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The Feet at the Foot of the Curtain: The Individual Subject in the Work of Friedrich Schlegel, Arthur Schopenhauer and Max Stirner.

Dedicated to my parents and the late Roger Towe.

**DECLARATION.**

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of Goldsmiths College is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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## Abstract.

The present thesis does not, following the cautionary example of Dupuis and Cotonet, seek to define romanticism. The fatuity of their lexicographical project, in light of Friedrich Schlegel's expansive 'theory' of 'romantic poetry', soon becomes clear. Schlegel's 'theory' aspired to elude categorisation and exceed definitive bounds. Dupuis and Cotonet had set out, to their foolish credit, to define the indefinable. However, it is possible to identify a characteristic motif of romanticism from Schlegel's 'inceptive' theory. The critic extended his vision, somewhat fastidiously, to nature itself. His subject, the poet, was privy to its inestimable beauty; he shared a common deliquescent principle, its 'inmost' being. The poet, like nature, was infinite and universal in scope and, ultimately, indefinable. Schlegel was not alone. Schopenhauer identified a similar quality, nature's will; it was no less universal, infinite or explicable than that which resided in the 'heart' of Schlegel's poet. It differed in one dramatic respect: it was loathsome. Nonetheless, Schlegel and Schopenhauer shared a common interest; it was of a decidedly visceral order. The value accorded to their respective subjects was determined by a universal force of nature which lurked about 'within' him. It bore little resemblance to anything remotely human. The question of romanticism was not, as Dupuis and Cotonet believed, purely a lexicographical concern; it strayed into the realms of ontology. Schlegel and Schopenhauer's spectral account, prioritising as they did, the subject's mysterious 'inmost nature' did a disservice to the singular, bodily person. Max Stirner, on the other hand, abhorred all general notions and all talk of 'universal

natures'; nevertheless, he also regarded the subject as the wellspring of infinite potential. Unlike Schlegel and Schopenhauer, Stirner emphasised the subject's determinate and definitive standing as a singular, egocentric 'personality'. What, then, can one ascertain about the 'true' nature of the individual subject?

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 'INFINITY AND STARDOM': THE WIDER QUESTION OF ROMANTICISM

'To understand things we must have been once in them and then have come out of them; so that first there must be captivity and then deliverance, illusion followed by disillusion, enthusiasm by disappointment. He who is still under the spell, and he who has never felt the spell, are equally incompetent. We only know well what we have first believed, then judged. To understand we must be free, yet not have been always free'.<sup>1</sup>

Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal'

'Our minds are still haunted by that Abstract Man, that enlightened abstraction of a common humanity'.<sup>2</sup>

Wyndham Lewis, 'The Art of Being Ruled'

#### I. THE TROUBLES OF DUPUIS AND COTONET

'This is all nonsense', Cotonet complained.<sup>3</sup> His astonished companion, Dupuis, remained silent. They had taken the news badly. Not without good reason. Dupuis and Cotonet had reached the twelfth year of what had been, from the very start, an uncustomary and troubled lexicographical project. It had all started some years before when an unfamiliar word reared its head in conversation for the very first time. It quickly came to their attention that neither of them knew exactly what

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<sup>1</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 254).

<sup>2</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'The Art of Being Ruled' (1926 / 1989 p. 375).

<sup>3</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 209).

was meant by the term. It left them at a complete and total loss.

The word was spoken far too freely for their liking and, more often than not, was used, as far as they were able to tell, in the most arbitrary, perplexing of ways. Its meaning was neither consistent nor, in a number of instances, the least bit intelligible. Time and again, they 'relapsed into uncertainty'.<sup>4</sup>

To make matters worse, the problem had, over the years, grown to such a monstrous degree that it could no longer be described as a purely lexicographical concern. The mere mention of the word had started, in the widest possible sense, to make them feel very uncomfortable indeed. By the twelfth year of their investigations, it, the word, had a decidedly menacing ring to it.

In a final effort to soften their anxiety and resolve the whole matter, as they shortsightedly hoped, for good, Dupuis and Cotonet decided to find out once and for all what precisely was meant by the term.

The word in question was 'romanticism'.

A dozen years had come and gone and Dupuis and Cotonet had exhausted nearly as many definitions - one had simply supplanted another and neither of them were any the wiser. Their anxiety remained and, if anything, had sharpened and grown more acute.

One question, above all others, remained unanswered:

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 198).

'what, then, is romanticism?', as Dupuis and Cotonet had repeatedly asked.<sup>5</sup>

It was still unclear, very unclear, what exactly was meant by the term, a point that had just been made painfully aware to them both. By the very man, a nameless Clerk, whom had first introduced them to the word all those years before.

'Romanticism', Dupuis and Cotonet had just been told, 'is the weeping star; it is the sighing wind, the chilly night, the bird in its flight, and the sweet-scented flower; it is the refreshing stream, the greatest ecstasy, the well by the palm-trees, rosy hope and her thousand lovers, the angel and the pearl, the white robe of the willows!'. 'It is', the nameless Clerk continued, 'infinity and stardom; it is heat, refraction, cold; it is flat and round, the diametrical, pyramidal, oriental; it is an embrace, a clasp, a whirlwind'.<sup>6</sup>

Given their patience, at this late stage, was at its thinnest, 'infinity and stardom' was the very last thing, one imagines, Dupuis and Cotonet wanted to hear. It certainly did not resemble, not even remotely, the 'definite conclusion' they had so eagerly sought.<sup>7</sup>

'This is impossible', the incredulous pair exclaimed. 'Something tells us that this can not be the result of such curious and assiduous researches! This can not be

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<sup>5</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 208).

<sup>6</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 209 - 210).

<sup>7</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 206).

so'.<sup>8</sup> They did not react at all well to the Clerk's bombastic explanation. In fact, Dupuis and Cotonet took it extremely badly. 'To end the matter', they concluded, 'we believe that romanticism consists in using all these adjectives, and not in anything else'.<sup>9</sup>

'The truth', as Henri Peyre may have tried to console the pair in a study whose title would no doubt have their interest attracted their attention, 'is that no brief definition - is valid for topics where the subjective point of view and inclination count so heavily. All one can do is describe, enumerate, eliminate, emphasize certain characteristics, and to do this every time one would need a volume'.<sup>10</sup> 'Romanticism', as the painter and particularly astute critic, Wyndham Lewis, corroborated, 'is a word that covers a great deal of things differing among themselves very widely indeed'.<sup>11</sup> And if one turns to a page of 'Adolphe' (1816), one comes across a particularly apt and cautionary note of advice: 'The spoken word', Benjamin Constant suggested, is 'at best but a clumsy medium, though it may serve well enough to give them a name, is never capable of sharply defining them'.<sup>12</sup>

Dupuis and Cotonet had listened attentively as the meaning of romanticism had been 'described' and 'enumerated' countless times, but, just as Peyre had said, no 'brief definition' appeared to suffice. Not only that, the parameters of the term seemed to expand into

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 204).

<sup>9</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 222).

<sup>10</sup> Henri Peyre, 'What Is Romanticism?' (1977 p. 42).

<sup>11</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'The Diabolical Principle and The Dithyrambic Spectator' (1931 p. 41 - 42).

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Constant, 'Adolphe' (1816 / 1924 p. 39).

increasingly incomprehensible realms.

It would not be completely true to say that romanticism had fallen short of their expectations; it had, in a certain respect, exceeded them.

'There is', to heed Isaiah Berlin's word of warning, 'a kind of inverted pyramid. It is a dangerous and a confused subject, in which many have lost, I will not say their senses, but at any rate their sense of direction'.<sup>13</sup> And Berlin's assessment certainly proved to be the case for Dupuis and Cotonet. The pair were faced, whether they liked it or not, with the shadowy prospect of 'infinity and stardom'. Given the sheer immensity of the term, it was little wonder Dupuis and Cotonet lost their way.

## II. THE COURTSHIP

Let me turn your immediate attention from Alfred de Musset's satire, 'The Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' (1836), to Friedrich Schlegel's 'Dialogue on Poetry' (1799 - 1800) to consider the following passage. Schlegel, I should add at this introductory stage, was a critic whose contribution to literary history rests largely on his expansive, if horribly florid 'definition' of romanticism or, as he referred to it, 'romantic poetry'. It was particularly significant, in a historical sense, as it constituted the first, initial attempt to outline the parameters of the literary form.

'The world of poetry', as Friedrich Schlegel explained, 'is as infinite and inexhaustible as the riches of animating nature with her plants, animals, and formations

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<sup>13</sup> Isaiah Berlin, 'The Roots of Romanticism' (1965 / 1999 p. 1).

of every type, shape, and color. Nor are the artificial or natural products which bear the form and name of poems easily included under the most inclusive term. And what are they, compared with the unformed and unconscious poetry which stirs in the plant and shines in the light, smiles in a child, gleams in the flower of youth, and glows in the loving bosom of women? This, however, is the primeval poetry without which there would be no poetry of words'.<sup>14</sup>

Friedrich Schlegel and his parodic counterpart, de Musset's Clerk, shared a common literary interest, but it was somewhat 'deeper' than that. It certainly led Schlegel on a path which descended very sharply indeed to a remote and largely inaccessible point: the substratum, not just of 'romantic poetry', but of nature itself. And things, as you might well imagine, were of an entirely different order 'down there'.

Schlegel, for instance, talked quite freely of an assortment of images in the same breath as they all expressed a single, underlying principle.<sup>15</sup> That the 'plant that stirred', the 'light that shone' and 'the child that smiled' ordinarily had little to do with one another was no longer strictly true: deep down they were all one and the same. The Clerk was also at liberty to talk, albeit for comic effect, of 'weeping stars', of 'sighing winds', and 'birds in flight' in the same highfalutin and indiscriminate manner.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 53 - 54).

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>16</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 209 - 210).

Having plummeted to this elemental point - an all encompassing principle of nature, Schlegel and de Musset's Clerk set out to aggrandise the standing of romanticism to an incalculable degree. It had, after all, unearthed certain relations, interrelations more specifically, that were not necessarily 'common knowledge'. The literary form had struck up an affiliation with nature and was privy to its arcane practices.

While de Musset capitalised on the kinship for satirical purposes, the same could not be said of Schlegel; he sought, in all seriousness, not only to appropriate, but exploit a number of nature's characteristics for his own theoretical ends. It allowed the critic to talk of his romantic 'theory' as if it were as immeasurable and indefinable as nature itself.

However, the range of its territorial advantage was offset by the crude bond that constituted its basis. The grounds, to take Schlegel's unifying enterprise to hand, was founded on all that was 'primeval' and 'unconscious' - hardly the most helpful of qualities if, like Dupuis and Cotonet, one wishes to get to the bottom of romanticism in one respect or another; in fact, they rather impede the effort from the start.

'For this is the beginning of all poetry', as Schlegel went on to explain, 'to cancel the progression and laws of rationally thinking reason, and to transplant us once again into the beautiful confusion of imagination, into

the original chaos of human nature'.<sup>17</sup> Let us suppose Schlegel was entirely correct and the starting point of 'romantic poetry' did indeed constitute the suspension, if not negation of 'reason', as he suggested, then the likes of Dupuis and Cotonet were, given their rational disposition, rather ill equipped to ever get to the bottom of the term.

While Schlegel's avid interest in all that was vegetal certainly worked to the advantage of his unitary aim, it did the likes of Dupuis and Cotonet absolutely no favours at all; it made the task of defining romanticism tremendously difficult, if not wholly impossible.

'We are', as Schlegel attempted to explain in his own flowery way, 'able to perceive the music of the universe and to understand the beauty of the poem because a part of the poet, a spark of his creative spirit, lives in us and never ceases to glow with secret force deep under the ashes of our self-induced unreason'.<sup>18</sup>

Dupuis and Cotonet would not have appreciated, had they come across a copy of *The Athenäum* (a short lived periodical in which the 'Dialogue on Poetry' originally appeared), Schlegel's talk of 'secret' forces, sparks of 'creative spirit' and they certainly would not have welcomed his mention of 'the ashes of our self-induced unreason' very warmly at all. Nor, on the other hand, would Schlegel have been the least bit tolerant of their desire to contain the most 'infinite and inexhaustible' of 'worlds', as he called 'romantic poetry', within the

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<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 86).

<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).



tight confines of a concise, straightforward explanation.<sup>19</sup> 'Defining', as Frederick Hiebel warned, 'means to set down finite limits'.<sup>20</sup> And setting down 'finite limits' would have inhibited, if not completely compromised Schlegel's ambitious plans.

'It is not necessary', as Schlegel might have condescended to tell Dupuis and Cotonet, 'for anyone to sustain and propagate poetry through clever speeches and precepts, or, especially, to try to produce it, invent it, establish it, and impose upon it restrictive laws'.<sup>21</sup> Schlegel, suffice to say, was a fine one to talk; his 'theory' of 'romantic poetry' was itself something of a paragon of ingenuity. Nevertheless, given Schlegel's apparent 'hostility' to rational thought, his disinclination to conform to 'restrictive laws', not to mention his 'promiscuous', if uncustomary concupiscent leaning to mingle and with all that was 'unconscious', Dupuis and Cotonet were never likely to fully comprehend the term. The pair had, in fact, been told something very similar indeed when the Clerk warned them: 'You may try in vain to seize the butterfly's wing' but 'the dust that colors it will be all you can hold in your fingers'.<sup>22</sup> After a dozen years of, in their words, 'anxious thought', Dupuis and Cotonet's investigations realised an equally derisory return.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 53 - 54).

<sup>20</sup> Frederick Hiebel, 'Novalis and the Problem of Romanticism' (1947 p. 520).

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>22</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset', Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 209).

<sup>23</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset', Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 204).

Dupuis and Cotonet were not, like Schlegel, the least bit attuned to 'the music of the universe'.<sup>24</sup> It was not music they heard but a muddle of enigmatic noises and the dull racket left them dumbfounded. It may be tempting, if one is so inclined, to close ranks with Schlegel, as many have done, and level something Julian Green wrote in their direction: 'The quality of their instruments', turning to a page of his novel 'The Closed Garden' (1928), 'corresponds poorly with the intentions of the composer'.<sup>25</sup> But to say something as dismissive as that is, I believe, entirely unjustified.

The problem had not so much to do with the 'quality' of Dupuis and Cotonet's 'instruments', their intellectual faculties in this case, but rested solely on the 'intentions' of a thoroughly irrational and insensible 'composer', that is to say nature itself. To jump to their defence, Dupuis and Cotonet were not able to follow its 'intentions' nor appreciate its so called 'music' as they were faced with an indecipherable and senseless score.

Romanticism could not be 'enumerated' in plain language; it was hostile to anything that was communicable, ordinary or determinate. The 'secrets' it had to impart were far more esoteric than that. The romantics in general, and Schlegel in particular, attributed an exorbitant amount of importance to that which was *incommunicable, extraordinary and indeterminate*. 'Romance, as currently used, then, denotes', according to

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<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>25</sup> Julian Green, 'The Closed Garden' (1928 p. 132). Translated by Henry Longan Stuart. Harper & Brothers, New York.

Wyndham Lewis, 'what is unreal or unlikely, or at all events not present, in contrast to what is *scientifically* true and accessible to the senses here and now. Or it is, in its purest expression, what partakes of the marvellous, the extreme, the unusual'.<sup>26</sup>

The romantics had found in nature a perfect foil.

'The language of nature', turning to a notable expert in the field, Arthur Schopenhauer, 'is not understood because it is too simple'.<sup>27</sup> Schopenhauer spoke with considerable authority on the subject; his own doctrine, as we will hear in one of the proceeding chapters, enthroned the most simpleminded and abhorrent of nature's powers, the will, to prevail over it. Schlegel did not happen to share any of Schopenhauer's reservations; he considered nature a thing of beauty, but, for all its coy smiles, it remained inexpressible: 'The sublime because it is unutterable, can be expressed only allegorically'.<sup>28</sup>

Whether it was Schlegel's 'theory' of 'romantic poetry', de Musset's wordsmith - the Clerk, or, indeed, Arthur Schopenhauer's contemptible doctrine of will, romanticism could not be defined nor, for that matter, did it wish to be defined, as words struggled, if not failed to faithfully reflect its instrumental courtship with nature. 'One cannot', as Schlegel declared, 'really speak of poetry, except in the language of poetry'.<sup>29</sup> But as the 'language of poetry' was said to take its cue from all that was 'primeval' and insensible it made it something

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<sup>26</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 27).

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 67).

<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 89 - 90).

<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 53 - 54).

of an onerous task to speak of it all. It is difficult, in this particular respect, not to harbour an enormous amount of sympathy for Dupuis and Cotonet. It hardly comes as much of a surprise they reached the end of their tether and arrived at their disheartening conclusion.

While Friedrich Schlegel was intent to hide the meaning of 'romantic poetry' in an extensive and overpoweringly fragrant bed of flowers, or, in the case of de Musset's Clerk, obscure it in the shadowy folds of the firmament, Dupuis and Cotonet were eager to expose the whole matter to sunlight. But romanticism, from the little one can tell at this early stage, was a wantonly heliophobic form that reveled, not only in its expansive, dimly lit surroundings, but also the dull, vegetal companionship it kept.

Dupuis and Cotonet would have been far happier had they been told a clear, succinct explanation as to what was exactly meant by the term. It would have allowed the socialites, if the question were ever to rear its head in conversation again, to confidently repeat what they had been told word for word. Unfortunately, the matter at hand afforded them no such luxury, nor did it simply end there.

Schlegel was not sufficiently satisfied to obscure the meaning of romanticism, as indeed the likes of Dupuis and Cotonet learnt to their cost; he was possessed by a far more ambitious desire and that desire was, as I suggested, to submerge 'everything', not just 'romantic poetry', in a murky 'primordial' pool. Then, and only then, was he able to speak of them as so many expressions of his totalising poetic vision.

'Schlegel's philosophical endeavors were guided', as Hans Eichner wrote in an eponymous study of the critic, 'by two vague but powerful concepts: that of the "absolute unity" of the universe and that of its "infinite plentitude" or variety'.<sup>30</sup> Not that Schlegel was alone in his endeavours. Schopenhauer's doctrine also entertained the two concepts, the 'will' and its 'representation' as he saw fit to call them, and sought, like Schlegel, to reconcile the "'absolute unity"' of nature's will with its 'infinite variety' by much the same means. And those means proved, in both examples, reductive in the extreme.

### III. TWO IMPEDIMENTS

To that end, Schlegel and Schopenhauer induced, as it were, two prominent 'impediments'. To say something to the effect that they were 'afflicted' with them would indubitably encourage the mistaken impression that they, the 'impediments', acted in a detrimental way. They almost certainly blunted the percipient and intellectual focus of their respective schemes, but that rather suited, even facilitated their unifying aims.

The 'impediments', as I have called them, afforded the equally shrewd figures a number of extremely beneficial allowances; they can hardly be said, not by any stretch of the imagination, to have constituted an 'affliction' taking into account their primary objective. And that, to clarify matters, was to unify all that was disparate by means of a single mantle, be it poetic or philosophic.

Schlegel and Schopenhauer exploited, most prominently of

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<sup>30</sup> Hans Eichner, 'Friedrich Schlegel' (1970 p. 77).

all, a certain visual impediment; it was akin to a chronic 'presbyopic' condition that acted to soften the sharp divisions between one thing and another to such an extent that everything settled in an indeterminate and, in the example of Schopenhauer's scheme, particularly noxious haze. 'The romanticists', as John C. Blankenagel wrote some decades ago in a nonetheless perceptive essay, 'The Dominant Characteristics of German Romanticism' (1940), 'were concerned less with a clear, visible world than with unfathomed depths, the unconscious, boundless emotions, and longing'.<sup>31</sup>

The 'condition', to take an earlier example, made it extremely difficult, if not impossible to distinguish Schlegel's 'plants' from the Clerk's 'stars'; they were regarded within such an enormous, opaque cloud that it effectively obliterated difference altogether. The 'plants' and 'stars' may well have been expressions of a single principle, but whatever alliance they were said to have was certainly not of a visual or somatic variety.

'"Romance"', turning once again to the painter, Wyndham Lewis, 'is what is unusual, not normal, mysterious, not visible, perhaps not susceptible at all of visual treatment'.<sup>32</sup> While their visual 'impediment' proved enormously efficacious in a theoretical sense - it allowed Schlegel and Schopenhauer, as we will hear, to talk of the world's 'unity', it took a brazen liberty with all things of singular standing. Not least of all the individual subject, whose identity, as I intend to explain, was plunged, head first, into a gigantic and dispersonating common pool.

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<sup>31</sup> John C. Blankenagel, 'The Dominant Characteristics of German Romanticism' (1940 p. 6).

<sup>32</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 23).

Neither Schlegel nor Schopenhauer appeared to value the subject, the individual person, in a singular sense, but a collective one that attributed an enormous amount of importance to what was often obliquely described as his 'inner-nature'. The term did not describe a coalescence of minds; it did not, to prevent you from drawing an abrupt and mistaken impression, appertain to the intellect at all, but an 'unconscious' power of nature - a completely unknown quantity, whose scope was said to exceed all known bounds.

Secondly, Schlegel and Schopenhauer lapsed, at times, into something that, for all intent and purposes, resembled an 'aphasic' state. This particular 'impediment', marked by convenient spells of obmutescence, proved just as beneficial as their impaired state of vision. Having identified an aphonic force of nature as their touchstone, Schlegel and Schopenhauer made it all too easy if, for whatever reason, they found themselves wanting in some respect or other, to roll out its lolling tongue for corroboration. It allowed them to excuse themselves on account of their reticent 'muse' whose ways, ultimately, remained a mystery.

Both writers absolved themselves, as I intend to argue, from intellectual scrutiny through their beneficial 'courtship' with nature. It was an extremely advantageous alliance to have at hand if one wished, as they did, to unite all worldly phenomena by means of its lowest common denominator: an unintelligible, invisible and infinite principle. As a direct result, it made it tremendously difficult to bring either of them to task, intellectually speaking, as the point of unity between nature and their

respective subjects was neither appreciable nor readily understood. The basis of their schemes was certainly profound, but remained indiscernible to both the intellect and naked eye.

