieser war dein Gatte nicht. / Lebst du noch als Bajadere, / Und so hast du keine Pflicht." In other words, because they were not married, the girl has neither duty nor right to sacrifice herself on the young man's funeral pyre. Yet these reproaches from the priests only serve to increase the girl's distress and determination: "...mit ausgestreckten Armen / Springt sie in den heißen Tod." In the poem's conclusion, the girl is saved and justified by the fact that the young man she is dying for is actually a god:

> Doch der Götter-Jüngling hebet
> Aus der Flamme sich empor,
> Und in seinen Armen schwebet
> Die Geliebte mit hervor.[102]

[101] Courtesan is perhaps not the right word here. The societal position occupied by the girl seems intrinsically difficult to determine. She lives in "der Liebe Haus" yet she is addressed as "Jungfrau." A literary precedent for this is the analogous situation of Marina in Shakespeare's *Pericles*.
[102] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Gedichte 1756-1799*, ed. Karl Eibl (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2010), 695.

In many respects, this poem – or "Romanze," as Goethe called it[103] – and the "Nachbarskinder"-novella are of a piece. In both cases, a girl wants a certain boy to be her husband, yet society is frozen in such a way that this is impossible; only a sort of death and rebirth is able to alter what seemed to be the inevitable course of things. Additionally, in both works the crisis undergone by the girl is said to be a "Prüfung": a "Prüfung" is still "nötig," we read in the novella, at the point when the girl first assumes she will marry the "Bräutigam"; the god in the poem seems to die on purpose "[um das Mädchen] schärfer und schärfer zu prüfen."[104] Further, in both works, the girl "springt" into some kind of element, i.e. water or fire. The boy figure then somehow saves or revives her. In both works as well, the protagonists are referred to as "Kinder" – let's consider the vocabulary found in their conclusions [my italics]:

> Man fuhr aufs Ungewisse fort, in Hoffnung die *Verlornen* wieder zu finden. [...] Die Geretteten warfen sich vor ihnen nieder. Eure *Kinder*! riefen sie aus: ein Paar.[105]
>
> Es freut sich die Gottheit der reuigen Sünder;
> Unsterbliche heben *verlorene Kinder*
> Mit feurigen Armen zum Himmel empor.[106]

In the present context, it is also interesting that the final lines of the poem deal with sin and confession. The children saved by divinity here are "reuige Sünder."

Probably the most important link between these two works, however, concerns the question of desire. Both works, more specifically, enact a purification of desire. The building in which the god and the Bajadere meet, for instance, is called "der Liebe Haus." Is there perhaps a

[103] Ibid., 1237. Goethe's Tagebuch for 9.6.1797 records "Indische Romanze Schluß."
[104] A similar sort of "Prüfung" or test seems to occur in the story about patient Griselda. As Boccaccio writes in his version of the story, "…Gualtieri was seized with the strange desire to test Griselda's patience, by subjecting her to constant provocation and making her life unbearable." *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (London: Penguin, 1995), 787.
[105] Goethe, 478.
[106] Goethe, *Gedichte*, 695. As the commentary by Karl Eibl notes, the use of the plural here – i.e. "Kinder" – makes little sense in the immediate context of the poem. The oddity of the poem's plural seems to strengthen the claim that there is a relationship between the "Kinder" in the poem and the "Kinder" in the novella. What calls for the plural, it seems, is an imaginative logic that wants to do more, say, than just make sure that the plot makes sense.