To have aligned, from its inception, the 'sacred mysteries of nature and poetry' was, to his credit, an ingenious stratagem on Schlegel's part and an enormously beneficial 'encumbrance' for him to have had at hand.<sup>33</sup>

Not that Schopenhauer was any less culpable. His doctrine of nature's will, coming nearly twenty years after Schlegel's romantic 'theory', also capitalised, to no less an extent, on its fundamental unintelligibility. 'We are plunged', as Schopenhauer surmised, 'into a sea of riddles and incomprehensibilities and have no thorough and direct knowledge and understanding of either things or ourselves'.<sup>34</sup>

While the joint force of their 'presbyopic' and 'aphasic' 'impediments' approximated, to some degree, the meretricious 'riches' of nature and afforded Schlegel and Schopenhauer a fanciful 'luxury' (for their theories were now as large and insensible as 'she'), it engendered a certain snobbishness, contempt even, towards things that were neither universal, infinite nor, as I recently said, readily apparent to either the intellect or eye. 'Only in relation to the infinite', as Schlegel haughtily claimed, 'is there meaning and purpose; whatever lacks such a relation is absolutely meaningless and pointless'.<sup>35</sup> Their

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<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 55).

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 110).

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 241).



supercilious attitude to all that was finite was most apparent of all in their estimation and evaluation of the individual subject.

The question of romanticism was not, as I suggested in one of the opening paragraphs, strictly a 'lexicographical concern'. If one takes into account Schlegel's poetic aim - to harmonise everything in nature by means of an arcane, deliquescent principle - it threw, from the beginning, the customary distinctions between one thing and another into doubt. Not to say the basis, nor indeed objective of the critic's consanguineous scheme was any more certain. Schlegel's inceptive 'theory' raises, if nothing else, a number of far wider philosophical problems which, as I will proceed to explain, are most keenly 'felt' in an ontological sense.

Schlegel's individual subject, the 'romantic poet', was not only implicated, but constituted the focus of his monistic scheme. 'Indeed', turning to Schlegel, 'there is and never has been for us humans any other object or source of activity and joy but that one poem of the godhead of the earth, of which we, too, are part and flower'.<sup>36</sup> 'Aren't there individuals', as Schlegel asked elsewhere, 'who contain within themselves whole systems of individuals?'.<sup>37</sup> Schopenhauer was by no means an exception: 'Every individual, every human apparition and its course of life', as he wrote in 'The World as Will and Representation' (1818), 'is only one more short dream of the endless spirit of nature'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 196).

<sup>38</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I

Neither Schlegel nor Schopenhauer appeared to value the subject on account of his *singularity*, bodily or otherwise, but by virtue of his *commonality*. That which they prized was a deep seated and somewhat unpleasant sounding limaceous quality, his 'inmost' nature, their respective subjects were said to share with one and all. In a certain respect, it afforded all people an incredible luxury, if one happens to consider flailing about in an anonymous, gigantic 'primeval' pool a luxurious prospect. In another, it reduced them to a coagulated mass, that is to say, their most rudimentary state. Schlegel called it, as we already know, the 'unconscious' while Schopenhauer described it, perhaps more faithfully, as the 'root point of existence'.<sup>39</sup>

All that that was infinite, impersonal and insensate took precedence over that which was finite, definitive and personal. In prioritising one set of qualities over another, Schlegel and Schopenhauer widened the parameters of a thoroughly unappealing communal pool and opened its turbid waters to 'all'. The latter with considerably more gusto than the former; Schlegel, as we will hear in the following chapter, could not bring himself to permit any more than a favoured few.

If the monistic association between 'one and all' was secured by such crude and general ties what possible value could it be said to have had? It could hardly be described as the most intellectually rewarding of associations if, as seemed likely, it was motivated by the prospect of 'gaining' the 'meretricious riches', as I

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(1818 / 1966 p. 322).

<sup>39</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 325).

described them, of a grandiose, if insensate vision of nature (presuming one is that way inclined and suitably impressed by big and vacuous things).<sup>40</sup> What cost, one may well ask, did Schlegel and Schopenhauer's fervid desire for unification exact?

It is my contention that the individual subject - the 'corporeal man with hide and hair' as a certain writer described him, came out of the association most poorly of all.<sup>41</sup>

#### IV. THE GROUNDS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Allow me take this opportunity to narrow the scope a little in an effort to clarify my own particular interest in the subject. I should start by making it absolutely clear that I do not, *not even remotely*, share Dupuis and Cotonet's desire to 'define' romanticism. It is impossible or, at any rate, improbable given its favourable predisposition towards all that was 'universal', 'infinite' and 'insensible'. I have no intention, if it is not already too late in the day, to follow in their particular footsteps.

To define romanticism and, at the same time, satisfy the exacting standards of a Dupuis or a Cotonet almost certainly exceeds my ability. Not that I particularly identify or, for that matter, agree with Schlegel, de Musset's effusive Clerk or Arthur Schopenhauer, but I recognise, if not always appreciate, their desire to transgress customary bounds.

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<sup>40</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 53).

<sup>41</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 28).

In one respect, the present study has taken a great deal of heart from Schlegel's romantic vision, at least in its preliminary stages. The critic aspired to unite all literary forms whether they were poetic, philosophic, dramatic or prosaic; nor, to Schlegel's further credit, did the passage of time engender any particular reverence for 'movements' and the like.

Schlegel wished to break down all borderlines, generic, chronological or otherwise, between one form and another. They were all expressions of the 'world spirit' and the 'world spirit' was indivisible. 'Everything interpenetrates everything else', Schlegel suggested, 'and everywhere there is one and the same spirit, only expressed differently'.<sup>42</sup> Schlegel's aim was, in a literary sense, extremely admirable even if it spiraled out of control and eventually got the better of him.

The present thesis is best described as a thematic and interpretative study. While my aspirations are rather more modest, to put it mildly, than Schlegel's the thesis can be said, in a literary sense, to work towards a similar objective. I intend to draw from various sources, regardless of their origination, not for the sake of anything as arcane or grandiose as the 'world spirit', but in the hope of presenting a more rounded picture, simply speaking, of the particular 'problem' at hand.

'It is the right of a new age', as René Wellek made a point of saying in 'Concepts of Criticism' (1963), 'to look for its own ancestors and even to pull passages out of their context'.<sup>43</sup> In one sense, Wellek describes

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<sup>42</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry' (1968 p. 82).

<sup>43</sup> René Wellek, 'The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History'

something of the 'interpretative allowances' I have granted myself. While I am eager to identify, not only 'ancestors', but progeny, as it were, of Schlegel and Schopenhauer's legacy, I am reluctant to 'pull passages' completely out of 'context', even if it amounts, in certain instances, to a thematic interpretation of the term (most obvious of all in my various references to works of 'fiction' which proffer, in my opinion, certain 'pictorial' benefits which, as I hope, aid understanding).

I will refer, from time to time, to a disparate collection of writers, many of whom, as I said, are novelists - not because I wish to satisfy a gratuitous personal whim, but in an effort to emphasise the extent to which a problem, emanating from their respective schemes, has exceeded not only the bounds of their times, but also the circle of discussion that ordinarily accompanies a critique of Schlegel and Schopenhauer's work. The 'problem', as I have called it, is not confined to one area of thought nor, for that matter, one period of time; it has troubled philosophers, novelists, painters and poets alike regardless, to put it very simply, of their actual date of birth or 'intellectual allegiance' they may, in certain cases, be said to have had.

I believe it is insightful to 'emphasize', as you may remember Henri Peyre saying a little earlier, 'certain characteristics' in an effort, not only to identify a notable motif of romanticism, but trace its, I hesitate to say 'evolution', but change of emphasis in the work of three writers, two of whom I have already mentioned -

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collected in 'Concepts of Criticism' (1963 p. 158).

namely Friedrich Schlegel (1772 - 1829) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 - 1860), but also another whose name, until now, has remained undisclosed; his name, rather penname, was Max Stirner (1806 / 1856).<sup>44</sup>

I intend, with this aspiration in mind, to follow, not strictly a 'characteristic' *per se*, but a figure, that of the individual subject. The said writers - Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Stirner have certainly made the present task somewhat easier than it might otherwise have been as each of their theses revolved, to no less an extent, around a central 'figure'. Schlegel's subject was, as I have already mentioned, the 'romantic poet', Schopenhauer called his, rather misleadingly in light of his questionable judgment, the 'subject of knowledge' and Stirner, objecting to the all too general tone of the term 'man' saw fit, betraying, at the same time, something of his particular weakness for things of a more determinate and contrary standing, to name his subject the 'un-man'.

The three figures attributed an equally privileged position, within each of their schemes, to the individual subject. Their understanding of 'individuality', though varying wildly in emphasis, was of fundamental importance to Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Stirner alike. The subject was, in all three examples, the linchpin and key to their work.

'It is individuality', turning immediately to Schlegel, 'which is the original and eternal within man'.<sup>45</sup>

Schopenhauer was similarly emphatic: 'Man carries the

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<sup>44</sup> Henri Peyre, 'What Is Romanticism?' (1977 p. 42).

<sup>45</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 155).

ultimate fundamental secrets within himself, and this fact is accessible to him in the most immediate way. Here only, therefore, can he hope to find the key to the riddle of the world, and obtain a clue to the inner nature of all things'.<sup>46</sup> On another page of the same volume, we hear Schopenhauer say: 'nature has her centre in every individual for each one is the entire will'.<sup>47</sup> And the importance Stirner attributed to his own individuality was no less ardently expressed: 'I too cannot get out of my skin, but have my law in my whole nature, in myself'.<sup>48</sup>

All three writers may well have attributed a similarly supreme value to the individual subject, but none of them would have agreed as to what actually constituted his 'real' nature; nevertheless, it was something they all sought to identify in an attempt to substantiate their broader claims.

'Starting with the romantics', as Henri Peyre wrote in another of his books, 'Literature and Sincerity' (1963), 'man set himself up, in literature, as the measure of all things'.<sup>49</sup> 'The self', he wrote a page or two before, 'was the ultimate reality for all the romantics, from which all else radiated'.<sup>50</sup> We hear, if we turn to Wyndham Lewis' insightful, amusingly opinionated and largely neglected philosophical work - 'Time and Western Man' (1927), a similar sentiment: 'For our only terra firma in

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<sup>46</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 179).

<sup>47</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 599).

<sup>48</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 146).

<sup>49</sup> Henri Peyre, 'Literature and Sincerity' (1963 p. 120).

<sup>50</sup> Henri Peyre, 'Literature and Sincerity' (1963 p. 118).

a boiling and shifting world is, after all, our "self".<sup>51</sup> Quickly turning to H. G. Schenk's 'The Mind of the European Romantics' (1966), we hear, once again, much the same sort of thing. 'When all ideas and ideals were once again in the melting pot', Schenk wrote, 'it was not unnatural that the individual self might seem to be the only firm anchor'.<sup>52</sup>

While Peyre's estimation of the subject's ascendant position in the work Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Stirner certainly rings true, the 'self' of which he confidently spoke, along with Lewis and Schenk, was by no means an agreed or certain idea among them. Quite the opposite, in fact. The 'ultimate reality', as Peyre described it, was not something that was necessarily agreed upon among the romantics. If, for instance, we turn to Max Stirner, we hear him tell us in one ear: 'only the un-man is a real man';<sup>53</sup> while, in the other, we hear Schopenhauer tell us something entirely different: the 'will alone is real'.<sup>54</sup> It was an opinion he reiterated on another page of the same work: 'the will is what is real and essential in man'.<sup>55</sup> As for Schlegel, he believed: 'Man is Nature creatively looking back at itself'.<sup>56</sup>

The 'question of self', for want of a better expression, was highly contentious and very much open to debate.

Stirner, Schlegel and Schopenhauer all claimed to have

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<sup>51</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 5).

<sup>52</sup> H. G. Schenk, 'The Mind of the European Romantics' (1966 p. 50).

<sup>53</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 159).

<sup>54</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 500).

<sup>55</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 215).

<sup>56</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 243).



discovered the subject's 'true' nature; for the former, it had an entirely physical, if creaky standing of its own that came to its abrupt and almost hysterical conclusion at the tips of his fingers and toes; while Schopenhauer and Schlegel described, overlooking the divergent question of its temperament, an elemental, imperishable and collective force of nature that was said to lurk about 'within' the subject as indeed it lurked about 'within' everything else. 'What presents and maintains the phenomenon of the world', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'is the *will* that also lives and strives in every individual'.<sup>57</sup> If one turns to Schlegel, one hears: 'no man is merely man, but that at the same time he can and should be genuinely and truly all mankind. Therefore, man in reaching out time and again beyond himself to seek and find the complement of his innermost being in the depths of another'.<sup>58</sup>

While Schlegel and Schopenhauer attributed an exorbitant amount of importance to the subject's 'inner-nature' - a reputedly 'infinite' quality that, to reiterate the point, extended well beyond the outer extremities of his own person into the world at large, Stirner valued that which was finite: his bodily presence and personality. The 'ultimate reality', as Stirner saw it, assumed a wildly distorted image of its own bearer - the 'Stirner personality' itself; whereas Schopenhauer firmly believed it represented an underlying, all encompassing 'essence' of nature. The same was true of Schlegel; he also talked, as we have heard, of 'individuality' as an 'eternal' quality found, somewhere or other, 'within' the 'romantic

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<sup>57</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Parerga and Paralipomena', Vol. II (1851 / 1974 p. 218).

<sup>58</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

poet' and nature alike.<sup>59</sup>

Stirner's ontology certainly did not, like Schlegel or Schopenhauer's, extend, as I suggested, beyond the cuffs of his sleeves or the tips of his shoes or, for that matter, beyond the span of his lifetime, but it harboured, nonetheless, a similar intent. All three writers aspired to distend the subject's 'true' nature, wherever it was to be found, to an incalculable, all encompassing degree.

Opinions were wholly divided as to what exactly constituted the aforementioned 'self'; nor, to take particular issue with Lewis and Schenk, can it be said to have constituted any sort of 'terra firma' or firmly secured 'anchor'. The very question of 'self' was, as I hope to illustrate, hotly contested and a matter of the utmost uncertainty. None more so, I propose, than its *presentation* in the work of Friedrich Schlegel and Arthur Schopenhauer and *portrayal* in Max Stirner's highly theatrical work of political philosophy, 'The Ego and its Own' (1844).

The question of 'self' was certainly not restricted to the three writers I have mentioned; it appeared to unsettle and perplex a great many of them, not all of whom, to repeat the point, were affiliated, in a chronological sense, with romanticism. While the problems associated with pinpointing the basis of 'selfhood' or individuality endured well beyond the handful of decades allotted to romanticism, its emergence can almost certainly be traced back, I believe, to a number of

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<sup>59</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 155).

writers associated with it.

#### V. A CAPTIVE OF THE EARTH?

Let me take this opportunity to take a general, if rather cursory 'survey', so to speak, among a handful of 'romantic' writers not only to set a 'common scene', but to substantiate my broader claim that the question of 'self' represented a 'notable motif' of the literary form. It certainly proved a significant stumbling block for a greater majority of them.

One question, above all others, comes to the fore; it was, I believe, *the* quintessential question Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Stirner all hoped to answer in the course of their respective studies.

In the first and earliest reference, taken from the first volume of Étienne Pivert de Sénancour's desultory but, at times, brilliantly piercing collection of letters, 'Obermann' (1803), we read the following: 'I questioned my problematic destiny, my storm-tossed heart, and that incomprehensible Nature which includes all things and yet seems not to include the satisfaction of my desires. What in the world am I? said I to myself'.<sup>60</sup>

Turning quickly to the second point of reference, taken from Gérard de Nerval's 'Aurelia' (1855), we hear him ask: "How can I have existed so long", I said to myself, "outside Nature and without identifying myself with her? Everything lives, everything acts, everything corresponds; the magnetic rays emanating from myself or

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<sup>60</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. I (1804 / 1910 p. 22 - 23).

others traverse unimpeded the infinite chain of created things; it is a transparent network which covers the world, and its fine threads communicate from one another to the planets and the stars. I am now a captive on the earth, but I converse with the choiring stars, who share my joys and sorrows!"'.<sup>61</sup>

Thirdly, I would like to draw your attention to an entry from Henri-Frédéric Amiel's posthumous 'Journal' (1882). On the 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1870 Amiel asked: 'At bottom, what is individual life? A variation of an eternal theme - to be born, to live, to feel, to hope, to love, to suffer, to weep, to die. Some would add to these, to grow rich, to think, to conquer; but in fact, whatever frantic efforts one may make, however one may strain and excite oneself, one can but cause a greater or slighter undulation in the line of one's destiny. Supposing a man renders the series of fundamental phenomena a little more evident to others or a little more distinct to himself, what does it matter? The whole is still nothing but a fluttering of the infinitely little, the insignificant repetition of an invariable theme. In truth, whether the individual exists or no, the difference is so absolutely imperceptible in the whole of things that every complaint and every desire is ridiculous. Humanity in its entirety is but a flash in the duration of the planet, and the planet may return to the gaseous state without the sun's feeling it even for a second. The individual is the infinitesimal of nothing'.<sup>62</sup>

With the fourth point of reference, taken from an unaccountably neglected novel - at least in translation,

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<sup>61</sup> Gérard de Nerval, 'Aurelia' (1855 / 1931 p. 51 - 52).

<sup>62</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 176).

Alfred de Musset's 'The Confession of a Child of the Century' (1836), an equal, in its way, of both Lermontov's far more well known 'A Hero of Our Times' (1840) and Constant's 'Adolphe' (1816), we read: 'And we, poor nameless dreams, pale and sorrowful apparitions, helpless ephemera, we who are animated by the breath of a second, in order that death may exist, we exhaust ourselves with fatigue in order to prove that we are living for a purpose, and that something indefinable is stirring within us'.<sup>63</sup> Earlier in the novel, Octave - de Musset's protagonist asks: 'Are we that which is in us?'.<sup>64</sup>

Turning to my fifth point of reference - Maurice de Guérin's 'Journal' (1842), a work which has all the piercing introspection of Sénancour near his best and all the floweriness of Friedrich Schlegel at his worst, we read: 'this immense circulation of life within the broad bosom of Nature, this life which springs from an invisible fountain and swells the veins of the universe; obeying its upward impulse, it rises from kingdom to kingdom, ever becoming purer and nobler, to beat at last in the heart of man, the centre in to which flow from all sides its thousand currents'.<sup>65</sup> A little later in his 'Journal', de Guérin asked: 'Of what, then, is my nature made?'.<sup>66</sup>

The preceding array of citations present a characteristic and quite typical picture not the least bit unfamiliar to

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<sup>63</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'The Confession of a Child of the Century' (1836 / 1908 p. 330 - 331).

<sup>64</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'The Confession of a Child of the Century' (1836 / 1908 p. 34).

<sup>65</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 78).

<sup>66</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 167).

those acquainted with the work of Schlegel or Schopenhauer. The subject finds himself at the foot of a vast and intimidating backdrop, a temporal and spatial setting adopted by many romantic writers - not just Schlegel and Schopenhauer - which makes it incredibly difficult for him, the subject, to establish anything, not least of all his own person, with any degree of clarity. Everything around him conspires to imperil the effort from the start. The subject is engulfed by his looming surroundings and made to feel, by comparison, very small indeed.

The subject is clearly implicated, so he imagined, in an 'infinite' scheme, but the basis of the association leaves him puzzled and bewildered. Maurice de Guérin spoke very much in the same tones as Sénancour and de Musset; he talked of the 'immense circulation of life within the broad bosom of Nature'; it sprang from an 'invisible fountain' and swelled in 'the veins of the universe' as it did 'in the heart of man'.<sup>67</sup> Whatever affiliation the subject was said to have with nature, it mystified de Guérin as greatly as it had mystified Sénancour and de Musset before him. Faced with such immense and 'incomprehensible' forces what value could *Octave*, *Obermann*, de Guérin and Amiel imagine themselves to have had? Compared to nature, the individual came a poor second best: he seemed, by comparison, diminutive, ephemeral and insignificant - an 'infinitesimal of nothing', as Amiel described him.<sup>68</sup>

We see, in the flurry of references, not only something

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<sup>67</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 78).

<sup>68</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 176).

of Schlegel and Schopenhauer's bleary eyed impediment, their 'presbyopia' as I referred to it, which tended to favour sweeping, whole scale views (most recognisable in Amiel's contribution when he said: 'In truth, whether the individual exists or no, the difference is so absolutely imperceptible in the whole of things'), but also the onset of their 'aphasic' complaint.<sup>69</sup> If we turn, in this respect, to Alfred de Musset, he certainly appeared to struggle to account for the 'indefinable something', as he described it, which apparently crept about inside of him.

The question of self was not so easily answered. It posed a formidable problem.

'What in the world am I? said I to myself', as *Obermann* asked.<sup>70</sup> Alfred de Musset seemed more than a little uncertain too: 'Are we that which is in us?', as *Octave* wondered.<sup>71</sup> 'At bottom', as Amiel also asked, 'what is individual life?'.<sup>72</sup> Not that Gérard de Nerval was any sort of exception. '"How can I have existed so long"', as he asked himself, '"outside Nature and without identifying myself with her? "'.<sup>73</sup> And Maurice de Guérin was equally perplexed: 'Of what, then, is my nature made?'.<sup>74</sup>

The 'problem' raises a number of pressing questions

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<sup>69</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 176).

<sup>70</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. I (1804 / 1910 p. 22 - 23).

<sup>71</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'The Confession of a Child of the Century' (1836 / 1908 p. 34).

<sup>72</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 176).

<sup>73</sup> Gérard de Nerval, 'Aurelia' (1855 / 1931 p. 51 - 52).

<sup>74</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 167).

concerning the identity and presence of the individual subject within a 'universal' scheme. What, for instance, constituted his 'inmost' nature? Was it, as *Octave* suggested, a ghostly sounding 'something' which 'stirred within' *him* and, presumably, continues to 'stir' within *us*?<sup>75</sup> Are we, then, to believe it was a means by which the subject, the individual person, was able to 'commune', in spirit, with an infinite and 'incomprehensible' force of nature? What advantage did it afford him? And what, more importantly, was its capital drawback? The emphasis placed on his deliquescent nature, collective in scope and elementary in character, appeared to do a tremendous disservice to his singular standing as an individual person. What of his more definitive qualities, his personality for example? Was it not simply effaced for the sake of universal ideal, a conjectural and purely theoretical concern?

Let us now turn to the way in which Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Stirner all addressed the question of the subject's 'true' nature.

#### VI. THE THREE SUBJECTS

The subject begins his life, as far as the present thesis is concerned, in Schlegel's 'theory' of 'romantic poetry' as a willing, an all too willing, participant in a monistic scheme: Schlegel's syrupy and discerning idea of nature itself. 'Whoever doesn't come to know Nature through love', as Schlegel credulously imagined, 'will never come to know her'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'The Confession of a Child of the Century' (1836 / 1908 p. 330 - 331).

<sup>76</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 250).



Schlegel aligned his romantic subject with a poeticised and thoroughly fastidious idea of nature. It was, if only on the surface, a happy and uncomplicated union; it allowed, the 'romantic poet', Schlegel's subject, to feel at one with its 'infinite riches' as he shared, deep down, its poetic and, in his particular example, perfumatory 'essence': 'Beautiful is what reminds us of nature and thereby stimulates a sense of the infinite fullness of life'.<sup>77</sup> Schlegel's affiliation with nature, selective though it was, was not, given his predilection for monumental and irresolvable ideas, without its rewards.

Irrespective of the heavy costs the association eventually came to exact, Schlegel's subject did not object in the least to submerging his identity with that of nature as it distended his compass to an inordinate degree. He was, so to speak, the sun, the moon and the stars; his 'inmost nature', if nothing else about him, was on a 'universal' scale. 'No man is merely man', Schlegel imagined, 'but that at the same time he can and should be genuinely and truly all mankind. Therefore, man in reaching out time and again beyond himself to seek and find the complement of his innermost being in the depths of another, is certain to return ever to himself'.<sup>78</sup>

Whether Schlegel's subject had any intention of ever snapping out his reverie and returning to himself, as it were, was questionable to say the very least; nevertheless, he certainly found his 'compliment' in

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<sup>77</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 248).

<sup>78</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

nature and the affinity, hospitable and generous as it was, filled Schlegel's verdant poet with 'joy'.

In the third chapter, the subject finds himself, to his immediate horror, in Schopenhauer's doctrine. It was a far cry from Schlegel's 'theory'. While his affinity with nature was no less as strong - for he too was implicated, in the most elemental sense, in its universal scheme, the prospect was not nearly so enticing.

Schopenhauer's subject also had the 'luxury', significantly less alluring in his case, of extending his reach to an untold degree; he was no less privy to the nature of the world for he also happened to share its inherent character, the will. 'The inner being itself', turning to Schopenhauer, 'is present whole and undivided in everything in nature, in every living being'.<sup>79</sup> Unlike the 'romantic poet', the association struck him as anything but complimentary.

Schopenhauer's 'subject of knowledge' did not regard nature, as Schlegel was particularly prone to do, as a mawkish collection of fragrant flowers, but a fierce, deranged force which conspired, in the most predatory sense, to derail, if not devour him. 'How frightful is this nature to which we belong!', as the philosopher exclaimed.<sup>80</sup>

Schopenhauer's subject, having arrived at his terrifying conclusion early on, thought it best, initially, to stick his head in the sand and drown out, as best he could, its

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<sup>79</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 129).

<sup>80</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 356).

disturbing caterwaul with a wall of violins, flutes and bassoons. When his first attempt at reprieve - his immersion in music, came up short, as all temporary solutions inevitably tend to do, Schopenhauer's subject set about the rather more conclusive task of dissolving the relationship for good to secure his *personal* escape from nature's imbecilic will, no matter the cost.

Stirner's 'un-man', quite unlike Schlegel or Schopenhauer's subject, did not, from the very start, wish to be implicated in any sort of monistic or communal scheme whether it happened to emanate from nature or not. 'To be a man', as Stirner stated, 'is not to realize the ideal of *man*, but to present *oneself*, the individual'.<sup>81</sup>

Stirner's objections, as we will hear in the fourth chapter, went several steps further down the line than those expressed by Schopenhauer's 'subject of knowledge'. The 'un-man' cut all ties, with immediate effect, with every groupish affiliation that came his way. The 'individual', as Stirner maintained, 'is the irreconcilable enemy of every *generality*'.<sup>82</sup>

The 'un-man' did not seek his compliment anywhere as it simply could not be found. To identify himself with an extrinsic or adventitious *idea* would, ultimately, be to his detriment; at best, it would only reflect a paltry portion of himself, his 'inner-spirit', while the larger, far more significant remainder - all that which Stirner considered exclusively his 'own', would be left unaccounted for and entirely ignored: 'In all this the individual, the individual man, is regarded as refuse,

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<sup>81</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 163).

<sup>82</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 192).

and on the other hand the general man, "man", is honoured'.<sup>83</sup>

The 'un-man' demanded, above all else, to be regarded as a tangible, autonomous and 'unique' figure not a ghostly 'spirit' or generalised 'essence' (for that would do an unpardonable injustice to his demonstrable bodily presence and irrepressible 'personality'). Stirner's subject did not care in the least for whatever 'higher' reward his 'inmost-nature' was reputed to afford him. 'Stirner does not deny the existence of external causes', as John Welsh recently said, 'He denies their legitimacy. He rejects the claim that external causes are the absolute source of meaning and allegiance. He rejects the claim that external causes are everything and that the person is nothing'.<sup>84</sup>

Stirner did not wish to convene in spirit with anything if it was to the exclusion of his body and personality. It would be tantamount to wishing himself away and effacing his own identity for little more than the sake of an extraneous idea. 'If somebody told you you were altogether spirit', as a chest beating Stirner wrote, 'you would take hold of your body and not believe him, but answer: "I have a spirit, no doubt, but do not exist only as spirit, but as a man with a body"'.<sup>85</sup>

Not to say that Stirner did not entertain a similarly heightened belief in himself, in his own individuality, but unlike Schlegel's 'romantic poet' or Schopenhauer's 'subject of knowledge', it did not sneak about 'within'

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<sup>83</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 182).

<sup>84</sup> John F. Welsh, 'Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation' (2010 p. 48).

<sup>85</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 31).

him as a benign or, in Schopenhauer's example, malign monousious entity. Stirner's 'might' was anything but vicarious; it did not emanate from a second hand source - nature in their case, but the corporeal, if overblown and clownish caricature Max Stirner intently made of himself. 'He is himself', as Amiel might well have said of Stirner's 'un-man', 'principle, motive, and end of his own destiny; he is himself, and that is enough for him'.<sup>86</sup>

It is possible, I believe, to 'chart' the subject's 'passage' from his initial entry into the flowery and seemingly endless maze of Schlegel's romantic 'theory' through to the sinister underbelly of Schopenhauer's doctrine and eventually onto the rickety funfair of 'The Ego and Its Own' and see him emerge from the study an altogether different figure, in a sense, from the one who entered it.

'Within the modern period', turning to Peter McCormick, 'the shift from one ideology to another can be explained as a new answer given to the same basic question'.<sup>87</sup> The question, need I say, was put most accurately of all by Maurice de Guérin when he asked: 'Of what, then, is my nature made?'.<sup>88</sup> Stirner's 'answer', compared to that of Schlegel or Schopenhauer, was certainly novel, but not so novel that it could be considered entirely 'new'. Certain traits, for all Stirner's novel innovations, remained.

In moving from one subject to another one is able to detect, not only his gradual transformation from willing

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<sup>86</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 17).

<sup>87</sup> Peter McCormick, 'The Concept of Self in Political Thought' (1979 p. 691).

<sup>88</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 167).

monist (Schlegel's naive, snooty poet) to unwilling monist (Schopenhauer's jumpy and understandably desperate subject) to confirmed somatist (the recalcitrant figure of the 'un-man'), but his growing hostility to universal schemes and eventual 'liberation' from them. Not only does one become aware of the subject's emerging independence, but also an incremental sense of his presence and physical statue. By the end of the thesis, the subject - Stirner's 'un-man' has apparently 'liberated' himself from all the universal, brooding powers 'within' and, without any outside 'help' or influence but his own, taken his first few unsteady steps.

Stirner may well have successfully clambered out of one gigantic 'sea of riddles', to use one of Schopenhauer's expressions, but he found himself, all the same, in a no less troubling, if rather more exclusive paddling pool of his own.<sup>89</sup> The source of Stirner's 'might' - his 'ego', unlike Schopenhauer's will, may well have been an entirely autogeneous quality, but it remained, for all his insistence to the contrary, equally arcane. 'The tangled web', as Herman Broch might have said of the subject's gradual transformation from universal essence to egocentric personality, 'unraveled itself only to be knotted in fresh tangles'.<sup>90</sup>

The three figures placed, as I have said, a similarly supreme value on the subject's nature; however, the three would certainly not have agreed, as their schemes unfolded, as to where it actually resided. 'To say that

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<sup>89</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 110).

<sup>90</sup> Herman Broch, 'The Sleepwalkers' (1932 / 1996 p. 105). Translated by Edwin & Willa Muir. Vintage International, NYC.

the Romantic "believed" in the individual', turning to Margaret Scalan's perceptive essay, 'Le Vide Intérieur: Self and Consciousness in *René*, *Atala*, and *Adolphe*' (1979), 'is to say what almost everyone will accept and no one understand, for the attitude toward the self is by no means consistent among the Romantics'.<sup>91</sup>

Stirner's would have flatly rejected Schlegel's ontological account as well as its far more detailed exposition in Schopenhauer's doctrine of will on the grounds that it was not only fallacious, but escapist in the extreme. They claimed to speak of one thing, the individual subject, when, in actual fact, they were speaking of his 'inner-nature' which did not exclusively belong to him or anyone else for that matter: it was anything but individual. The subject's personal qualities, on the other hand, hardly aroused, in an affirmative sense, their curiosity or interest, rather, it was 'his' universality which captivated them.

If one tries to imagine what their 'subdermal' subject might look like, one gets little, if any, sense of his terrenity. This, I believe, is exactly where the pinch can begin to be felt. It is only with the greatest difficulty that one is able to picture either Schlegel's 'romantic poet' or Schopenhauer's 'subject of knowledge' at all. Even then, one is faced with a phantasmagorical, featureless 'everyman' not a distinct, corporeal or remotely recognisable person.

Schlegel and Schopenhauer afforded significantly less value to the subject's integumental qualities, his 'hide

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<sup>91</sup> Margarat Scalan, 'Le Vide Intérieur: Self and Consciousness in *René*, *Atala*, and *Adolphe*' (1979 / 80 p. 30).

and hair' as Stirner has already described them.<sup>92</sup> Schlegel and Schopenhauer's emphasis on all that was diffuse and visceral 'within' expressed, as Stirner would no doubt have said, 'a concern for man as man, not as a person'.<sup>93</sup>

The kernel outweighs the shell: this, to put it very simply indeed, is what one learns from Schlegel and Schopenhauer. It may well, of course, be true, but only in the sense that the Venus de Milo is also, petrologically speaking, little more than a glorified lump of stone. The subject was supremely important to Schlegel and Schopenhauer, not because he was a distinct, singular figure, but on account of his amorphous make up: his 'inner-nature'. It was a stark, quite featureless generality which reflected little, if a single definitive thing, of the subject concerned. It was common to one and all. Not that Stirner's objections to Schlegel and Schopenhauer would have ended there.

Their ontology pointed in a single direction and that direction led towards a tight exit through which the pair hoped to escape themselves, albeit for different reasons, to reconvene with all that was universal. Schlegel and Schopenhauer wished to leave the 'limitations' of their individuality behind for the greener, less involved pastures of 'life' eternal.

'Rid, rid!', Stirner shouted, 'That is its battlecry, get rid even of yourselves'.<sup>94</sup> That which Schlegel and Schopenhauer valued was nothing more than a very handy

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<sup>92</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 28).

<sup>93</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 28).

<sup>94</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 148).



means of escape that allegedly 'liberated' their respective subjects from all that was bodily, earthly and essentially *his* in favour of whatever 'riches' were to be found elsewhere.

To put it another way, it is somewhat like the owner of a grand house talking very fondly, not strictly about the house itself - its upkeep, after all, is a continuous burden of brightly coloured bills, but a little known backdoor which opens out, if you happen to be 'lucky' enough to find it, onto an extensive and unimaginably peaceful communal garden. That which Schlegel and Schopenhauer coveted was precisely the backdoor through which they could eventually bid farewell to all that was individual, personal and taxing. 'Longing and hope everywhere, and nothing but these', as Stirner would indubitably have said. 'For me, call it romanticism'.<sup>95</sup> Their ontology was extremely escapist in character.

Regardless of the broad stretch of water one might mistakenly assume would separate the monism of Schlegel and Schopenhauer on one bank and the solipsism of Stirner on the other, there are a series of stepping stones which, I believe, enable one to successfully cross from one side of the water to the other.

All three writers sought to distend the subject's 'nature', as they saw it, to encompass *all* things, albeit by an entirely different set of means. Schlegel and Schopenhauer emphasised the universal scope of his 'inner-nature', while Stirner glorified his finite and particular standing as a 'transitory' and egocentric 'personality'.

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<sup>95</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 284).

It is as well to bear in mind, at this particular point, two observant remarks made by the bullish English critic, T. E. Hulme in the course of his posthumous collection of essays, 'Speculations' (1924), 'Here is the root of all romanticism', Hulme wrote, 'that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities'.<sup>96</sup> Turning to the second of Hulme's contributions, one reads: 'The romantic because he thinks man infinite must always be talking about the infinite; and as there is always the bitter contrast between what you think you ought to be able to do and what man actually can, it always tends, in its later stages at any rate, to be gloomy'.<sup>97</sup>

While Hulme's second observation certainly holds true of Arthur Schopenhauer's cheerless doctrine, the same cannot so readily be said of his ebullient counterpart, Max Stirner nor, for that matter, the odorous critic, Friedrich Schlegel.

It is my contention that all three writers believed, to no less a degree, in the 'infinite' wealth of the individual subject. 'For Schlegel', turning, firstly, to the critic Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert for corroboration, 'self-consciousness is consciousness of an I, which is not a solitary cogito or *Ich*, but rather part of an organic unity, part of something greater'.<sup>98</sup> 'Man's essence', as Dennis Rasmussen said of Schopenhauer's doctrine, 'consists in his insatiable desire or will

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<sup>96</sup> T. E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism' collected in 'Speculations' (1924 / 1977 p. 116).

<sup>97</sup> T. E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism' collected in 'Speculations' (1924 / 1977 p. 119).

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, 'Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy' (2007 p. 149).

which can never in time reach a final goal'.<sup>99</sup> 'Stirner is the philosopher', as another critic, John Carroll, claimed, 'of the infinitely possible. The egoist is the limitless one; his freedom lies in his ability to create his own infinity'.<sup>100</sup>

Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Stirner similarly believed the subject had, in one sense or another, a legitimate claim to an all determining quality of colossal proportions. Hulme was almost certainly correct when he said it presented them all with a certain difficulty - a 'bitter contrast' as he described it. It rested on their ability, not only to identify and successfully communicate whatever heightened ideas they entertained, but reconcile it with the subject's physical standing.

The 'problem' certainly left the otherwise loquacious Max Stirner at something of a loss for words. Schopenhauer also struggled and, ultimately failed, to satisfactorily explain the catastrophic conflict between his physical state and universal 'inner-nature', nature's inimical will. Not to say that Schlegel's 'preliminary account', establishing, as he did, the ever receding parameters of 'romantic poetry', was the least bit successful either. It, Schlegel's account, was not only over perfumed, but compromised by a bewildering use of language and giddy fixation with 'time eternal' that left one, in the end, nauseated (the overpowering floral smell), disorientated (the spin of time) and none the wiser (the critic's macrology).

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<sup>99</sup> Dennis Rasmussen, 'Immortality: Revolt Against Being' (1975 p. 68).

<sup>100</sup> John Carroll, 'Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky' ((1974 p. 41).

Dupuis and Cotonet, to cast your mind back to that particular pair, could certainly count themselves fortunate they decided to call it a day and abandon their investigations before they got tangled up in the ontological questions surrounding the romantic subject. The dilettantes would have faced a problem that even Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Stirner all failed, in the end, to adequately explain.

#### VII. THE INSUFFERABLE LOVEGOAT

Max Stirner was not your customary sort of romantic. All the same, to say something to that effect implies, that he was, to some extent or other, a *sort* of a romantic. Given my largely contrary estimation of Max Stirner's affinity with Schlegel and Schopenhauer it may well strike you as odd, if not thoroughly foolish that I consider him any sort of romantic writer at all.

There is a temptation, as I suggested, to draw very sharp line between Max Stirner, on one side, and Schlegel, Schopenhauer and, without wishing to sound the least bit dismissive, a number of 'secondary writers' on the other. Not to say the temptation, on the face of it, is entirely unwarranted.

Stirner did not share, for instance, their monistic leanings; his particular outlook was not clouded by the thick somnambulistic fog that hung over their work; he was also insusceptible to the mesmeric influence of 'time eternal' nor, for that matter, were his percipient faculties 'impaired' by anything resembling a 'presbyopic' condition. If anything, the opposite was true. Stirner's focus was entirely 'myopic' and centred

on one thing: the ostensible, brawny and obstreperous presence of the 'un-man'.

Nevertheless, I am still inclined, whether it is foolhardy or not, to consider Max Stirner a romantic writer, if a rather uncommon one. I say 'uncommon' as Stirner had an extremely ambivalent and intricate relationship with a number of writers, especially Schopenhauer, and a rather antagonistic one with romanticism as a whole. If, I should immediately add, his ideas are considered in an *interpretative* and *thematic* sense. What makes Stirner a 'sort of romantic', as I inelegantly put it, is that he tried to confront, as best he could, a question that had not, in his opinion, been answered ingenuously by religion, political philosophy or, as I intend to argue, a handful of romantic writers who preceded him.

'Clearly, the one thing that unifies men in a given age', as Jacques Barzun wrote in 'Romanticism and the Modern Ego' (1943), 'is not their individual philosophies but the dominant problem that these philosophies are designed to solve'.<sup>101</sup> And following Barzun's lead, the fundamental problem Stirner, along with Schlegel and Schopenhauer, sought to address, if not exactly 'solve' was the very nature of the subject's 'real' identity.

Max Stirner's intemperate treatise on the prevailing political and religious beliefs of his time can legitimately be directed towards wider philosophical targets. Stirner had little patience for the dispersonating nature of *all* ideological forms including

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<sup>101</sup> Jacques Barzun, 'Romanticism and the Modern Ego' (1943 p. 21 - 22).

those, as I intend to argue, clouded by the generalising tendencies associated with romanticism.

Stirner wished to stamp out the unsavoury and unwelcome intrusion of all dogmas, abstractions and speculative theories in intellectual life. 'And so', as Pierre Drieu la Rochelle wrote in 'Will o' the Wisp' (1931), 'for want of being held together by ideas, the world was so inconsistent that it offered him no means of support. Only solid things kept their form for him'.<sup>102</sup> Fixed ideas not only inhibited one's ability to think freely, but exerted a despotic hold over one's attention and, ultimately, warped one's immediate concerns: 'with so many a man', as Stirner maintained, 'a thought becomes a "maxim", whereby he himself is made prisoner to it, so that it is not he that has the maxim, but rather it that has him'.<sup>103</sup> 'As psychologically concrete entities', as Lawrence Stepelevich, in his study of Stirner, corroborated, 'these abstract essences such as Man, God, Mankind, State, Truth, stand over and against the individual thinker in their hostile demands to be served and worshipped. In short, they have turned against their creator'.<sup>104</sup>

Stirner's fears certainly proved to be well founded as far as Arthur Schopenhauer was concerned. The philosopher came under the increasing pressure of his own doctrine - it ganged up on him in the most conspiratorial of ways; so much so that by the time it reached its conclusion, it was very much in the driving seat and had almost

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<sup>102</sup> Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, 'Will o' the Wisp' (1931 / 1966 p. 23). Translated by Martin Robinson. Calder and Boyars, London.

<sup>103</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 59).

<sup>104</sup> Lawrence S. Stepelevich, 'The Revival of Max Stirner' (1974 p. 326 - 327).

completely done away with him altogether. Schopenhauer's concerns, at the final stage of his scheme, were almost entirely theoretical and rang very hollowly indeed.

Schopenhauer's doctrine 'afforded' his subject one last throw of the dice and the 'opportunity' certainly had one incentive in its favour - his expectant release from the philosopher's horrendous theory even if it was cut short, as we will eventually hear, by one major, unavoidable drawback.

All zealots - regardless of their particular philosophical, social or religious cause, no longer openly expressed their personal opinion nor particularly cared to hear one expressed in return. The said 'types', Stirner believed, far preferred to have 'conceptual' goals on their hands and work, instead, towards the fulfillment of those. Whatever end they purported to champion, no matter what it happened to be, invariably proved antithetical - in complete contrast to their normal 'day to day' affairs. Their concerns, so Stirner believed, were purely conceptual.

If we turn briefly to the novelist, Robert Musil, we may begin to develop a clearer impression of exactly the type of hypocrisy Stirner sought to confront in 'The Ego and Its Own'. Directing your attention to a page of Musil's stupendous novel - 'The Man Without Qualities' (1930 - 43 / 1997), we come across the following passage:

'Feuermaul, for instance, was an industrious young man who could be quite unpleasant in the struggle for his own advantage, but his lovegoat happened to be "man", and the moment he thought of man in general, there was no

restraining his unsatisfied benevolence'.<sup>105</sup>

Musil perfectly expressed the impersonal and remote concern, to take the example at hand, of 'humanitarianism' - the 'human religion' as Stirner derisively referred to it.<sup>106</sup> Stirner would, I believe, have said *Feuermaul's* attitude was quite typical of the kind of hypocrisy that was rife, if not pandemic in the intellectual world at large. In this instance, it was exemplified by *Feuermaul's* unbridled 'theoretical' concern for 'man' which was not, in practice, matched by the young man's 'unpleasant' behaviour towards them. 'To be sure, he cares for each individual', as Stirner would have sarcastically said of *Feuermaul*, 'but only because he wants to see his beloved ideal realized everywhere'.<sup>107</sup>

*Feuermaul's* 'lovegoat', as Musil put it, was not 'man the person', but, in stark contrast, 'man the non person': the collective 'idea' of *mankind*. And the difference between the two, Stirner believed, was not only appreciable, but irreconcilable. The former did not pertain, in any meaningful way, to the latter. A vast gulf had come to distinguish 'man', the all too general term, from the person himself. What had 'man' have to do with Stirner, after all? What business was it of his? It clearly did not concern him, not in personal capacity at

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<sup>105</sup> Robert Musil, 'The Man Without Qualities' (1930 - 43 / 1997 p. 1122).

<sup>106</sup> Stirner wrote: 'The **human religion** is only the last metamorphosis of the Christian religion. For liberalism is a religion because it separates my essence from me and sets it above me, because it exalts "man" to the same extent as any other religion does its God or idol, because it makes what is mine into something otherworldly, because in general it makes what it is mine, out of my qualities and my property, something alien - namely, an "essence"; in short, because it sets me beneath man, and thereby creates for me a "vocation"'. See 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 158).

<sup>107</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 72).



any rate.