resonance between the role of this building in the poem and the role of the "Lusthaus" in the novel? Considering that we're talking about a courtesan – i.e. about lust, on some level, about adultery – the suggestion seems likely. The poem begins, therefore, with a kind of desire that is fleeting, or merely human. Gradually, however, desire undergoes a transformation – the Bajadere, for instance, will soon speak of her guest as her "Gatte." And it is quite clear that the basis for this transformation is a disruption in a mimetic force field. Notice that when the Bajadere rushes to the corpse of the young man "sie…teilet die Menge." Literally, that is, she breaks up a crowd, she disrupts its unity. In the same vein, the "Totengesänge" sung by the "Chor" of "Priester" have the distinct feel of a sacrificial ritual. And it is not difficult to tell that the "Jüngling" is indeed viewed as a sacred victim. For one thing, he occupies the social space that is proper to a victim: he is a foreigner, not completely integrated into this society. And the "Priester" speak of his death as a kind of holy offering for the gods:

> Ertöne Drommete zu heiliger Klage!
> O, nehmet, ihr Götter! die Zierde der Tage,
> O, nehmet den Jüngling in Flammen zu euch.

Summarizing, the love between "Der Gott" and "Die Bajadere" is essentially a love that puts a stop to a certain mimetic process, a love that gets in the way of this process. As the preceding pages have shown, however, in the world of the present in the *Wahlverwandtschaften*, love doesn't do this, i.e. it's not really love. The romantic attraction that drives the novel's experiment doesn't disrupt a mimetic process, it feeds into it. Unlike in the poem and novella, we find in the novel a desire that is consistent with sacrifice, and that, in this sense, might be said to turn its back on divine transcendence.

By way of concluding, it is crucial to think about how the kind of love that the poem and novella give expression to impacts the particular aesthetic of these works. For a number of

reasons, it is fair to say that both of these works are romances. Obviously, they recount a sort of love story. More significantly, however, there is something miraculous about both of them. There is a certain fairy tale-like, or hard to believe, quality. We're dealing with nothing less than passages through death into new life. Something here is almost too good to be true. What is one to make of this fairy tale-like quality? The world of the present in the *Wahlverwandtschaften* seems to have a straightforward answer. This quality means that the story is simply not true, or that it has been liberally embellished. Such a story has passed "erst durch den Mund der Menge und sodann durch die Phantasie eines geist- und geschmackreichen Erzählers...." Because of this, "[e]s bleibt zuletzt meist alles und nichts wie es war."[107] Yet is a different answer perhaps possible? Can one read such a story and conclude something other than that it is embellished, something other than that the story doesn't correspond exactly to what must have really happened?

The readings above argued that, in both of these romances, a bond of love disrupts a mimetic force field. If this is what is happening on the content level of the story, it is only natural that the same thing is going to happen on the aesthetic level. In other words, the story is absolutely realistic, absolutely true. To recognize this fact, however, one has to keep in mind *what* exactly the object is that the story is relating. This object is a relationship of love that breaks out of a mimetic cycle. How is a story supposed to render this? In a word, it does this by *itself* breaking out of a mimetic cycle. An obviously non-mimetic, blatantly miraculous story can be realistic, that is, because the thing it is portraying is also non-mimetic. The story thus departs from strict mimesis, one could say somewhat paradoxically, in the name of truth. With these reflections, we seem to arrive at a fundamental aspect of fiction, of imaginative literature. We

[107] Goethe, 479.

also make a certain stride toward describing the intersecting point between such literature and Biblical revelation. How are the miracles in the Bible true? One answer might be that they are true because believing in them is tantamount to rejecting a mimetic logic. The truth, in other words, departs from mimesis. It is inherently miraculous, inherently difficult to believe. Believing in it will necessarily require effort, for it will always amount to resisting the forces that lead to the formation of the crowd. From a certain historical perspective, of course, to reject miracle stories as false is simply to be enlightened. *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, however, seems to complicate this view. In the world of the present in this novel, the romance of the novella is not allowed to come to fruition. Why is this so? Is it because this world of the present is enlightened and reasonable? What the novel suggests is that, if the wondrous or miraculous is denied, this doesn't only happen in the name of reason. It sometimes happens in the name of darker, more mythical forces. We might say, along with Benjamin, that it is the force of the mythical [*das Mythische*] that ultimately prevents the novella's romance from being a true story.

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