It was almost certainly a lofty and magnanimous sounding cause to champion, but *Feuermaul's* 'humanitarianism' did not extend, not with anything like the same degree of strength, to a single human example. Stirner would certainly have had the measure of *Feuermaul*: 'He asks very little about your private opinions and private follies, if only he can espy "man" in you'.<sup>108</sup> And, as Stirner would have added, 'he loves in you not Hans, of whom he knows nothing and wants to know nothing, but man'.<sup>109</sup> *Feuermaul* was not the least bit interested in 'Hans', to coin Stirner's turn of phrase, but showered his untold 'benevolence' on an impersonal and insubstantial idea: 'man in general', as Musil described it.<sup>110</sup>

'Man' had gone awry. The term no longer pertained to that which was extant or determinate: it was a billowing abstraction. 'Man', as Stirner believed, 'is not the individual, but man is a *thought*'.<sup>111</sup> He vehemently refuted such notions as they debased, as I will explain, the individual person. 'Stirner's fundamental critique of humanism', as Saul Newman corroborated, 'shows such identities to be mere apparitions or "spooks"; and yet, these spooks have a powerful effect on the individual, incarcerating him within a discursive prison, reducing his difference and uniqueness to abstract, totalizing uniformity, and sacrificing his autonomy on the altar of Man. That is why the individual must distance himself

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<sup>108</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 155).

<sup>109</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 155).

<sup>110</sup> Robert Musil, 'The Man Without Qualities' (1930 - 43 / 1997 p. 1122).

<sup>111</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 292).

from Man and Humanity, why he must free himself from essence'.<sup>112</sup>

Who or what, then, was to blame? Stirner firmly believed a certain double standard was at play at the heart of theoretical thought and the blame lay squarely at the feet of none other than theoreticians themselves. If one failed to redress the balance, there was a distinct danger, if it was not already too late, that philosophical thought would, at best, become entirely meaningless or, as seemed more likely, take a pernicious turn for the worse.

Critics and philosophers alike, with Schlegel and Schopenhauer firmly in mind, prioritised the elemental 'essence' of 'mankind' rather than any one particular figure; it may well have afforded them, in light of its universality, a far more profuse topic to wax lyrical about, but it did not pertain to the Christopher, the Peter or the Paul of them, but the 'essence' which resided 'within' all three of them. 'When the "higher essence" is mutually recognized', as John Welsh astutely said, 'persons do not actually recognize, respect, or revere each other, but only the "higher essence" that is hidden within them'.<sup>113</sup>

But, of course, 'man' was anything but individual, Stirner believed; it was a hollow abstraction which pertained to everyone in general rather than anyone in particular. It 'merely' described the least definitive of common qualities: man's all too precious 'spirit'. But

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<sup>112</sup> Saul Newman, 'Introduction: Re-encountering Stirner's Ghosts' collected in 'Max Stirner' (2011 p. 8).

<sup>113</sup> John F. Welsh, 'Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation' (2010 p. 64).

neither Christopher, Peter nor Paul could say, in all honesty, that it belonged solely to them yet, when the discussion turned to 'man', the 'spirit' - their *collective* spirit, was hallmarked as their all determining factor. The turn of events heralded a 'splitting in two' of the subject and the individual person - the Christopher, the Peter or the Paul - came off the worse for wear. Each one of them, without exception, came a poor second to 'their' universal essence.

To compound matters, the expression was bandied around philosophical circles as if it were something else entirely. The intelligentsia saw fit, in their perverse wisdom, to accord supreme value not to man - the person, but to 'man' - the pithy idea. There was, to reiterate the point, a sharp and discernible difference between the one and the other. And, as far as Stirner was able to tell, what was fit for the goose was not necessarily fit for the gander. 'When one looks to the *bottom* of anything, searches out its *essence*', as Stirner complained, 'one often discovers something quite other than what it seems to be; honeyed speech and a lying heart, pompous words and beggarly thoughts'.<sup>114</sup>

Philosophers and critics were perfectly entitled and at complete liberty to talk of 'man' in absolutely any terms they pleased as it no longer pertained to 'the human' but the 'essence', an all encompassing idea. And if something is so very far removed from one's immediate concerns or personal interests, one is naturally more inclined to say and do whatever one wants with it; 'man' has so little bearing on oneself, after all. They not only neglected

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<sup>114</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 40).

the very thing they purported to prioritise, man himself, but managed, along the way, to undermine and diminish his very standing in favour of a theoretical principle. The resultant effect of this upturn of events acted to set 'man the idea' against the person himself. The demonstrable lost out to the intangible, the singular to the universal and, ultimately, the person to an idea.

The theoretical 'interest' for 'man' was not only misleading, but injurious in the extreme.

The subject and the 'essence' were evidently not the same thing and the latter, to Stirner's amazement, took precedence over the former by virtue, if nothing else, of its universality. It was, to put it simply, a far 'larger' concern. Doctrinal lines ruled the roost, not man's so called 'concern' for 'man', not as a person at any rate. 'The one-sided search for essences', to refer to Welsh once again, 'subverts the realm of everyday life in which persons have a "this worldly", material reality and interact with each other as physical beings. In everyday life, individuals are not essences to each other. But, in modernist systems of knowledge, they have a "higher essence" hidden within'.<sup>115</sup> The same was true, I believe, not only of 'modernist systems of knowledge', but also the epistemology, not to mention the ontology of romanticism itself. Both of which pandered to paraphrase Welsh, the 'higher essence within'. It was most evident of all, as we will hear, in Schopenhauer's doctrine of nature's unpleasant and nonsensical will.

The 'intellectual', preoccupied as it was by remote and

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<sup>115</sup> John F. Welsh, 'Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation' (2010 p. 64).

impersonal concerns, clearly did not coincide with the 'private'. Stirner not only exposed the vast gulf and glaring contradiction between the one and the other, but came up, as we will hear, with a novel way to counteract his reservations and fears. If 'man' did not appertain to that which was readily apparent, singular or definitive then Stirner would celebrate its opposite, hence his 'un-manning' of man, as it were.

If one takes an interpretative liberty with Stirner's censorious political critique it may also, I believe, be said to encompass a critique of romanticism; it too can legitimately be counted among the fields of thought Stirner objected to. More especially, if one considers the spectral, impersonal and thoroughly escapist character of Schlegel and Schopenhauer's ontology.

Stirner's ideas are not the least bit dogmatic and lend themselves rather well to the interpretive allowances I intend to make of them. Stirner's work cannot only be understood in this light, but it is, I believe, extremely informing to do so.

Having said that, I ought to declare, before continuing, that what I fancy to be 'Stirner's critique of romanticism', as you might have already guessed by my use of the term 'interpretive allowances', is, if taken literally, no such thing at all. Stirner hardly mentions 'romanticism' (the word crops up twice in passing and he refers to it, on both occasions, in a dismissive sense) let alone provide a specific critique of it.

In the same breath, there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that Stirner was acquainted with the work of

Arthur Schopenhauer or Friedrich Schlegel or had even heard of them; nor, for that matter, does he make any mention of any of the other figures such as Sénancour, Amiel and de Musset who will ghost in and out of the present thesis.

To subject romanticism to the short tempered and fiery polemics of Max Stirner is not, as it may initially seem, such a completely foolish or erroneous thing to do. I believe aspects of Stirner's work are invaluable with regards to the present study, especially in light of Schopenhauer's doctrine of will. The affirmative tone, to take one notable quality of 'The Ego and Its Own', provides a particularly revealing counterpoint to Schopenhauer's renunciative scheme. To consider the two works, in a comparative sense, can be said to be mutually rewarding if one wishes to develop a greater critical appreciation of their respective schemes. What makes the relationship between the two writers, namely Schopenhauer and Stirner, particularly fruitful is that within each of their schemes resides a rich critique of one as there is of the other.

My own particular interest in Max Stirner is not, as usually seems the case, limited to the political radicalism of his thought, I am eager to present a more 'open' interpretation of his work. Consequently, I am not going to discuss his critique of liberalism or Christianity, his influence on libertarianism nor, for that matter, am I going to talk about his relationship to the theories of Hegel or Marx. This has all been done many times before and, in particular instances, very well

indeed.<sup>116</sup>

Stirner's work of 'political philosophy' and I use that term a little hesitantly (I believe that the wholly idiosyncratic figure had little patience for 'political thought' just as he had, as I will argue, little patience for the universalism associated with the theories of Schlegel and Schopenhauer), can be thought of as an important and contemporaneous, if largely unheralded critique of romanticism.

When one is writing a study of this sort there is, I dare say, yet another temptation one is best advised to ignore and that is to say something to the effect of 'by the time one gets to Max Stirner in the 1840's the individual subject finally came of age' or something equally trite and meaningless.

I do not wish, with this danger firmly in mind, to suggest, not for a single moment, 'The Ego and Its Own' represented something as significant as a definitive 'rupture' in the way in which the individual subject was regarded in literature or philosophy. Even Stirner, who was at odds with many of Schlegel and Schopenhauer's principal tendencies, cannot, at the risk of belaboring the point, be said to have been entirely free of them himself. Stirner's affinity with romanticism was refractory and complex.

Certain leanings, fashions, tendencies - call them what you will, do not adhere to red or green lights; they do not necessarily stop dead in their tracks or surge

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<sup>116</sup> For instance, Saul Newman's (ed) recent collection of essays, 'Max Stirner' (2011).

forward at convenient periodic junctures. One need only look, for instance, at the novels of Hamsun, Hesse or Lawrence or, for that matter, take into account the work of Bergson, Groddeck or Freud to see the interest in all that was visceral did not simply stop with Stirner but soldiered on, if you will, well into the following century.<sup>117</sup>

Rather than regard Stirner's book as a 'definitive breaking point' that heralded the end of *this* or anticipated the beginning of *that*, I prefer to regard the 'The Ego and Its Own' as an anomalous, provocatively playful, but ultimately flawed work that actively sought to break away from all the abstruse, rudimentary forces at play 'within' the subject to establish his *presence* in a far more substantial and personal light even if, as I suggested, it fell somewhat short of the mark.

Stirner was of the firm opinion that theories and the like not only acted to transmogrify the intellectual world, but, in a far more immediate and injurious sense, the individual himself. 'Stirner believed', turning to Isaiah Berlin's 'Karl Marx. His Life and Environment' (1939) to reiterate the point, 'that all programmes, ideals, theories, are so many artificially built prisons for the mind and the spirit, means of curbing the will, of concealing from the individual the existence of his own infinite creative powers, and that all systems must therefore be destroyed, not because they are evil, but

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<sup>117</sup> Take Georg Groddeck's 'The Book of the It' (1923) by means of an example: 'I hold the view that man', as he wrote, 'is animated by the Unknown, that there is within him an "Es," an "It," some wondrous force which directs both what he himself does, and what happens to him. The affirmation "I live" is only conditionally correct, it expresses only a small and superficial part of the fundamental principle "Man is lived by the It"' (1923 / 1935 p. 16). C. W. Daniel Co, London.



because they are systems; only when this has been achieved, would man, released from his unnatural fetters, become truly master of himself and attain to his full stature as a human being'.<sup>118</sup> With these fears firmly in mind, Stirner deliberately sought to *confront* the reader, not with an abstract set of ideas, but a vociferous, irreverent, if somewhat contrived 'personality'. Not that it was unaccompanied. The reader is also confronted with an unavoidable, if not always intentionally comic 'muscular presence'.

The crudity, certainly in tone, of 'The Ego and Its Own' belies, to be fair to Stirner, the subtlety and forethought that informed, what might otherwise be adjudged - and wrongly I believe, to be his inadvertent churlishness.

While Schlegel and Schopenhauer envisioned a *conceptual* subject who exemplified their respective schemes, Stirner, wary of impersonal abstractions and convoluted theories, went about - albeit with mixed success - the highly fraught task of *personifying* his own line of argument. 'I never execute anything *human* in the abstract', as Stirner warned, 'but always my own things; my human act is diverse from every other human act, and only by this diversity is it a real act belonging to me'.<sup>119</sup>

Stirner's brusque bearing, his churlishness in other words, was anything but inadvertent. His very manner was itself something of a calculated ploy; it was a means by which Stirner 'stepped in' to 'The Ego and Its Own' and

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<sup>118</sup> Isaiah Berlin, 'Karl Marx. His Life and Environment' (1939 p. 137 - 138).

<sup>119</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 161).

invested something of himself, caricature or not, within its pages in a bold, if contrived, effort to distinguish his work from the impersonal and 'deadening' schemes he berated.

The degree of sophistication - certainly in a stylistic sense, at play in Stirner's robust and boisterous egocentric 'display' is worthy of greater attention than it has been paid in circles beyond those of political theory. Even if, to concede something of my point, it is all too easy - especially when one's patience has come its end, to forget all about the considered and particularly admirable efforts Stirner made on this front.

Stirner's treatise certainly exceeded, if only in design, the outline of a conventional theoretical project. 'The Ego and Its Own' was, if nothing else, a novel and uncommon philosophical enterprise.

#### VIII. NAME CALLING

Stirner's work is extremely idiosyncratic and it hardly comes as much surprise that commentators and critics alike have struggled to describe it in an unanimous way.

Stirner has, over the years, been called all sorts of strange and, in some cases, particularly nasty names. If one turns to one critic, Stirner is apparently a 'nihilistic egoist', if not a complete 'paranoid schizophrenic',<sup>120</sup> while another critic has seen fit to call him a 'weak anarchist',<sup>121</sup> and, in one famous book,

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<sup>120</sup> R. W. K. Paterson, 'The Nihilistic Egoist' (1971 p. 18).

<sup>121</sup> David Leopold, 'The State and I: Max Stirner's Anarchism'

he has even been sarcastically referred to as a 'Saint'.<sup>122</sup> At the risk of adding another misleading nomenclature to the growing list, I cannot help but think of Max Stirner as an adolescent.

Again, I do not mean to sound too dismissive when I refer, on this occasion, to Stirner as an 'adolescent'. An adolescent is, if one thinks of them in biological terms, in a maturescent state and I certainly prefer to think of Stirner, primarily, in this light.

The 'Ego and Its Own' took, at the risk of contradicting myself, something of what can best be described as a 'maturescent turn'. It did not, to clarify the point, signal the subject's 'final coming of age' (Stirner was, I fear, in a prolonged, if not permanent spell of adolescence) nor did it herald, in any particularly significant sense, an intellectual breakthrough. It presented, in itself, an entirely familiar set of problems that were, regardless of their change of emphasis and innovative stylistic form, no less troublesome or explicable.

The one significant developmental aspect of Stirner's work, if one compares it to that of Schlegel and Schopenhauer, was that the individual subject, the 'un-man', had suddenly become acutely conscious of his body and 'inimitable' personality and they were no longer qualities he wished to readily forsake.

Any 'advance' Stirner made was not, ultimately speaking,

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collected in 'The New Hegelians. Politics and Philosophy the Hegelian School' (2006 p. 199).

<sup>122</sup> See Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology' (1845 / 1932).

startlingly insightful; it was an 'awakening', of sorts. An immediate apprehension of himself as *himself* rather than a universal 'essence'. It was akin, as I like to think of it, to one of those absolutely arbitrary pubescent spurts of growth. For the normal teenager, it results in the sudden disproportionate appearance of, let us say, his feet or hands. Thankfully for him the condition is temporary; the rest of his body will, given time, catch up with him even if, in the intervening period, he has to endure a spell of clumsiness on account of his cumberments.

Stirner was somewhat less fortunate. He was pushing forty and the rest of his body had yet to catch up with his disproportionately large biceps and 'ego' (the swaggering tone and force of his 'might'). Stirner's 'top heaviness' made him something of a clumsy, unwieldy thinker whose footing, to say the very least, was precariously balanced. Needless to say, I also happen to consider Stirner an 'adolescent' for a number of less flattering reasons.

Stirner's manner too often comes across like that of a particularly strepitant, irresponsible and boastful teenager and like any right minded teenager it is more than a little difficult to take everything he says without first taking a very deep breath and large pinch of salt. There is, as a word of warning, a considerable amount of testosterone, muscle-flexing and bluster to be found in the pages of 'The Ego and Its Own'. Half of which, if not more, comes across as sounding very spurious indeed. 'The Ego and Its Own' is an often testing work.

Stirner may well have made a radical and, initially, welcome departure from the likes of Schlegel and Schopenhauer, but it quickly descended into something of a tedious and farcical novelty. 'It is', as George Santayana said, 'a bold, frank, and rather tiresome protest against the folly of moral idealism, against the sacrifice of the individual to any ghostly powers such as God, duty, the state, humanity, or society; all of which this redoubtable critic called 'spooks' and regarded as fixed ideas and pathological obsessions'.<sup>123</sup>

Stirner is a terribly repetitive writer and often takes an awfully long time to say the simplest of things. He also has an unpleasant tendency to raise his voice and shout. On other occasions, he lost his tongue completely and lapsed, as I have already mentioned, into a state of speechlessness in his inability and frustration to articulate the illimitability of his own 'might', as he, rather unfortunately, saw fit to describe his 'ego'. I say 'unfortunately' as he met his end, for all his 'he-mannish' bravado, at the intervention of an insect.

Max Stirner's work, if you are not familiar with it, is like a very loud and colourful firework; it just so happens the impression is the first firework of an extremely noisy and draining display.

#### IX. A PAEAN TO THE BODY

'It would not be an exaggeration', as John E. Atwell believed, 'to dub Schopenhauer the philosopher of the body. To a greater extent than anyone before his time,

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<sup>123</sup> George Santayana, 'The German Mind: A Philosophical Diagnosis' (1968 p. 99).

and even since then, he makes the body - that is, one's own body (der eigene Leib) - the primary focus and indispensable condition of all philosophical inquiry. If required to give a single answer to the philosophizing subject's question, "What am I?" Schopenhauer would surely reply, "I am body", though, he would just as surely add, "in more than one way"<sup>124</sup>.

Atwell was somewhat off the mark. Schopenhauer was not, as he imagined, the so called 'philosopher of the body'. The subject's actual body was, in and of itself, of little concern to the philosopher; it was an entirely secondary matter. It was 'merely' a 'vehicle' or 'representation' as Schopenhauer described it - one among a numberless array of others, through which nature's will chose, whatever its reason, to exhibit itself.

'The whole body', turning to Schopenhauer, 'is the visible expression of the will'.<sup>125</sup> 'The body', as he made absolutely clear elsewhere, 'is the will itself objectively perceived as spatial phenomenon'.<sup>126</sup> 'The whole body, including the brain', if one turns, for a second opinion, to a recent critic, 'is objecthood of the will'.<sup>127</sup>

Given, what can only be described, as his monomaniacal obsession with nature's universal will, Schopenhauer could equally be dubbed the 'philosopher of the ant',

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<sup>124</sup> John E. Atwell, 'Schopenhauer on the Character of the World' (1995 p. 81).

<sup>125</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 403).

<sup>126</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 609).

<sup>127</sup> Christopher Janaway, 'The real essence of human beings: Schopenhauer and the unconscious will' collected in 'Thinking the Unconscious. Nineteenth-Century German Thought' (2010 p. 148).

'cat', 'mouse' or any other phenomenal form one can possibly call to hand. It hardly mattered. 'I see that everywhere in nature', if one turns to the third volume of the philosopher's 'Manuscript Remains', 'each particular phenomenon is the work of a universal force that is active in a thousand similar phenomena'.<sup>128</sup>

Schopenhauer had absolutely no claim to Atwell's title. He did not champion the body, the subject's somatic state at all; the philosopher, as I will go on to explain in a following chapter, was, if anything, its arch enemy. 'Finally, if death comes, which breaks up the phenomenon of this will', to convey something of Schopenhauer's complete disregard towards the subject's physical standing, '... it is most welcome, and is cheerfully accepted as a longed-for deliverance'.<sup>129</sup> Schopenhauer did not place any intrinsic value on the subject's corporality; it was 'merely', as he maintained, an illusory 'phenomenon' of will and a hindrance at that; it was something from which the subject was best 'delivered'. Schopenhauer was not, as Atwell fancifully imagined, the 'philosopher of the body', but nature's incorporeal will. 'His god (or Will, as he prefers to call it)', as Wyndham Lewis far more insightfully said of the philosopher, 'is a vast, undirected, purposeless impulse: not, like us, conscious: but blind, powerful, restless and unconscious'.<sup>130</sup>

Atwell's title, given the choice between Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Stirner, unquestionably belonged to the latter. Max Stirner was the only one out of the three who

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<sup>128</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Manuscript Remains', Vol. 3 (1989 p. 643).

<sup>129</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818/ 1966 p. 382).

<sup>130</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 332).

placed any significant value on the subject's determinate, bodily standing. 'The Ego and its Own', unlike Schopenhauer's 'The World as Will and Representation', is an unequivocal paean to the body; it was no longer considered a tightly bound circle out of which the subject wished to transgress. Its needs were neither denied nor renounced, as the will beaten Schopenhauer deemed necessary, but celebrated and affirmed in strength as well as weakness.

#### X. CHEST BEATING

Let me now turn your attention, very briefly, to the way in which Stirner went about answering the, by now, familiar 'philosophizing subject's question', as Atwell awkwardly described it.<sup>131</sup> Turning to 'The Ego and Its Own', we read: "'What am I?" each of you asks himself. An abyss of lawless and unregulated impulses, desires, wishes, passions, a chaos without light or guiding star!'.<sup>132</sup> And, if we refer to an earlier page, we get a far clearer impression of the particular way Stirner sought to address the aforementioned question: 'From the moment when he catches sight of the light of the world a man seeks to find out *himself* and get hold of *himself* out of its confusion, in which he, with everything else, is tossed about in motley mixture'.<sup>133</sup>

Stirner's attempt to 'get hold of himself' was the very thing that can be said to have distinguished him from the likes of Schlegel, Schopenhauer, S enancour and de Musset *et al.* Stirner's subject, the 'un-man', was no longer

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<sup>131</sup> John E. Atwell, 'Schopenhauer on the Character of the World' (1995 p. 81).

<sup>132</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 146).

<sup>133</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 13).



regarded as a 'poor nameless dream' or mere 'apparition', but a very particular, distinct corporal being.<sup>134</sup> 'By bringing the essence into prominence one degrades', as Stirner argued, 'the hitherto misapprehended appearance to a bare *semblance*, a deception'.<sup>135</sup> His response was quite unlike the more customary view held by the collection of other writers to whom I have referred. The 'un-man' was anything but an illusory or deceptive phenomenal form. He alone, as we heard earlier, was 'real'.

If, to underline the point, we turn to page 244 of the second volume of S nancour's 'Obermann' we read, 'I am like a walking shadow on the earth, which sees but can grasp nothing'.<sup>136</sup> Turning to Amiel's 'Journal' we come across a similar sentiment: 'He does not even believe his body his own; he feels the vital whirlwind passing through him, - lent to him, as it were, for a moment, in order that he may perceive the cosmic vibrations... He is fluid as a phantom that we see but cannot grasp; he resembles a man, as the *manes* of Achilles or the shade of Creusa resembled the living. Without having died, I am a ghost. Other men are dreams to me, and I am a dream to them'.<sup>137</sup> 'He was not', as Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, an associate of Schlegel, wrote, 'capable of stretching out his arm toward any object or reaching for anything with his hand; he couldn't take a step with his feet like other people. A trembling anguish flew through all his nerves whenever he wanted to try to interrupt the giddy

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<sup>134</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'The Confession of a Child of the Century' (1836 / 1908 p. 330 - 331).

<sup>135</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 40).

<sup>136</sup>  tienne Pivert de S nancour, 'Obermann', Vol. II (1804 / 1910 p. 244).

<sup>137</sup> Henri-Fr d ric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Fr d ric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 279).

whirlwind even a single time'.<sup>138</sup>

All this ghoulish sort of talk would have been anathema to Max Stirner: 'to the extent of my powers I let a bit of daylight fall in on the nocturnal spookery'.<sup>139</sup> He did not wish to relinquish *himself* so cheaply and readily nor for so little return. Stirner had, quite unlike Schlegel, Schopenhauer, S enancour, Amiel and Wackenroder, a far firmer grip of his bodily self: 'it is only through the "flesh" that I can break the tyranny of mind; for it is only when a man hears his flesh along with the rest of him that he hears himself wholly'.<sup>140</sup> Stirner's response was certainly a significant departure from the way in which Schlegel and Schopenhauer evaluated the individual subject.

Stirner was not the least bit eager to commune with 'everything else', but struggled, in contrast, to *extricate* himself from the 'motley mixture' in which he, along with everything else, was apparently 'tossed about'.<sup>141</sup> Rather than align the 'un-man' with a murky common pot, Stirner aspired to *distinguish* him from it. Then, and only then, could he be regarded, so he imagined, as a truly autonomous, liberated and singular figure: 'I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego: I am unique. Hence my wants too are unique, and my deeds; in short, everything about me is unique'.<sup>142</sup>

Schopenhauer's doctrine also worked its way, somewhat unexpectedly - in light of the philosopher's lowly

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<sup>138</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, 'A Wondrous Oriental Tale of a Naked Saint' collected in 'Confessions and Fantasies' (17\*\* / 1971 p. 176).

<sup>139</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 263).

<sup>140</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 60).

<sup>141</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 13).

<sup>142</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 318 - 319).

estimation of his subject's volitional powers - towards a similar point; in the concluding phase of his doctrine, Schopenhauer's 'subject of knowledge' was no longer in a fit state to be 'tossed about' by any force of nature, let alone an actively malevolent one, and sought, as a measure of last resort, to abscond from its clutches in a final bid to be left alone and in peace from its desires. 'Those who restrain desire', as William Blake perceptively said, 'do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained'.<sup>143</sup> And having been 'softened up', as it were, by the philosopher's arduous and traumatic scheme, the 'subject of knowledge' was only too 'happy', as it reached its end, to 'restrain' the desirous force of nature, the will, by absolutely any means, if, as Schopenhauer promised, it liberated him from all its imbecilic and wanton urges.

Overlooking the catastrophic measures Schopenhauer's raddled subject took to 'liberate' himself from nature's will, the climax of the philosopher's doctrine took something of a 'Stirnerian twist' of its own. For all of the philosopher's dismissive and derisory talk of individuality, the culmination of his doctrine hinged, unquestionably, on the sole word - albeit renunciative word, of his beleaguered 'subject of knowledge'. But unlike Stirner, Schopenhauer arrived at this point by handing his subject a white flag and knowing full well, given his abhorrent and otherwise inescapable account, he would not have to be asked twice to wave it if, as the philosopher promised, it secured salvation from his doctrine of nature's will. To put it more simply, Schopenhauer, unlike Stirner, came to more or less the

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<sup>143</sup> William Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' (1825 - 27 / 1927 p. 5).

same sort of point - and came very close indeed, by *denying* rather than *affirming* his inherent nature. This, however, remains a matter for a later stage of the study.

Stirner, to return your attention to 'The Ego and Its Own', was absolutely assured that he was his own property; what he 'saw' he could also 'grasp'. 'Not until I am certain of myself', as Stirner wrote, 'and no longer seeking for myself, am I really my property'.<sup>144</sup> The 'un-man' was apparently in *full* possession of himself. He was now 'the owner' of all his qualities whether they were spiritual, conceptual or corporeal.<sup>145</sup> As a 'whole' man, rather than a bit part figure, he was neither answerable, nor played second fiddle to his 'inmost nature'. It was 'merely' one of his qualities and hardly, for all that, the most important among them.

'Before any sort of political liberation from the external forms that oppress us can take place', as Saul Newman said of Stirner, 'we must first dispense with the internalized forms of domination and subjectification whereby we cling to fixed, established identities, and where we are induced to seek within ourselves a stable essence in which we see a reflection of universal Humanity and the God-like image of Man'.<sup>146</sup> The 'un-man' was 'his own property' and shaped entirely by his own hand. 'I am I', as Stirner wrote stumbling, as he was often prone to do, over his own tongue, 'only by this, that I make myself; that it is not another who makes me, but I must be my own work'.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 283).

<sup>145</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. \*\*\*).

<sup>146</sup> Saul Newman, 'Introduction: Re-encountering Stirner's Ghosts' collected in 'Max Stirner' (2011 p. 8).

<sup>147</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 207).

Whatever incalculable scope the 'un-man' was said to possess was found far closer to home; it existed in the *flesh*, in the *present*, in his effusive *personalism* - it was not shrouded by an extensive cloud or obscured by the wish wash of 'time eternal', but existed visibly and vocally as the subject, the 'un-man' himself. The Swedish novelist, Hjalmar Söderberg, perfectly expressed the reasoning behind Max Stirner's demonstrative performance when, in 'Doctor Glas' (1905), he wrote: 'I've learned to feel and understand that my body is me. There is no joy, no sorrow, no life at all, except through it'.<sup>148</sup>

What Stirner prized neither led to, nor was found in, a point outside himself. It did not exist as a monistic 'essence' nor an expectant, unrealisable ideal, but was conveyed, in its entirety, by his singular person. The subject must defend, rather than relinquish, the grounds of his individuality. 'Stirner's egoism springs', as Lawrence Stepelevich also believed, 'from a conscious and total atheism, with this playful indifference and apathy to any higher essence being the prerequisite for encountering one's own being, one's uniqueness'.<sup>149</sup>

'Mankind' no longer, to paraphrase Schlegel, required a sense for 'something beyond mankind' as that 'something' was, so Stirner believed, in his immediate possession.<sup>150</sup>

If there was a single lesson to be learnt from 'The Ego and Its Own' it was something along the lines of the following: the individual subject must, first and

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<sup>148</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, 'Doctor Glas' (1905 / 1963 p. 115).

<sup>149</sup> Lawrence S. Stepelevich, 'The Revival of Max Stirner' (1974 p. 326).

<sup>150</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 154).

foremost, be of his own making. 'Yourself must be your own caste', as Wyndham Lewis similarly beseeched readers in one of his early essays.<sup>151</sup> The subject must not surrender himself so willingly to abstract ideas or general notions, however tantalising the prospect may sound on paper. The desire to universalise oneself is, ultimately, a desire for dissolution; it spells the end, to put it simply, of oneself. One would be better advised, if Stirner was to be believed, not to hanker after ideals, least of all universal ideals, as they invariably worked to one's disadvantage, if not complete downfall.

Stirner implored the reader to refute all universal notions and pursue his or her own ends for their own good, whatever that might entail; they must begin from themselves with the clear intention of ending up with themselves and not lose sight, in the process, of their primary and immediate concern: their own preservation, affirmation and pleasure. 'Stirner's psychological approach', if one turns to John Carroll, 'takes the individual psyche as the only coherent and meaningful unit of analysis... Thus the external world is differentiated according to whether it generates ego-enhancing or ego-degrading forces'.<sup>152</sup> 'The ideals of religion, philosophy, and science are not', as John Welsh corroborated, 'uplifting and do not inspire persons to be more than they are, happier than they are, smarter than they are, and more powerful than they are. The contrary is true, they browbeat persons into aspiring to be less

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<sup>151</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Imaginary Letters', Little Review (July, 1917 p. 4).

<sup>152</sup> John Carroll, 'Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky' ((1974 p. 22)).

than they are. But the unique one resists the modernist reduction of persons to abstract categories'.<sup>153</sup> And, to repeat the point, the 'unique one' - Stirner's 'un-man' would have objected, no less vehemently and, for that matter, on exactly the same grounds, I believe, to Schlegel and Schopenhauer alike as their schemes were neither 'uplifting' nor 'ego enhancing', to paraphrase Welsh and Carroll, but worked, instead, to the ultimate undoing, dissolution - destruction even, of their respective subjects.

The subject must, if he does not relish the prospect of being hounded out himself, go about the task of establishing and preserving his *presence* in the face of such hostile, 'outside' forces. Accordingly, Stirner implored people, all people, to abandon their foolish and misplaced mania for universalism and begin to recognise and affirm their singular and exclusively private selves as the wellspring of all conceivable potential. 'Ownness', as Stirner wrote, 'calls you back to yourselves, it says "come to yourself!"'.<sup>154</sup>

Stirner's call for 'ownness' constituted a 'wake up call' - a call intended to bring the intellectual world to its senses and, ultimately, the individual subject back to himself. 'The need to raise itself above humanity', according to Schlegel, 'is humanity's prime characteristic'.<sup>155</sup> But as Stirner would no doubt have retorted: 'if the individual lifts himself above the limits of his individuality, this is rather his very self

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<sup>153</sup> John F. Welsh, 'Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation' (2010 p. 94).

<sup>154</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 148).

<sup>155</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 243).

as an individual; he exists only in raising himself, he exists only in not remaining what he is'.<sup>156</sup>

Stirner's subject no longer felt compelled to escape the so called 'confines' of his individuality to discover whatever peace, salvation or heightened state he aspired to find elsewhere. Everything was, fundamentally, at hand. 'Therefore', as Stirner implored, 'turn to yourselves rather than to your gods or idols. Bring out from yourselves what is in you, bring it to the light, bring yourselves to revelation'.<sup>157</sup> The individual subject was now an entirely 'self-contained', autogeneous figure; his singular, finite state was no longer something to be lamented, cursed, least of all renounced. His reappraised state was not simply a source of solace, but, so Stirner ultimately believed, ataraxia.<sup>158</sup>

#### **XI: AN EXTREMELY BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Having attempted, in the introductory chapter, to bring your attention to something that resembles a 'starting point' and excused my methodological 'excesses' to some degree or another, I hope to have made, if nothing else, my own particular interests in the subject a little clearer.

I have described, in an effort to 'set the scene', the fatuity of Dupuis and Cotonet's desire to define romanticism in light of Friedrich Schlegel's inceptive

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<sup>156</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 163).

<sup>157</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 146).

<sup>158</sup> In 'The Concept of the Self in Political Thought' (1979), Peter McCormick made a similar point: 'The complete lack of content makes the concluding epigram take on Stoic overtones, adopting apathy toward an external world in order to enjoy life more fully the freedom of an internal world' (1979 p. 707).



and, admittedly, in certain respects, cleverly contrived 'theory' of 'romantic poetry'. It was not, from the very beginning, purely a matter of literary definition. Given Schlegel's expansive theoretical ambitions, the meaning of romanticism extended well beyond the parameters of literature into philosophical realms, more specifically those of ontology.

Given the predominant and apparently unavoidable presence of a looming, insensate force of nature and the subject's alignment with it, for better or worse, his definitive person, that is to say, his bodily self and personality were completely lost to the cause. His 'inner-nature' may well have expanded into the shadowy realms of 'infinity and stardom', but his finite, physical form fared rather less well.<sup>159</sup> All that was integumentary, singular and personal wilted and withered under the conditions that proved so expedient to that which was universal, hebetudinous and found somewhere 'within'.

The individual subject was lost. He was part of a 'whole' he could not possibly begin to understand or readily discern. It was, as I have said a number of times, all extremely mysterious.

To extend oneself to nature was, in all likelihood, a vain and wholly destructive theoretical pursuit, as I said; one that almost certainly came to exact its cost in Schopenhauer's calamitous description of its will. Max Stirner aspired to redress the balance: to bring the subject's, up till now, neglected personal and somatic standing to light and fruition.

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<sup>159</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 209 - 210).

In the course of the present chapter, I have also attempted to emphasise, primarily to underline a key motif of romanticism and the largely irresolvable nature of the problems it posed, the extent to which the question of 'self' troubled a number of 'secondary writers' in whom I have expressed an equal interest. Some of whom were indeed affiliated with romanticism, others were not, but, nevertheless, still grappled with a number of uncertainties that, I believe, came to fore with the emergence of the literary form. The need to identify the subject's 'true' nature was not, not by any stretch of the imagination, exclusive to Schlegel, Schopenhauer or Stirner - it was far more widely 'felt' than that and across many more disciplines and chronological periods than may customarily be acknowledged.

Rather than concentrate solely on any one of the three writers, I have seen fit to identify the 'individual subject' as the focus of the present study. Principally, to ascertain not only his standing and value as it was presented, even depicted in their work, but to critically evaluate the subject's 'maturation', as I described it, from an inchoate, 'general spirit' to 'singular personality' as he is ushered through the 'climatic' and dramatic changes of the three respective schemes.

Allow me to turn your attention to the second chapter and the overweening figure of Friedrich Schlegel; his 'theory' of 'romantic poetry' was, I believe, the point where the subject entered the initial stage of his developmental 'growth'. Schlegel's romantic vision was a hotbed of dull organic forces that enjoyed the most favourable of temperate conditions. The clammy and

decidedly stuffy air of Schlegel's 'theory' constituted a perfect of environment for the subject's vegetal 'inner-nature' to grow, as we will hear, to a wild and tumescent degree.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL'S HOTHOUSE

'What a writer! Like a cuttle-fish in water, every movement produces a cloud of ink which shrouds his thought in darkness!'.<sup>160</sup>

Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal'

'I need limitless illusions, receding before me to keep me always under their spell. What use to me is anything that can end? The hour which will arrive in sixty years' time is already close at hand. I have no liking for anything that takes its rise, draws near, arrives, and is no more. I want a good, a dream, in fact a hope that is ever in advance, ever beyond me, greater than my expectation itself, greater than the things which pass away'.<sup>161</sup>

Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann'

'In analysing "romance" the first definition required, perhaps, is to this effect: *the "romantic" is the opposite of the real*. Romance is a thing that is in some sense non-existent. For instance, "romance" is the reality of yesterday, or of tomorrow; or it is the reality of somewhere else'.<sup>162</sup>

Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man'

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<sup>160</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 190).

<sup>161</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. I (1803 / 1910 p. 73).

<sup>162</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 22).

'Happy projects of future joy, you are, perhaps, the only true happiness known to man'.<sup>163</sup>

Alfred de Musset, 'The Confession of a Child of the Century'

#### I. THE CUTTLE-FISH

'Obscurantism is a sin perhaps not against the Holy Spirit, but certainly against the human. Therefore we ought never to forgive it, but always and everywhere implacably hold it against the person who has made himself guilty of it, and take every opportunity of showing our contempt for him, as long as he lives, and even after he is dead'.<sup>164</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer wrote these words in 1844 in the second volume of 'The World and Will and Representation' and the person in question was a certain Friedrich Schlegel.

Schlegel was indeed dead at this point and had been for a good fifteen years, but no less 'guilty' of having committed a 'sin', as Schopenhauer regarded it, against 'the human' which, as he emphatically and rather harshly maintained, should never be forgiven.

The philosopher had something of a cheek to speak of Schlegel in this light; his own doctrine of will dealt 'the human' all sorts of painful and nasty little pinches before he finally saw off his own humanity with a particularly grievous and conclusive blow. Nonetheless, Schopenhauer saw fit to talk of Schlegel's 'disgraceful

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<sup>163</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'The Confession of a Child of the Century' (1836 / 1908 p. 250).

<sup>164</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 525).

obscurantism' in precisely these unforgiving terms.<sup>165</sup> Not to say that Schopenhauer was entirely unjustified.

Friedrich Schlegel was not the clearest of writers; he was, more often than not, a dreadful pleonast. The number of words he used far too frequently outweighed the number of ideas he wished to convey. Schlegel used far too many of one and entertained too few of the other. At least, that is the abrupt conclusion one is tempted to come to when Schlegel was at his most effusive.

Having called him a 'pleonast', there were other occasions, most notably in his aphoristic pieces, 'fragments' as Schlegel called them, when he did not seem to use nearly enough words to convey the meaning he wished to express. Schlegel was, in these particular instances, extremely sparing in his use of them. 'A work', to take one example, 'is cultivated when it is everywhere sharply delimited, but within those limits limitless and inexhaustible; when it is completely faithful to itself, entirely homogeneous, and nonetheless exalted above itself'.<sup>166</sup>

When faced with such a dense, impenetrable collection of words, it is hardly the easiest of things to discern what meaning they were actually intended to convey. It all sounds conspicuously obscure and one may even come around to Schopenhauer's way of thinking very quickly indeed, if not start to believe the philosopher was somewhat kinder to Schlegel than he might otherwise have been.

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<sup>165</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 525).

<sup>166</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 204).

It is hard to judge whether Schlegel should really, at times, have gone to such trouble to write many of these 'fragments' of his in the first place. The majority of them sound so very lofty, pious and intentionally profound that one cannot help feel letdown, even annoyed, by the sudden realisation that they, the grand sounding fragments, express little, if a single illuminating point at all.

It is tempting, in these moods, to believe Schlegel's fragments were written purely for effect and nothing more. 'In truth, and particularly in the case of Friedrich Schlegel', as Maurice Blanchot pointed out in an essay, 'The Athenaeum' (1983), 'the fragment often appears as a means of complacent self-indulgence, rather than an attempt to elaborate a more rigorous mode of writing'.<sup>167</sup>

Initially, one is never quite sure where exactly one stands with the infuriating critic. Schlegel is an extraordinarily difficult writer to get to grips with; he wins one's favour as quickly as he loses it. We see too little of the Schlegel who perfectly balances what he wishes to say with terms of expression that entirely suit their intended meaning and far too much of the other Schlegel, the diffusive one, who frequently sounds far too fond of his own voice for his own good. The reader, presuming they harbour similar reservations, may even start to object to certain aspects of his work.

Schlegel had, to warn you again, an exceedingly 'sweet tooth' and was prone to express himself in an extremely affected and patronising manner. He also seemed to have

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<sup>167</sup> Maurice Blanchot, 'The Athenaeum' (1983 p. 171 - 172).

something of an unhealthy obsession with flowers; consequently, his 'Dialogue on Poetry' exudes a somewhat fumitory, off putting smell that can hardly be said to readily ingratiate the reader to his work.<sup>168</sup>

Schlegel's aphoristic pieces, the 'fragments' I mentioned, had a thoroughly indigestible, if not inedible quality to them; they were not willing to divulge their meaning and 'go down the hatch' - to put it very simplistically, with the least bit of ease. Even the more digestible ones leave something of an unpleasant aftertaste in one's mouth. 'They are often written', as Robert Wernaer wrote in an extremely perceptive essay, 'Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany' (1910), 'in such compact language, and, at times, designedly with such fallacious subtlety that many of them cannot be understood taken by themselves'.<sup>169</sup>

Schlegel's fragments had an irresolvable air about them; it was a quality that certainly belied, as he no doubt intended, their brevity. Even so, it is particularly exasperating to find that so few words are able to inflict such sharp and unpleasant pangs of dyspeptic pain. The critic's fragments stick in one's throat like a sickly assortment of congealed sweets.

What makes matters twice as worse than they need necessarily have been is that one, however dimly, begins

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<sup>168</sup> On page 53, for example, of Schlegel's 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797-1800 / 1968) we hear him talk about the 'flower and kernel of other minds'; on page 81, the 'first flower of youthful imagination'; turning to page 101, he spoke of the 'eternally fresh flowers of the imagination' and on the 153<sup>rd</sup> page we are confronted with another 'fresh flower', this time it was attached to a 'living stalk'.

<sup>169</sup> Robert M. Wernaer, 'Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany' (1910 p. 68).



to suspect that there may well have been a form of 'wit' at play within some of his aphoristic contributions. Sadly, Schlegel had little flair for comedy. If we turn, in this respect, to his 'Dialogue on Poetry', we come face to face with Schlegel's 'wit' and it throws an otherwise perfectly understandable sentence into disarray. Having successfully made one's way through two thirds of it, we reach the final third and Schlegel's 'wit' not only impedes our way, but encourages the thoroughly dispiriting impression that one has somehow missed the point of the epigram altogether. 'An aphorism', as Schlegel wrote, 'ought to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world like a little work of art and complete in itself like a hedgehog'.<sup>170</sup>

It all seems, at times, to be something of a laborious, uphill struggle with Schlegel. In these bleak moments, one has to fight every urge not to hold a lasting grudge against Schlegel for intentionally making one feel like Dupuis or Cotonet. One becomes increasingly suspicious whether in fact Schlegel did not simply set out with the intentional purpose of leaving the reader completely in the dark.

If one is in a more forgiving mood, one may even begin to doubt one's judgement and entertain the belief that there must surely have been a certain 'light' and 'playful' air to Schlegel's work that has, in the course of time, simply been lost somewhere along the way. In much the same way, the human digestive system was once said to have been able to cope quite easily with wild berries without making him delirious and sick.

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<sup>170</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 143).

Perhaps it was intended as a private joke, one might continue to imagine, that Schlegel shared with his older brother August, his sister in law, Caroline, Novalis, Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Schleiermacher or any of the other figures associated with The Athenäum. It was, or so we have been led to believe, if one reads Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's bombastic study, 'The Literary Absolute' (1978), conceived in a 'communal', homely sort of spirit after all.

However, the word 'playful' insinuates there is, to some degree or other, an amount of pleasure to be derived from Schlegel's 'Dialogue on Poetry'. I say 'playful' as it quite possibly describes Schlegel's 'pleasure' rather more faithfully than it does our own and Schlegel's 'pleasure', for all of its flowery homeliness and abundance of jellied sweets, was not without its own sadistic peculiarities.

Schlegel's sugariness should not be underestimated; he may well have adorned his inceptive 'theory' of 'romantic poetry' with flowers and bunting but, like a funeral procession, it worked its way, if one takes Schopenhauer's doctrine into consideration, towards a very uninviting and inhospitable place indeed.

Everything about Schlegel's work tends, if one is not careful, to make one slightly dizzy and short of breath. 'The perfume of the flowers was bewildering', as Rilke might have said of him, 'like many voices sounding all at once'.<sup>171</sup> Schlegel's work is more than just a little

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<sup>171</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, 'The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge' (1910 / 2008 p. 147). Translated by Burton Pike. Dalkey Archive Press,

disorientating. It is not just the abundance of flowers with which one is assaulted, but Schlegel's contrived enthusiasm for 'the unconscious' and 'infinite', his patronising air, his 'disregard' for the rules of the house whose 'chaos', as one begins to suspect, was of the most fussily ordered nature, and, when one hears about his cliquy little coterie in Jena, it almost becomes too much to stomach.

Schlegel's work has all of the clammy atmosphere of an elderly and unpredictable relative's conservatory on a particularly long and muggy Sunday afternoon. We are invited to 'make ourselves at home' just so long as we take off our shoes and do not 'dare' touch a thing; Schlegel commands us, in a raised voice, to 'relax'. At least, that is the distinct impression one gets from much of the critic's 'Dialogue on Poetry'. It is difficult not to harbour the growing suspicion that Schlegel's overbearing floweriness was not simply a front to disguise something very unpleasant and unsavoury indeed. However, one must repeatedly tell oneself that it may not be immediately clear, but like all expansive and sweeping views, Schlegel's work involves an enormous of patience and a great deal of fortitude to get to the top.

## II. THE MILDLY CHARGED FRAGMENTS

One would do very well to remind oneself, when one's patience is at its thinnest, that Schlegel fancied himself as a polemicist; in the 300<sup>th</sup> fragment he hinted as much himself. 'When reason and unreason touch', as one of Schlegel's more understandable sayings goes, 'there's

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London.

an electric shock. It's called polemics'.<sup>172</sup>

Schlegel was tremendously fond of dishing out these, not exactly deadly, but certainly modest and irritating 'electric shocks' in the most liberal of ways. If Schlegel's objective was to trouble readers with his indigestible and mildly charged array of fragments then he can be said to have been extremely accomplished at his task.

Schlegel wished, I imagine, to unsettle, even perplex readers rather than mollify or reassure them in an effort to 'engage' them, in the most active sense of the word, with his work. If indeed that was his objective, then Schlegel can be said, if one is so inclined, to have been a first rate and supremely gifted polemicist.

However, one must seriously begin to question the long term health effects of these minor 'shocks' which are continually delivered to one's system. 'At its best', as René Wellek observed in an eponymous chapter devoted to Friedrich Schlegel in the second volume of 'A History of Modern Criticism' (1955), 'he can open, with a glimpse, wide vistas; at its worst he can note down pretentious witticisms and even trivialities'. 'But one', as Wellek quickly added, 'must be literal-minded indeed not to recognize that Schlegel was engaged in warfare, that he wanted and needed attention at the price of paradox and offence, and that he loved the grandiose, mysterious, and irrational too much to suppress it'.<sup>173</sup> It is best, as Wellek advised, not be too 'literal-minded' when one

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<sup>172</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 204).

<sup>173</sup> René Wellek, 'Friedrich Schlegel' in 'A History of Modern Criticism: 1750 - 1950. Volume 2: The Romantic Age' (1955 p. 35).

reads Schlegel's work. Even so, it is something of a strain.

Novalis, whose most well known poem - 'Hymns to the Night' (1800) appeared, like the 116<sup>th</sup> fragment, in the third and final volume of *The Athenäum*, summed up Schlegel's intentions far better than Schlegel could possibly have done himself. 'Fragments of this kind', as Novalis wrote in 'Grains of Pollen' (1798), 'are literary seeds: certainly, there may be many sterile grains among them, but this is unimportant if only a few of them take root'.<sup>174</sup> Novalis' assessment was almost certainly true of Friedrich Schlegel's contributions to the periodical.

One comes across dozens and dozens of 'sterile grains', very few of which appear the least bit eager to show any real sign of life however attentively one prods or waters them, so to speak. Many, as Wellek pointed out, were little more than blighted buds, 'witticisms' and 'trivialities' as he referred to them, that drop away from one's memory very sharply indeed; however, that is not to say, I feel somewhat obliged to add, that Schlegel's work was completely barren or bereft of life, if only in a gestatory sense.<sup>175</sup>

There are a few important, if ultimately hazardous things to be found among Schlegel's horticultural display of words. For all the criticisms and cheap shots one can level at it, Schlegel's romantic vision certainly prised open up a huge vegetal environment that was open to manipulation - certainly at the hands of Schopenhauer.

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<sup>174</sup> Novalis, 'Grains of Pollen' (1798/ 19\*\* 2: 463).

<sup>175</sup> René Wellek, 'Friedrich Schlegel' in 'A History of Modern Criticism: 1750 - 1950. Volume 2: The Romantic Age' (1955 p. 35).

### III. THE GRAND 'THEORY'

Having spoken a little about the often maddening, slightly painful way in which Friedrich Schlegel expressed himself, let us now say something about what he struggled to say.

Let me turn your attention, with this objective in mind, to Schlegel's 'theory' of 'romantic poetry'. One should, however, be a little wary of even using the term 'theory' when talking of Schlegel's romantic vision for fear of it representing one of the 'deadening generalizations' of which he claimed to disapprove.<sup>176</sup> But Schlegel largely ignored his own advice and propagated, in the course of the third and final volume of *The Athenäum*, his own 'theory' very cleverly indeed.

Schlegel's understanding of 'romantic poetry' constituted a 'theory' of sorts. It was, to put it somewhat awkwardly, a 'non theory' theory; it was of a decidedly 'dressed down' order - sporting, as it were, the loosest, most casual of clothes even if, as one increasingly suspects, a tightly drawn girdle kept everything in the strictest order underneath them.

Before we can begin to look at this particular matter in any sort of depth, I should perhaps clarify what exactly Schlegel understood by the term 'romantic poetry'. We have, after all, already familiarised ourselves, in the introductory chapter, with the regrettable experience of Dupuis and Cotonet. It is necessary, at this point, to refer at some length, to one of Schlegel's more tumid

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<sup>176</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1799 - 1800 / 1968 p. 55).

'grains' - I am referring to the '116<sup>th</sup> fragment' of his 'Dialogue on Poetry'.

While I am a little hesitant to call it Schlegel's 'most successful fragment', it would appear to be his most discussed and celebrated. The 116<sup>th</sup> fragment has, over the years, been interpreted, rightly or wrongly, as the very cornerstone of romanticism. 'This fragment', as indeed René Wellek wrote, 'has been quoted over and over again and has been made the key for the interpretation of the whole of romanticism'. 'But', as he insightfully added, 'one should recognize that it is only one of his deliberately mystifying pronouncements and that in it Schlegel uses the term "romantic" in a highly idiosyncratic way which he himself very soon abandoned'.<sup>177</sup>

Wellek, I believe, was entirely correct in this respect; one should not 'restrict' one's attention, if indeed that is an appropriate term, to Schlegel's 116<sup>th</sup> fragment, instead one should take it onboard and consider it alongside Schlegel's many other 'deliberately mystifying pronouncements', as Wellek called them.

'Romantic poetry', as Schlegel maintained, '...does not manifest itself in individual conceptions but in the structure of the whole'.<sup>178</sup> Schlegel's visual impediment, his 'presbyopia' as I referred to it in the introductory chapter, always tended to be focused on the 'whole' rather than any one particular aspect of it. One ought,

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<sup>177</sup> René Wellek, 'Friedrich Schlegel' in 'A History of Modern Criticism: 1750 - 1950. Volume 2: The Romantic Age' (1955 p. 12 - 13).

<sup>178</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1799 - 1800 / 1968 p. 86).

in this respect, not to concentrate one's attention too intently on the 116<sup>th</sup> fragment but consider it, as indeed Wellek advised, along with all his others.

Turning immediately to the fragment in question, we read: 'Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical; poeticize wit and fill and saturate the forms of art with every kind of good, solid matter for instruction, and animate them with the pulsations of humor'.<sup>179</sup>

Schlegel went on to say: 'It embraces everything that is purely poetic, from the greatest systems of art, containing within themselves still further systems, to the sigh, the kiss that the poetizing child breathes forth in artless song. It can so lose itself in what it describes that one might believe it exists only to characterize poetical individuals of all sorts; and yet there still is no form so fit for expressing the entire spirit of an author: so that many artists who started out to write only a novel ended up by providing us with a portrait of themselves. It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also - more than any other form - hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that

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<sup>179</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1799 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).



reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors. It is capable of the highest and most variegated refinement, not only from within outwards, but also from without inwards; capable in that it organizes - for everything that seeks a wholeness in its effects - the parts along similar lines, so that it opens up a perspective upon an infinitely increasing classicism. Romantic poetry is in the arts what wit is in philosophy, and what society and sociability, friendship and love are in life. Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analyzed'.<sup>180</sup>

At this point, we see Schlegel - resorting, in spite of myself, to something of a 'Schlegelism', in full 'verbicidal' flight; it was in this elevated mood the critic made what was, quite possibly, his most extravagant pronouncement.

'The romantic kind of poetry', as Schlegel claimed, 'is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself. The romantic kind of poetry is the only one that is more than a kind, that is, as it were, poetry itself: for in a certain sense all poetry is or should be romantic'.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1799 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

<sup>181</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

One can begin to ascertain a number of telling things about Schlegel's 'theory' from the dense 116<sup>th</sup> fragment. Firstly, it had an unambiguous unitary aim and a very honorable aim it was too - at least, in its initial stage.

Schlegel talked of joining up all the various generic strands of literature to form a 'literary whole'. The critic wished to unite poetry with philosophy, rhetoric, prose, and criticism. They were no longer to be viewed as rigidly distinct forms separated along purely artistic or intellectual lines. 'All streams of poetry', as Schlegel surmised, 'flow together into the one vast sea'.<sup>182</sup>

One need only look, in this respect, at the variety of Schlegel's contributions to *The Athenäum*; they ranged from essays, a letter, a series of dialogues and a collection of aphorisms, to see that he faithfully reflected his unitary aim, if not in content then certainly in form.

'The Romantic genre of poetry', as Schlegel maintained, 'is the only one which is more than a genre, and which is, as it were, poetry itself'.<sup>183</sup> In an earlier periodical, the *Lyceum der schönen Künste* (1797), Schlegel tentatively suggested, 'Perhaps then we would have to get along with a single theory of the genres'.<sup>184</sup> Swiftly returning your attention to the *Athenäum*, we read in the 113<sup>th</sup> fragment: 'A classification is a definition

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<sup>182</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 53).

<sup>183</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 141).

<sup>184</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 127).

comprising a system of definitions'.<sup>185</sup>

The 'romantic genre', then, was a 'single' classification which contained within it a 'system of definitions'. The prospect, it goes without saying, would obviously have horrified Dupuis and Cotonet. One may also see in Schlegel's unifying literary ideal some of the generalising tendencies that were to balloon to such monstrous and destructive proportions in his ontology of the individual subject, the 'romantic poet'.

The 'romantic genre' certainly would appear, at first glance, to have represented, as Schlegel imagined, the broadest, most inclusive understanding of poetry he could have possibly formulated. 'It embraces everything that is purely poetic', as we heard Schlegel say, 'from the greatest systems of art, containing within themselves still further systems, to the sigh, the kiss that the poetizing child breathes forth in artless song'.<sup>186</sup>

Schlegel did not, so he imagined, deem it necessary to restrict or delimit the meaning of 'romantic poetry'; he even talked, at one point, of 'the universe of poetry'.<sup>187</sup>

Schlegel's romantic vision appeared to be gloriously free from all the sorts of restrictions the likes of Dupuis and Cotonet would, if only to placate their worries, have happily have placed on it. 'The romantic poets, first in Germany and then in France', as another critic made a point of saying, 'were the poets who, scorning and rejecting the models of the past and the received rules

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<sup>185</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140).

<sup>186</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

<sup>187</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 237).

of composition, prided themselves on their freedom from law, and on their own artistic spontaneity.'<sup>188</sup>

Schlegel's 'theory' certainly sounded like it championed artistic and intellectual freedom above all else; if it was nothing more than impression, it was certainly an impression that acted to the favour of his lasting credit. It represents, if only in intention, the important, if slim source of 'encouragement' I have taken from Schlegel's work.

'I always shudder', as Schlegel claimed, 'when I open a book where the imagination and its works are classified under headings'.<sup>189</sup> Schlegel's apparent attitude, as I mentioned in the introductory chapter, has almost certainly informed, without wishing to sound too pretentious or self righteous, my own 'open' methodology. To that end, I similarly believe that lines should not too keenly or pedantically be drawn between one work and another simply to appease the fraught and somewhat ridiculous desire to pigeonhole things for the convenient sake of pigeonholing them. In a certain sense, I admire and warmly welcome Schlegel's 'presbyopia', but only on the grounds that it acted, purely and simply, to soften the all too ludicrous distinctions that tend to isolate 'the artistic' from 'the intellectual'. The 116<sup>th</sup> fragment comes, in this respect, as an enormous relief from the dozens of other 'sterile grains' Schlegel all too carelessly sowed.

Sadly, the relief is all too short lived. Schlegel's 'presbyopic condition' knew no bounds and what started

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<sup>188</sup> Logan Pearsall Smith, 'Words and Idioms' (1925 p. 87).

<sup>189</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 76).

its life as an admirable literary aim rapidly turned against its laudable ends and obscured 'everything' in a poisonous, sickly smelling cloud.

Schlegel attributed the loftiest, farthest reaching qualities to 'romantic poetry'. In doing so, he extended its scope to an immeasurable degree and it certainly exceeded the bounds one might ordinarily associate with a literary concept. Schlegel aspired to poeticise the world and make poetry worldly. His 'theory' constituted, so he imagined, 'the true world system of poetry'.<sup>190</sup>

'Friedrich Schlegel asserted', as John C. Blankenagel wrote, 'that poetry and philosophy are an inseparable whole; they share the whole range of great, exalted human nature'.<sup>191</sup> And turning to another critic, Hans Eichner, we hear: 'Just as Schlegel envisaged the *Roman* as a combination of all possible forms, so he felt that it should encompass every possible subject matter. It was the one form through which the poet could present a comprehensive view of the world in a single work, and thus it was its sacred task and privilege to effect the reunion of all the faculties, trends and functions whose isolation from each other in modern life Schlegel so greatly deplored'.<sup>192</sup>

Schlegel's poetic vision would indeed *appear* to have encompassed all things. We might even be tempted to agree with Blankenagel and Eichner on this particular matter and similarly conclude that there was nothing Schlegel's

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<sup>190</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 237).

<sup>191</sup> John C. Blankenagel, 'The Dominant Characteristics of German Romanticism' (1940 p. 4).

<sup>192</sup> Hans Eichner, 'Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of Romantic Poetry' (1956 p. 1027).

'theory' was not able to assimilate. 'For they regarded life', as Blankenagel said of Schlegel's coterie, 'as one and inseparable, as a unit'.<sup>193</sup>

Schlegel's 'theory' aspired to open out the literary form to such an extent that it was able to embrace, as he claimed, 'everything'. 'Romantic poetry' need not necessarily have been 'poetry' at all; not, that is, in the strictest sense of the term. Schlegel's 'theory' appeared to encompass nature in its entirety and poeticise it in turn. It was, on one hand, a tremendously bold and adventurous idea to have entertained; it certainly represented one of Schlegel's more frutescent 'literary seeds', as Novalis put it, that he can be adjudged to have 'planted'. You have already heard me say 'on the one hand' Schlegel's idea was a 'bold' and 'adventurous' idea, let me now bring your attention to the considerable number of reservations balanced in the other.

If there was so little justification to divide up literary expressions according to their particular generic form, why should one, taking several seven league strides down the line, draw any distinction at all, as Schlegel logically concluded, between one thing and another - man, beast or plant, if they were all, at heart, 'purely poetic'?<sup>194</sup> Schlegel's literary ideal, admirable as it may have been in its initial stage, constituted, nevertheless, the germinating seed from which his own sweeping and dispersonating visual and intellectual 'impediments' sprang.

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<sup>193</sup> John C. Blankenagel, 'The Dominant Characteristics of German Romanticism' (1940 p. 4).

<sup>194</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

It is one thing to unify a collection of literary forms in an open, all inclusive bracket, but quite another to subject all people to a universalising and thoroughly elemental 'theory'. What, after all, can possibly be said to be left of them in their decorticated common state? 'This immanent, "historical" doctrine', as Wyndham Lewis might have said of Schlegel's 'theory', 'like any other form of pantheism, has its capital drawback that it leaves very little room indeed for the individual, the person - that is if you regard that as a drawback'.<sup>195</sup>

#### IV. THE MONUMENTAL FUSSPOT

Having extended the 'embrace' of 'romantic poetry' so hospitably to 'all things', Schlegel opened an enormous double door through which anyone or anything could stumble just as long as Schlegel had first given them the once over - a good look up and down to assess whether or not they were suitably 'poetic', better still 'purely poetic' and satisfy his firm and discerning terms of entry.<sup>196</sup> Schlegel rather recklessly opened the flood gates to all and sundry and extended an open invitation, whether he approved or not, to countless other guests - many, if not all but the prettiest of whom, were immediately turned away from his 'theory', but nevertheless returned, well past midnight and a little worse for wear, in Schopenhauer's addled doctrine of will.

It may well strike you as odd, if not unlikely - bearing in mind Schlegel's 'eagerness' to welcome 'everything' in

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<sup>195</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 237).

<sup>196</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

such a generous, warm 'embrace' that his 'theory' proved extremely selective in what it sought to poeticise.

Given its reputation as an 'open house', Schlegel's 'theory' was far more discerning than Schopenhauer's doctrine could ever adjudged to have been. Unlike Schlegel, he received an entourage of vile and rowdy guests and their ringleader, the will, presided over the evening's proceedings, to Schopenhauer's immediate consternation, with alarming indifference to all the customary rules of the house.

Schlegel, on the other hand, was only willing to extend his hand to guests - the prompt arrivals, on the strictest of conditions; they had to be, first and foremost, 'purely poetic' before he could bring himself to take their hand in his.<sup>197</sup> But where on earth, one might be tempted to ask oneself, did this idea of being 'purely poetic' begin and end? What made something 'purely poetic' rather than, for the sake of argument, 'partially poetic' or even 'barely poetic'?

Schlegel's romantic vision did not, to reiterate the point, 'merely' refer to poetry; he broadened its social circle, courtesy of a RSVP it turns out, to a number of other things: 'the sigh', 'the kiss' and the 'poetizing child', but he did not dare extend the invitation to a single thing that might jeopardise the purity of his 'pleasant' ideal and muddy its clean carpet.<sup>198</sup> Why, after all, did everything Schlegel deem 'purely poetic' always tend to be sighing to itself when it was not busy

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<sup>197</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

<sup>198</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).



puckering and painting its lips? It can hardly be said to faithfully reflect the true 'spirit of universality' with which the critic claimed to grace the poetic form. One cannot say something to the effect that it constituted 'the idea of ideas', as Schlegel had done, and selectively restrict their number if the 'ideas' in question were not particularly complimentary or suited to one's sugary palate.<sup>199</sup>

Schlegel sought his compliment in nature, but only on the most selective of terms. It accounts, to some degree, for his 'obsession', as I described it, with 'flowers', 'smiles', 'bosoms' and all the rather more picturesque things life is rumoured to offer.<sup>200</sup> 'Beautiful is what reminds us of nature', as Schlegel liked to think, 'and thereby stimulates a sense of the infinite fullness of life'.<sup>201</sup> But what Schlegel saw when he looked admiringly at nature was not a faithful image of nature itself - its violent and, more often than not, bloody struggle for plain and simple survival, but a clouded reflection, not necessarily of himself but his better, 'purely poetic' self. Needless to say, that particular reflection was no less beautiful nor any less 'infinite' in depth. 'Human beings', as Pär Lagerkvist perceptively made a point of saying in 'The Dwarf' (1944), 'like to see themselves reflected in clouded mirrors'.<sup>202</sup> Lagerkvist's observation certainly holds true, I rather suspect, of Friedrich Schlegel.

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<sup>199</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 150).

<sup>200</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 53 - 54).

<sup>201</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 248).

<sup>202</sup> Pär Lagerkvist, 'The Dwarf' (1944 / 1945 p. 172).

The 'mirror' into which Schlegel all too casually and discerningly peered was the kindest of mirrors; it beautified, embellished and aggrandised all that it reflected. Not least of all, Schlegel's 'handsome' and 'awe inspiring' image of the 'romantic poet' in whom, one suspects, he liked to see an all too familiar, simpering reflection.

The critic's understanding of term, 'purely poetic', may well have referred to anything at all just so long as it was polite enough to wipe its feet, part its hair and reciprocate his pleasantries. All that failed to flatter his priggishness - that which swore, spat and urinated in public, Schlegel kept well away at arm's length. Without having any inclination to defend boorish behaviour - least of all aspire to poeticise it, Schlegel entertained, to clarify my point, a very funny idea of 'universalism' indeed. It was so comely and vain that one cannot help but grow increasingly suspicious of it.

Schlegel betrayed something of his fussiness when he wrote: 'Therefore, man, in reaching out time and again beyond himself to seek and find the complement of his innermost being in the depths of another'.<sup>203</sup> And, if we turn another page of the 'Dialogue on Poetry', Schlegel, once again, gave something of his true intentions away: 'Love needs a responding love', as he wrote.<sup>204</sup> Turning to yet another page, we hear Schlegel talk in the most favourable of terms of the 'beautiful self-mirroring' of Pindar's poetry in which he must, yet again, have seen something of his own desire to distort, for the better,

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<sup>203</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>204</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 55).

whatever image he preferred to see of himself in the reflection of another.<sup>205</sup>

Schlegel's 'all encompassing' romantic vision was not, then, the least bit eager to embrace 'everything' at all. His 'godhead', nature, was somewhat less welcoming than Schlegel purported it to be: it simply reflected his own floriated and horribly fumitory disposition. 'It wasn't so difficult', as Hermann Broch might have said of Schlegel's finicky roitelet, 'to have God with one in these circumstances'.<sup>206</sup>

Schlegel's understanding of nature was woefully shortsighted, if not more than just a little childish. It may well come as something of a surprise that Schlegel, given his apparent interest in 'nature', entertained such a staggeringly facile understanding of its ways. Schlegel clearly had no intention to identify either himself or his 'poet' with nature. The critic by far preferred the company of a fanciful 'Mother Nature', but only on the strict understanding that 'she', so to speak, wore her best clothes, caked her puckered face with makeup and was good enough to flatter his conceit and pamper his indulgent tastes. He certainly was not the least bit interested in anything 'she' had to say for herself, least of all anything which was likely to upset him. Given his apparent squeamishness, it was, I imagine, an all too easy line to cross.

Schlegel did not initiate his 'courtship' with 'Mother Nature' to gain anything more from her than the company

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<sup>205</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 145).

<sup>206</sup> Hermann Broch, 'The Sleepwalkers' (1932 / 1996 p. 67). Translated by Edwin & Willa Muir. Vintage International, NYC.

of her 'inestimable' beauty. A significant portion of which, he indubitably imagined, rubbed off on himself. Schlegel's 'relationship' with nature was certainly vicarious, if not somewhat parasitic.

'Nature', if one turns to a page of Maurice de Guérin's 'Journal', 'has decked herself with all her jewels'.<sup>207</sup> And the de Guérin's image faithfully describes one's first impressions of Schlegel's 'godhead'. Not that it is always the case, but in this instance, first impressions prove telling in the extreme. Schlegel's 'bejeweled' muse made all sorts of agreeably enigmatic noises and Schlegel returned the compliment and spoke of 'her' in the most wheedlesome of tones. But whether 'she' was in any sort of position to reveal anything of particular note to Schlegel and he, in turn, to us seems less and less likely.

Schlegel's 'universal' ideal, focusing as it did on all that was 'beautiful' and conveniently turning a blind eye to that which was not, was all so very decorous and applausive that it hardly encourages one to hold out much hope of learning very much from him at all, not in an instructive or insightful sense. Schlegel may well have betrayed his extremely selective and fair weathered affinity with 'nature' but also, along the way, his... well, there is a 'choice':

1. grave shortcomings as particularly insightful thinker.
2. great flair and adroitness for sophistry.

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<sup>207</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 95).

Given the 'choice' between option 1 and option 2, it is almost completely impossible to plumb for either one or the other. Both, in their own way, are equally credible. Schlegel was beset as much by option 1 as he was blessed by option 2.

'But', as Schopenhauer might have asked, with option 1 firmly in mind, of Schlegel's woefully obtuse understanding of nature, 'is the world, then, a peep show? These things are certainly beautiful to *behold*, but to *be* them is something quite different'.<sup>208</sup> Schlegel failed, I believe, to fully appreciate the significant difference between the two - that is, between 'beholding' and 'being'. Nature was little more to the nescient critic than the most congenial, family orientated of 'peep shows' and perfectly in keeping with his anodyne tastes.

To put it more simply still, Schlegel pointed enthusiastically at the stage, but only on the odd occasion it was graced by a particularly handsome actor whom he thought resembled him the most. For all of Schlegel's grand talk of 'romantic poetry' - for all its apparent 'universality', the critic spelt out, quite clearly, the limits of the allegedly 'limitless' form. Schlegel was not the least bit eager to soil the soles of his shoes in excrement and filth as Schopenhauer went on, perhaps a little too enthusiastically, to do.

Schlegel was simply too fussy and picky about the company he wished to keep but having claimed to have opened the doors so widely he had absolutely no grounds to be so

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<sup>208</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation' Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 581).

pernickety.

Schlegel was clearly beset by innumerable shortcomings that hardly made him, by any stretch of the imagination, a 'particularly insightful thinker'. Option 1 has many merits.

But the all too entitled Schlegel, now bearing in mind option 2, appeared to want it both ways. 'It is not necessary', as he had the nerve to say, 'for anyone to sustain and propagate poetry through clever speeches and precepts, or, especially, to try to produce it, invent it, establish it, and impose upon restrictive laws as the theory of poetics would like to'.<sup>209</sup>

Schlegel was clearly reluctant to openly espouse a 'theory' - they are horribly 'restrictive', after all; nonetheless, the critic had an acute realisation that he must have some sort of firm 'outline' in place to keep all the 'unpoetic' rabble out. 'It is equally deadly for a mind', as indeed Schlegel said, 'to have a system or to have none. Therefore it will have to decide to combine both'.<sup>210</sup> Schlegel's 'theory', regardless of the pains he went to to disguise it, still had the firmest of boundaries, a perimeter fence - if you like, and however widely one was encouraged to roam one would eventually find oneself confronted by a formidable gate officiated by a pedantic little man, clipboard and pen ready, who impeded the progress of all but a fey few.

'What Schlegel wanted', as Hans Eichner observantly said

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<sup>209</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>210</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 136).

of the critic, 'was neither reckless irrationalism, nor total disregard of form'.<sup>211</sup> 'It was sufficient for his theory', Eichner added, 'that there should be the *semblance* of limitations being violated, of untrammelled caprice, and of confusion'.<sup>212</sup> Schlegel felt 'the obligation', if one turns to listen to Maurice Blanchot, 'to be systematic' and express, at the same time, a 'horror of system'.<sup>213</sup> But whatever 'horror' Schlegel expressed was purely for dramatic effect - it was not, as all too often proved the case, the least bit convincing.

Schlegel's 'theory' may well have been billed as a 'universal' theory or the 'semblance' of such, but it had, securely in place, the strictest of door policies. His 'theory' was as restrictive as any of the unspecified 'theories' he claimed, in the most epideictic of ways, to disapprove.

Schlegel's universal 'theory' had its limits after all.

When Schlegel said it was not necessary 'for', in his words, 'anyone to sustain and propagate poetry through clever speeches and precepts' one can only conclude he was not speaking in a personal capacity and what he actually meant to say was that it was not the least bit necessary for *anyone else* to 'sustain and propagate poetry' through those means as he was well on the way to doing an excellent, if not matchless job of it himself.<sup>214</sup>

Schlegel was almost certainly blessed with a 'great flair

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<sup>211</sup> Hans Eichner, 'Friedrich Schlegel' (1970 p. 63).

<sup>212</sup> Hans Eichner, 'Friedrich Schlegel' (1970 p. 63).

<sup>213</sup> Maurice Blanchot, 'The Athenaeum' (1983 p. 171).

<sup>214</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

for sophistry'. There is certainly no shame in choosing option 2, it too has its merits.

It is difficult, bearing in mind his insuperable 'gifts', not to see something of the worst sort of school teacher in Friedrich Schlegel. A teacher who, for all intent and purposes, advocates all manner of wildly irreverent and anarchic ideas about 'freedom' and 'flaunting the bounds of convention', but, at the same time, sees absolutely no conflict in putting his pupils in detention, for a very punctual hour, in order to fully instruct them in the said principles.

It is precisely this sort of double talk that one may well begin to object to most vehemently of all; more especially when one remembers the irreverence Schlegel encouraged one to have for literary 'laws' and the like in the first place. It is fairly disappointing to say the least.

'Combine the extremes', as another of Schlegel's sayings went, 'and you will have the true centre'.<sup>215</sup> In a certain sense, one may well, for a change, be tempted to agree with the critic and say: 'how very true'. Schlegel's 'theory' was, to no small extent, characterised by half measures; a 'theory' falsely billed as a 'non theory' whose tenets one 'dare' not question and whose 'generosity' one could all too easily fall foul of if one fell in, as it were, with the wrong crowd.

For all of Schlegel's disregard for rules and the like, he comes across as unbearably bossy and sanctimonious.

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<sup>215</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 155).



The reader may, understandably, start to feel somewhat swindled and short changed, if not even a little bullied by Schlegel. I will return to address this particular matter shortly.

#### V. FAR LOFTIER MATTERS

'Romantic poetry' was said, at least on paper, to be the 'cradle' of all things - the finite as well as the infinite, the sensible as well as the insensible. It was 'the infinite poem concealing', as Schlegel imagined, 'the seeds of all other poems'.<sup>216</sup> It was, to put it another way, an enormous Russian doll in whose heart, indeed hearts, all sublimity, artistry and spirituality duly 'throbbed'. The embryonic rhythm pulsated, no less resonantly, in the breast of the poet as it did in the bosom of 'Mother Nature'; the synchronous chest note left the all too susceptible critic captivated, not necessarily by his piercing 'insight' into the machinations of nature, but the enormous opportunity it afforded him to display his sophistic craft.

Schlegel's ambitions did not stop there - they were on a far 'grander' scale than that. His concern was not limited to that of 'art', 'genius', 'literature' and the like, but the rather more lofty matter of the 'world spirit' and the 'world spirit', if Schlegel could not honestly and truly say it of himself, embraced everything. 'Given this form and this spirit', as Hans Eichner wrote, 'the work of art will be a true microcosm; it will mirror the essential structure of nothing less

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<sup>216</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 82).

than the universe itself'.<sup>217</sup>

Schlegel sought to capture life's 'universal' quality and, having taken certain measures, as I will explain, to distil it from life itself, the critic put the 'prized' quality at the heart of his poetic vision. It was, if one takes Schlegel's ambition at face value, the grandest of ideas. It was certainly a means by which, keeping one's gnawing reservations firmly at bay, Schlegel 'aggrandised', not only his own poetic vision, but also the subject's 'inmost' nature to an 'inestimable' degree.

The 'romantic poet' was no less privy to life's universal, if 'primordial power' and, in light of certain procedures, he would be perfectly attuned to express its 'unfathomable' murmurings if, indeed, he followed Schlegel's lead. And perfectly in keeping with the example he wished to set, Schlegel's obscure turns of phrase coupled with his conspicuous 'back to front' thinking neither helped to develop a clearer understanding of his 'theory', his 'bejeweled' muse nor, indeed, his poetic subject. But Schlegel, need I remind you, was no ordinary literary critic, his 'theory' was no ordinary theory, and the 'romantic poet' was anything but your 'average Joe' in the street. As for Mother Nature, she bore absolutely no resemblance to nature as it is commonly found beyond the outskirts of Jena. Schlegel's 'insights' were anything but ordinary.

'The life and vigor of poetry', as Schlegel admitted, 'consists in the fact that it steps out of itself, tears out a section of religion, and then again withdraws into

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<sup>217</sup> Hans Eichner, 'Friedrich Schlegel' (1970 p. 68).

itself by assimilating this part'.<sup>218</sup> Schlegel almost certainly tore a very selective number of pages out of 'religion' - its most mystical and pantheistic sounding ones, whatever their creed, and 'assimilated' them, if indeed 'assimilated' is not simply a polite expression for exploiting them, to heighten the effect of his own 'theory' to a similar degree. 'Religion is absolutely unfathomable', Schlegel surmised. 'Always and everywhere', he added with, I suspect, more than just a touch of envy in his voice, 'one can dig more deeply into infinities'.<sup>219</sup> Taking this as his cue, Schlegel went about the task - with more than just a fair degree of success, of making his own 'theory' preeminent, profound and equally 'unfathomable'.

Schlegel sought to deify poetry. It was a 'Godhead' from which 'everything' was said to emanate. The critic enthroned his very own tightlipped and fussy roitelet - a nature god, 'the godhead the earth', as Schlegel called 'her', whose 'one poem' hung on the lips, muzzle and petal of man, beast and plant alike.<sup>220</sup>

All that was languid, gurgled and completely incapable of speech was no less expressive, to Schlegel's ears, as the 'genteel' poet who composed and recited verse. 'Every art or discipline which does not manifest its nature through language', as Schlegel said, betraying, at the same time, the high esteem in which he held his reticent godhead, 'possesses an invisible spirit: and that is poetry'.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 151).

<sup>219</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 152).

<sup>220</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>221</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms'

'Romantic poetry' need not have been the 'poetry of language' but the 'poetry of spirit' and as 'everything', so Schlegel claimed, was spiritualised it was also 'poetic'.

Any poet worth his salt aspired to express, Schlegel imagined, the 'mysterious' contralto of all that was deep seated, suspirious and aphonic: it was 'the invisible primordial power of mankind', the orchestral pit of nature itself.<sup>222</sup> 'Actually', as Schlegel supposed, 'every work should be a new revelation of nature'.<sup>223</sup> But whether the monumental fustian was willing to arbitrarily reflect the *entire* spirit of nature and not simply cherry pick and glean its more tempered elements still remained highly improbable.

The greatest of all poetic achievements, if Schlegel was to be believed, was to reflect that which was without intellect, sense of self or readily appreciable power of language. But Schlegel's poetic vision was evidently the outcome of a considerable amount of intellectual effort and took, along the way, a number of deft and seasoned linguistic liberties of its own.

Why was Schlegel so eager to denounce the sophisticated and verbose methods he employed to concoct his 'theory' in the first place? I have already called it, if you happen to remember, a 'paragon of ingenuity'. Why did the 'intellect' hold so little charm for him, of all people? Schlegel's talents were, as far as I can tell, almost

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(1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 76).

<sup>222</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>223</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 92).

completely limited to his slippery, 'evasive' form of intellectualism.

Schlegel was extremely guileful. He was well versed in the art of conjuration and trickery and had all the dexterous handiwork one associates with a professional stage magician. 'Poetry is the finest branch of magic', as Schlegel announced, 'and the isolated individual cannot rise up to magic. But where any human instinct functions in alliance with human spirit there is magical power'.<sup>224</sup> Schlegel was full of the fallacious sort of 'profundity' one tends to associate, not necessarily with a mystic, but a critic playing, when it suited him, at being a mystic. The former is positively less straightforward to deal with, one can but hope, than your average incarnation of the latter. A mystic is certainly not answerable, in the same way, to the exacting and rather more prosaic standards imposed on a literary critic. Schlegel knew this only too well.

Schlegel went about the 'feat' of making the intellect 'vanish', and, in a corresponding shuffle of the hands, swiftly replaced it with 'instinct' and 'spirit'. It was, however, an elaborate contrivance. 'If he was now a romanticist', as Robert W. Wernaer suggested, 'it was not merely for temperamental reasons, but because he had thought it out'.<sup>225</sup> 'Intellectual supremacy', as the same critic wrote on an earlier page, 'may be called the master passion of his best years'.<sup>226</sup> If we turn to Maurice Blanchot for a second opinion he had something

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<sup>224</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 80).

<sup>225</sup> Robert M. Wernaer, 'Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany' (1910 p. 67).

<sup>226</sup> Robert M. Wernaer, 'Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany' (1910 p. 65).

similar to say. 'Romanticism is excessive', Blanchot wrote, 'but its primary excess is one of thought - an abuse for which one cannot hold Schlegel solely responsible, since the same intellectual fever, the same dizzying passion for theoretical penetration', as he somewhat unfairly added, 'motivates Novalis'.<sup>227</sup>

Schlegel's attempt to pass off his 'theory' as an irrational 'theory', if one could even call it a 'theory', was purely a notional gesture. The critic pursued an entirely conceptual ideal and disavowed, in accordance with its goal, its intellectual basis. Not without good reason. His 'theory' could not be defended on intellectual grounds alone; it was absolute necessary, rational even, for Schlegel to resort to 'magic', pseudo-mystical tones and the like to defend his otherwise indefensible aims.

'For this is the beginning of all poetry', as you may well remember Schlegel claiming in the introductory chapter, 'to cancel the progression and laws of rationally thinking reason'.<sup>228</sup> But Schlegel had absolutely no intention to 'cancel' any such 'laws', he was too much of a prude for that. It was all something of a decoy - a red herring, if you will.

'The Dialogue on Poetry' was not the work of a writer who pursued, come what may, his 'spiritual and intellectual interests', to paraphrase Stirner, 'as he pleased'; rather, it was the work of a calculating theorist who manufactured, as best he could, an impression of 'irrationalism' to achieve his conceptual goal.

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<sup>227</sup> Maurice Blanchot, 'The Athenaeum' (1983 p. 165).

<sup>228</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 86).

Schlegel's intellectual craft remained, in spite of his insistence to the contrary, his 'master passion', as indeed Wernaer quite rightly said.

#### VI. THE IMMEASURABLE SNOB

Schlegel's appreciation of 'romantic poetry' had, lest we forget it, an unquestionably 'majestic' air about it. We are rather forced to face that fact whether we wish to or not. Schlegel spoke of his 'theory' in such toady and reverential tones that one may well start to become utterly contemptuous of the whole thing altogether. 'It can be exhausted by no theory', as Schlegel sternly warned us, 'and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its ideal'.<sup>229</sup>

At this point, Schlegel shows something of his true colours and begins to turn on the reader in a mean and snooty little way. I have already described him, rather too kindly on reflection, as an 'overbearing host'.

Schlegel's 'hospitality' gives way to something far more aggressive and unpleasant. He was not only an extremely shrewd if fussy theorist, but also, it appears, something of a cliquey and outright bully. One is almost certainly able to get a clearer picture, if nothing else, of the ruthlessness with which he pursued his specious ends.

'Other kinds of poetry', as Schlegel sniffed, 'are finished and are now capable of being fully analyzed'.<sup>230</sup> Are we then to assume that his 'theory', in complete

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<sup>229</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

<sup>230</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

contrast to 'other kinds of poetry', was actually beyond criticism? It was not, as Schlegel claimed, 'capable of being fully analyzed'? And why not? Simply because he intentionally failed to put a full stop at the end of his 'theory'? It was more than a little rich coming from a critic who claimed to value artistic and intellectual freedom as greatly as we had been led to believe.

If we turn, in the hope of getting a clearer answer, to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's 'The Literary Absolute' (1978), a study I have already described as 'bombastic', we find the authors somewhat in awe of Schlegel's seasoned trickery.

To understand what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy had to say for themselves is not the easiest of things to do; they tended, more often than not, to drown each other out. One not only gets the distinct impression that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy were talking at precisely the same time during 'The Literary Absolute', but had actually, in the process, surpassed Schlegel's verbal excesses and surpassed them by some distance. It was, if it needs saying, no mean feat.

Nevertheless, if one carefully and patiently picks one's way through Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's jumbled words one slowly begins to sense something of the alarming and hostile united front which faced Dupuis and Cotonet when they asked, rather 'stupidly' as it turns out: 'what, then, is romanticism'.<sup>231</sup>

Talking of the said question - the one that got Dupuis

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<sup>231</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 208).



and Cotonet so worked up in the first place, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy deigned to say: 'the important thing is first that the question should persist and insist', they both said at the same time, 'and that its answer, obviously, should be awaited'. 'It means', they added a little further on, 'that literature, as its own infinite questioning and as the perpetual positing of its own question, dates from romanticism and as romanticism. And therefore that the romantic question, the question of romanticism, does not and cannot have an answer or, at least that its answer can only be interminably deferred, continually deceiving, endlessly recalling the question (if only by denying that it still needs to be posed). This is why romanticism, which is actually a moment (the moment of its question) will always have been more than a mere "epoch", or else will never cease, right up to the present, to incomplete the epoch it inaugurated'.<sup>232</sup>

'The important thing', as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy may have patronised to tell Dupuis and Cotonet, 'is first that the question should persist and insist, and that its answer, obviously, should be awaited'.<sup>233</sup> 'Romanticism, in other words', as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy blurted, having finally reached, one would like to think, their wits' end, 'could never have protected, defended, or preserved itself from its "unworking" - its incalculable and uncontrollable incompleteness: its incompletable incompleteness'.<sup>234</sup>

Once again we are faced, not only with Schlegel's

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<sup>232</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Literary Absolute' (1978 / 1988 p. 83).

<sup>233</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Literary Absolute' (1978 / 1988 p. 83).

<sup>234</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Literary Absolute' (1978 / 1988 p. 59).

verbosity, but also the same haughty and patronising tone that we might have hoped had stopped, if not with Schlegel, then certainly with de Musset's Clerk nearly a century and half before 'The Literary Absolute' was published in the mid 1970's. One gets the familiar, sinking feeling of ever getting oneself involved and meddling with the 'business' of romanticism at all; 'the inability to be defined or delimited', as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy said, probably belongs to the very essence of genre'.<sup>235</sup>

The question of romanticism would appear to bring out the very worst in some people. It certainly brought the worst out of Schlegel, de Musset's Clerk and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy to name but a few. All of whom saw fit to look down their noses on those impertinent enough, like Dupuis and Cotonet, to have asked such 'facile' and 'vulgar' question in the first place.

One may even start to feel unaccountably protective towards Dupuis and Cotonet and find it increasingly difficult not to instinctively jump to their defence purely, if nothing else, to express one's antipathy for all the snooty, gangish and verbose form of bullying the pair would have almost certainly been subjected to at the hands of Schlegel and his clique. 'I felt a strong inclination', to quote Benjamin Constant's exceptionally sharp novel 'Adolphe' (1816), 'to contradict them; not because I was necessarily opposed to their opinions, but from exasperation at convictions so stolid and unshakable'.<sup>236</sup> The grounds of Constant's objections certainly begin to characterise something of my own; not

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<sup>235</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Literary Absolute' (1978 / 1988 p. 90 - 91).

<sup>236</sup> Benjamin Constant, 'Adolphe' (1816 / 1924 p. 34).

just towards Schlegel but also, with a few exceptions, the all too forgiving 'critical' reception the 'charmed' critic has received in more 'contemporary' circles.

On these occasions, when one's indignation is at its strongest, it is more than tempting, to immediately throw one's lot in with de Musset's dilettantish pair, declare the whole matter 'nonsense' and wash one's hands of it for good.<sup>237</sup> Life, as the well worn cliché goes, is simply too short. The adage, however trite, is particularly apt with Schlegel's example in mind.

The likes of Dupuis and Cotonet 'obviously' had to wait, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it, and wait for an extremely long time - if not an eternity, before Schlegel's 'theory' reached any sort of conclusive outcome. In the meantime, one, presumably, has little choice but to hold one's tongue - for fear of it being bitten off and impatiently drum one's fingers in the vague and rather fatuous belief that Schlegel's 'theory' would honour his word in the long run.

But, surely, one can guarantee to do almost anything if one has been granted an indefinite amount of time to accomplish it. And having shrewdly granted himself an eternity, Schlegel promised the world without any sort of pressing necessity to deliver it.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy described the 'fragment' as 'the romantic genre *par excellence*'.<sup>238</sup> Understandably so,

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<sup>237</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset' Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 209).

<sup>238</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Literary Absolute' (1978 / 1988 p. 40).

given their predilection for suspense. The soil need not give a fraction of an inch to any of Schlegel's embryonic, half-formed ideas; it was rather by the bye whether they manifested their meaning or not. What was of far greater importance to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy - what really got them going was the *possibility* that something entirely unprecedented and hitherto unknown could emerge, any second now, from Schlegel's vegetal hothouse. The prospect certainly kept the expectant pair on tenterhooks.

'Analysis', as an incalculably more insightful critic observed, 'kills spontaneity. The grain once ground into flour springs and germinates no more'.<sup>239</sup> And the 'grain', as Amiel just described it, must, as Schlegel also realised, remain exactly how it is - in a fallow, languorous state if it is to preserve any sense of futurity. Schlegel's fragments were permanently 'on hold' and suspended - as indeed they have remained for over two centuries, but, at any given moment, they could, as if by 'magic', burst forth from their gestatory state and reveal their latent splendor.

'Finally, it should be kept in mind', turning to Hans Eichner, 'that Schlegel's idea of *romantische Poesie* was conceived by him as the goal of an infinite progression, subject to "divinatory criticism" rather than to historical research'.<sup>240</sup> 'Even here, however, at his most immanent', as another critic - this time Kate Rigby wrote: 'Schlegel reserves a space for transcendence. For if the divine is eternally in the process of becoming, it

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<sup>239</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 254).

<sup>240</sup> Hans Eichner, 'Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of Romantic Poetry' (1956 p. 1031).

can never be fully present in the world at any one moment'.<sup>241</sup>

Having graced the form with a sense of all of these pseudo-mystical sounding qualities: 'infinite progression' (Eichner), 'eternal processes of becoming' (Rigby) and 'infinite waiting' (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy) - all of which have, if you happen to agree, a decidedly purgatorial ring to them, Schlegel extricated himself, in what must surely constitute something of a masterstroke, from unwelcome criticism.<sup>242</sup>

The 'essence' of 'romantic poetry' was, presumably still is, in an endless 'state of becoming' and anything in a so called 'state of becoming' is not, as Rigby said, 'fully present' and proves much harder to pin down and examine than your 'average' grounded concept.<sup>243</sup> In their enthusiasm to legitimise Schlegel's stupendously heightened idea - his 'mystifying pronouncements' as Wellek faithfully described them, nearly all of these 'critics' adjudged it 'fair game' to treat the reader in a cursory and somewhat shoddy way.

Before one knows what's what, one is immediately referred back to Schlegel's 116<sup>th</sup> fragment and solemnly advised, if one heeds Eichner's otherwise insightful advice, to resort to "divinatory criticism", whatever that might entail, to discern the 'profundity' of the critic's arcane and pretentious fragments.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Kate Rigby, 'Topographies of the Sacred. The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism' (2004 p. 49).

<sup>242</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Literary Absolute' (1978 / 1988 p. 102).

<sup>243</sup> Kate Rigby, 'Topographies of the Sacred. The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism' (2004 p. 49).

<sup>244</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms'

Schlegel legitimised his 'theory' by appealing to the least definite or comprehensible of things - 'the infinite', the 'unconscious', the 'magical', the 'half formed' and the so on and so forth; it was an ingenious, if rather duplicitous means, by which Schlegel put his 'pronouncements', had one the nerve to 'dare', beyond critical examination. Schlegel's 'calling', as I have said, exceeded the bounds of 'mere' literary criticism - it was far loftier than that.

Schlegel distanced himself, all too opportunely, from 'mere' literary criticism and extricated himself, in the process, from the sobriety of its invective. If his 'theory' was 'unfathomable' it was 'unfathomable' for a very good reason. That it left one none the wiser was not Schlegel's fault, the blame lay squarely with the reader; they were clearly insensitive to his 'poetic' and 'numinous' insights. Schlegel's 'mysticism', for all its calculated profundity remained, just like his 'universalism', entirely implausible.

In a certain sense, it must surely come as an enormous, if somewhat onerous compliment to Schlegel's sophistry that after the best part of two centuries it still had the strength to entrance critics as powerfully as it appeared to have entranced Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy *et al.*

The reader is certainly able to develop - I hesitate to use the word 'appreciation' but certainly a far keener estimation of Schlegel's 'intellectual evasiveness'; a sense, in other words, not only of how inscrutable he

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(1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

believed his own 'theory' to be but also the extent to which other critics, from the 1970's onwards, have all too willingly indulged Schlegel's fancies.

One cannot help, in this particular respect, but reluctantly admire Schlegel's ingenuity. Having placed a dormant seed at the heart of his 'theory' Schlegel made it extremely difficult to pass judgment on it for fear of 'jumping to conclusions'. His 'theory' could not be 'analysed' as analysis, to some extent or another, implies that something is complete and capable of being analysed in the first place. Schlegel's 'theory', however, was not complete. The all too precious 'seed' had yet to germinate.

'A romantic movement', if one listens to T. E. Hulme's all too optimistic hope, 'must have an end of the very nature of the thing. It may be deplored, but it can't be helped - wonder must cease to be wonder'.<sup>245</sup> But in Schlegel's example, the otherwise sound Hulme would seem to have missed the point entirely. Schlegel's romantic 'theory' showed absolutely no sign that it was ever likely to reach a conclusive 'end'. And that, indeed, seemed its sole and portentous point. 'Wonder' would continue to be 'wonder' if Friedrich Schlegel and his clique had any say in the matter.

'One may wonder', as another critic, Peter Szondi, postulated, 'whether his choice of the fragmentary form is not simply a sign that Schlegel recognizes his inability to solve these problems'.<sup>246</sup> Szondi was, I

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<sup>245</sup> T. E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism' collected in 'Speculations' (1924 / 1977 p. 140).

<sup>246</sup> Peter Szondi, 'Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of Poetical Genres: A Reconstruction from the Posthumous Fragments' (1986 p. 82).

believe, well on his way to making an extremely observant point before he jumped in and cut his better self short.

Schlegel had no intention - absolutely none at all, to 'solve' any 'problem'. His work proffered little in the way of genuine answers, big or small. It was largely barren. But one must not forget the fact that Schlegel fancied himself as a polemicist. 'When reason and unreason touch', as you may remember him saying, 'there's an electric shock. It's called polemics'.<sup>247</sup> Schlegel was duty bound, in that respect, to manufacture a series of niggling 'problems' and leave them hanging in the air. Each 'mildly charged fragment' may not have been harmful in itself, but as Schlegel delivered the little jolts with such rapidity, one repeatedly after the other, they constituted a steady and formidable war of attrition.

I would not, presuming I was in any sort of position to do so, have encouraged Szondi to entertain the thought, even mention the word 'solution' with regard to Schlegel's polemics. Not out of any particular deference for the critic's 'magisterial' scheme, but, purely and simply, out of consideration of the insurmountable distance Schlegel intentionally placed between the all too contrived one (the said 'problem') and the ever receding chance of the other (the reputed 'solution'). It is not the least bit advisable to entertain even the remotest hope of discerning a 'solution' as the 'problem' *has, is and will always be* several steps in its advance. To put it plainly, the 'solution' has not presented itself in the 1800's, the 1970's nor, indeed, the 2010's; consequently, one should not only severely doubt the

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<sup>247</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 204).



likelihood of a 'solution' ever appearing, but also be extremely wary of the very 'problems' Schlegel posed in the first place.

The critic's 'choice of the fragmentary form' was an extremely beneficent means through which Schlegel was able to absolve himself from any duty to 'solve' a single thing. Schlegel shirked the rather unenviable responsibility of 'filling in the gaps' to the reader whom he left completely in the lurch. Some of whom, in their growing desperation, have even seen fit, not wishing, presumably, to appear unpoetic, to accord profound importance to the derisory scraps left to them. Schlegel's rather sadistic sounding 'electric shocks' had far more disorientating effects on some than they had on, in a manner of speaking, a 'less grounded' collection of others.

It is sorely tempting, in this particular respect, to level a warning of sorts in the direction of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy *et al*: 'Even in the organic kingdom', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'we see a dry seed preserve the slumbering force for three thousand years, and with the ultimate appearance of favourable circumstances grow up as a plant'.<sup>248</sup> One has, I fear, an equal wait on one's hands if one has any inclination at all - let alone the patience or even, to put it very plainly indeed, the lifespan to see Schlegel's 'profound' fragments finally reach their fruition. The 'favourable circumstances', as Schopenhauer described them, have not been, in Schlegel's case, the least bit forthcoming.

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<sup>248</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 136 - 137).

One must seriously begin to question the patience - the all too saintly patience of the likes of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy whom, one fears, are still eyeing the soil in a masochistic state of expectancy.

As for the few cynics amongst us who are reluctant to readily accept the 'profundity' of Schlegel's pretentious and dubious 'theory' nor willing to pander to his fancies - if indeed one has the time to spare, are simply made to feel incapable of fully appreciating the magnitude and sublimity of his poetic vision. One has little choice but to make do with Schlegel's fallacious, half-baked ideas in the vain hope, that given time (and an awfully long stretch of time at that), they would eventually come to mean something in the long run.

The novelty and value of Schlegel's romantic 'theory' was based entirely upon the most extravagant and hollow of promissory notes whose authenticity one 'dare' not question and whose debts, one sorely suspects, Schlegel could never possibly square. His 'theory' was irresolvable. It was, as Pär Lagerkvist might have said of it: 'A riddle which is intended not to be solved, but to exist. To exist for us always. To trouble us always'.<sup>249</sup>

Schlegel's fragments alluded, in an all too abstruse way, to a far greater 'whole' whom one was not encouraged to talk about directly for fear of undermining its authority, offending his ideal in some way or another and betraying, as a result, one's 'plebian' insensibility for poetry. It was obviously not for the likes of us.

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<sup>249</sup> Pär Lagerkvist, 'The Sibyl' (1958 p. 148).

Schlegel's self-regarding and snobbish attitude has all of the meek 'do's and don'ts' one may well associate with meeting a member of the Royal Family. One is not encouraged to engage in direct eye contact and certainly not advised to touch it - let alone ruffle its hair, slap its back or begin to subject it to any sort of sensitive personal questions.

But one must remind oneself, to provide a brief interval to the proceedings, that Schlegel, for all of his bombastic talk and supercilious, bullying tone did not get anywhere near honouring his 'promissory note'. Schlegel certainly did not go on to write the complete work of which he spoke in such reverential tones; instead, he ended his days in the far more fitting luxuriance of embassy where everything, no doubt to his extreme delight, 'gleamed' and 'glowed' in his inestimable company.

'You may try in vain to seize the butterfly's wing', as you may remember, to return your attention to the matter at hand, the Clerk's condescending words of warning to Dupuis and Cotonet in the introductory chapter, but 'the dust that colors it will be all you can hold in your fingers'.<sup>250</sup> And, no doubt, to the approval of de Musset's Clerk, Schlegel's 'theory' was also based on irresolution and indeterminacy. It had all of the qualities of the most maddening and irritating butterfly whom one cannot, however hard one tries, appear to be able to net and pin down.

'Romantic poetry invariably deals with longing', as

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<sup>250</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet' collected in 'The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset', Volume 9 (1836 / 1908 p. 209).

Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen wrote in 'Novalis and the Blue Flower' (1892), 'not a definite, formulated desire for some attainable object, but a dim, mysterious aspiration, a trembling unrest, a vague sense of kinship with the infinite, and a consequent dissatisfaction with every form of happiness which the world has to offer'. 'The blue flower', Boyesen added - alluding to Novalis' unfinished, fairy tale 'Heinrich von Ofterdingen' (1802), 'like the absolute ideal, is never found in this world; poets may at times dimly feel its nearness, and perhaps even catch a glimpse of it in some lonely forest glade, far from the haunts of men, but it is vain to try to pluck it'.<sup>251</sup>

Schlegel's exalted 'theory' absolved itself from intellectual scrutiny - 'historical research' as Eichner called it, as it had simply not reached the point where it could actually be scrutinised; if, indeed, one had plucked up enough courage to suggest such an unthinkable thing in the first place.<sup>252</sup> Having intentionally left everything 'half-done' and extending what he had done to an insensate, infinite and fussy 'godhead' - 'Mother Nature', Schlegel not only betrayed his 'inability to solve these problems', but also excused himself from that duty as 'these problems', if you remember Peter Szondi calling them, were distended to such a nonsensical degree that they were put well beyond one's grasp, if not one's complete comprehension. Schlegel 'longed', to repeat a line from J. P. Jacobsen's novel, 'Niels Lyhne' (1880), 'for colors that life did not possess, for a beauty that

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<sup>251</sup> Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, 'Novalis and the Blue Flower' collected in 'Essays on German Literature' (1892 p. 324 - 25).

<sup>252</sup> Hans Eichner, 'Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of Romantic Poetry' (1956 p. 1031).

the earth could not ripen'.<sup>253</sup>

Schlegel's 'theory' had yet to reach its completion, if indeed it was ever likely to reach such a conclusive point. 'But in the universe of poetry', as Schlegel imagined, 'nothing stands still, everything is developing and changing and moving harmoniously; and even the comets obey invariable laws of motion. But until the course of these heavenly bodies can be calculated and their return predicted, the true world system of poetry won't have been discovered'.<sup>254</sup> The 'true world system of poetry' had yet to be discovered; man, as Schlegel faithfully said, had far more chance of fathoming the workings of the universe than he had of fathoming his own poetic 'theory'.<sup>255</sup>

Schlegel may well have talked of 'flowers' and 'bosoms', but he talked of them through clenched teeth. His wheedlesome tone was little more than a ruse. The critic practiced a very sharp and unsavoury form of intimidation by means of scope and scale. 'Only in relation to the infinite', as we have heard Schlegel snort, 'is there meaning and purpose; whatever lacks such a relation is absolutely meaningless and pointless'.<sup>256</sup>

Not that Schlegel was the only who resorted to these sort of 'intimidatory tactics'. Schopenhauer, as we will hear in the proceeding chapter, was no less culpable - possibly worse, in fact. But if we turn, putting the

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<sup>253</sup> Jens Peter Jacobsen, 'Niels Lyhne' (1880 / 19\*\* p. 93 - 94).

<sup>254</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 237).

<sup>255</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 237).

<sup>256</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 241).

philosopher to one side for the time being, to the second volume of Sénancour's 'Obermann' (1803) we hear very much the same thing: 'Nothing is worth consideration that is not lasting'.<sup>257</sup> 'I need limitless illusions', as the same writer said in the first volume of his lengthy series of soliloquies, 'receding before me to keep me always under their spell. What use to me is anything that can end?'.<sup>258</sup> And turning to another work we hear: 'What I felt as I plunged my gaze into this infinitude', as Maurice de Guérin wrote - expressing something of Schlegel's particular bent, 'it would be difficult to express. This vision is too great for the soul; she is terrified at this mighty apparition and no longer knows whither she goes'.<sup>259</sup>

It is, I feel obliged to add, something of a minor injustice to cast Sénancour and, to a lesser degree, Maurice de Guérin in exactly the same light as Friedrich Schlegel. For all of their own browbeating by means of the 'infinite', Sénancour in particular, was a far more ingenuous and thoughtful writer than the fraught and pompous Schlegel could ever faithfully have said to have been. One is certainly more tolerant of Sénancour's excesses than Schlegel's as there are a great deal of genuinely insightful things to be gained from his work which one cannot so readily say, if at all, of Schlegel's.

Even in the hands of a far greater talent, the fragmentary form, in light of its proliferous nature, was

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<sup>257</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. II (1804 / 1910 p. 251).

<sup>258</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. I (1804 / 1910 p. 73).

<sup>259</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 87).

somewhat flawed, as indeed Novalis suggested. But it mattered less if a dozen or so fragments failed to capture one's attention - proved 'sterile' as Novalis put it, if one or two of them actually succeeded in their aim; they, at least, made up for the shortcomings of the others.<sup>260</sup> But in the regrettable event of coupling the form's inherent weakness - its decidedly hit and miss nature, with a writer of Schlegel's obscurant bent the resultant experience is dramatically less rewarding.

There is little in the way of a 'counterbalance', as it were. The form's weakness is not complimented by occasional flashes of fulgurant light. Schlegel's fragments were largely without fuel or flint and failed to ignite, least of all sustain one's interest or curiosity. Schlegel simply did not have the presence of mind nor the penetrating insight, in anything like the necessary proportions, to bring very much to light at all - presuming, somewhat naively, that was his aim. One comes across one 'sterile' grain after another with far greater frequency than one might, initially, have hoped.

Leaving that matter for good, one can nonetheless, to return your attention to 'loftier' matters, begin to recognise the importance the likes of the 'infinite' and 'universal' had for the romantics in question.

'Infinitude' has, if one happens like Schlegel, to be impressed by big and fanciful things, a far more elevated and rarefied ring to it than its less fruitful counterpart, finitude. The 'infinite' certainly had a very special appeal for Friedrich Schlegel - a sophist with a particular soft spot for all that was big, perfumatory and, as René Wellek said a little earlier,

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<sup>260</sup> Novalis, 'Grains of Pollen' (1798/ 19\*\* 2: 463).

'grandiose'.<sup>261</sup>

The fanaticism for all that was big and esoteric engendered a certain, if peculiar form of snobbishness towards all that was 'merely' finite, singular and demonstrable. And Schlegel, for one, certainly capitalised on the disproportionate size difference between the one and the other. Schlegel used the 'infinite' as a yardstick, which he beat rather menacingly in his hand, to intimidate the reader, to make him or her 'terrified', as indeed de Guérin's 'soul' was 'terrified', by the thoroughly daunting sight of 'this mighty apparition'.<sup>262</sup> The 'mighty' vision was, in Schlegel's case, his own 'theory' of 'romantic poetry'.

Schlegel bullied the reader, if he or she did not wish to appear insensitive, 'unpoetic' or too vulgar into submitting to his claims. The reader is simply not up to the task of comprehending Schlegel's regal, if thoroughly specious 'theory', yet alone begin to subject it to any sort of analysis. 'This vision', as we heard de Guérin say, 'is too great for the soul'.

To put it a little more simply, Schlegel exploited the idea of 'the infinite' to shoo away critics in the most intimidating and belittling sort of ways.<sup>263</sup> They were simply not up to the task of analysing something so very grand: it was clearly beyond them.

Wyndham Lewis certainly recognised the unsavoury and

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<sup>261</sup> René Wellek, 'Friedrich Schlegel' in 'A History of Modern Criticism: 1750 - 1950. Volume 2: The Romantic Age' (1955 p. 35).

<sup>262</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 87).

<sup>263</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Literary Absolute' (1978 / 1988 p. 59).



disdainful form of bullying generally at play. The 'individual, in short', as the refulgent painter wrote, 'is dwarfed by these perspectives'.<sup>264</sup> 'Everywhere', as he said some pages before, 'the *snobbery of scale* is employed to drive home these doctrines'.<sup>265</sup> Lewis' observation not only proved pertinent with regards to Schlegel's 'theory' but also, with one eye on the following chapter, Schopenhauer's doctrine of nature's will. Schlegel ran, all too eagerly, into the oafish arms of the so called 'infinite' to overawe and frighten readers into submission; it was another tremendously clever, if rather cheap means by which Schlegel 'kept trespassers out'.

But one must seriously begin to question whether 'romantic poetry' did not simply represent an inviolable 'golden rule' that Schlegel exploited in a brazen, if vain attempt to cover up his grave and innumerable shortcomings.

#### VII. THE CONCUSSIVE DIALECTIC

While it may again sound improbable, given his reluctance to leave his comfort zone or associate himself with anything that was not of a likeminded temperament, Schlegel continued to test, not just one's credulity and patience, but, if he was to be believed, 'ideas' themselves to their absolute limits. His 'theory' had a dialectical aim; it sought, as you may remember hearing in one of the earlier passages, to 'combine the extremes' in order to ascertain the 'true' centre.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 241).

<sup>265</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 182).

<sup>266</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 155).

'An idea', as Schlegel elaborated, '... is an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts'.<sup>267</sup> 'Only by being individual and universal', if we swiftly turn to another of his epigrams, 'does a work become *the work*'.<sup>268</sup> But '*the work*', as Schlegel emphatically described it, acted to the advantage of one at the expense of the other. The 'extremes' were not on anything that could be described as an equal footing.

Schlegel hardly talked of the 'individual' as fair game for the 'universal'; the 'centre' was not the least bit true, it was way off the mark and played more to the advantage of the latter than it did to the former. 'Only through the relationship to the infinite', as the immeasurable snob imagined, 'do content and utility arise; that which is not related to it is merely void and useless'.<sup>269</sup> It was a wholly imbalanced and one sided affair and one party - the smaller, least 'useful' of the two, inevitably lost out to the other.

The so called 'dialectic' of Schlegel's 'theory' had all the disorientation and confusion associated with the immediate aftermath of a particularly violent collision. The result of the head on encounter meant all that was 'individual' was now 'universal' and all that was 'universal' had suddenly become 'individual'. The former was, inexplicably, a byword for the latter and the interplay between the two was said, if only in a nominal sense, to be commutative.

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<sup>267</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 176).

<sup>268</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 92).

<sup>269</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 149).

Schlegel betrayed something of his concussive state when he asked: 'But are not nature and the world individuals?'.<sup>270</sup> On the following page, Schlegel had still not fully recovered his senses: 'Through artists mankind becomes an individual'.<sup>271</sup> And one severely begins to doubt, turning to another work, whether he was ever likely to recover them at all - presuming, of course, he had them to lose in the first place. 'Aren't there individuals', as Schlegel asked, 'who contain within themselves whole systems of individuals?'.<sup>272</sup>

The 'universal', from the little one is able to gather, engulfed all that was 'individual' within an enormous, capacious cloud. Having done so, Schlegel saw absolutely no reason to prevent him from talking of the 'universal' as if it were indeed 'individual'. Given its 'infinite scope', Schlegel no doubt felt entitled to refer to his 'theory' in any which way he pleased. It subsumed 'everything', after all. But whether anything of singular standing actively contributed an influence of its own in the reputed 'interchange' with the 'universal' was, if one considers Schlegel's aversion to all that was not monumental, again highly improbable.<sup>273</sup>

'We are concerned only with the meaning of the whole', as Schlegel corroborated. And, as he immediately added, 'things which individually excite, move, occupy, and delight our sense, our hearts, understanding, and

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<sup>270</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 154).

<sup>271</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 155).

<sup>272</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 196).

<sup>273</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 176).

imagination seem to us to be only a sign, a means for viewing the whole at the moment when we rise to such a view'.<sup>274</sup> On another page we hear him say much the same sort of thing: 'Every conscious link of an organism', Schlegel wrote, 'should not perceive its limits without a feeling for its unity in relation to the whole'.<sup>275</sup>

Schlegel was not the least bit interested in anything that was 'individual', least of all 'human'. It had, first of all, to be implicated with, if not submersed in a mysterious 'whole' before he could bring himself to talk of it with any degree of enthusiasm at all. 'For they regarded life', if you remember what Blankenagel had to say about Schlegel's coterie, 'as one and inseparable, as a unit'.<sup>276</sup> And if one happens, like Schlegel, to consider 'life' as a single, featureless and 'inseparable unit' then one is, understandably, disinclined to tolerate anything which acts to inhibit that aim with the least degree of patience.

#### VIII. EFFACING MEASURES

Central to the critic's inceptive 'theory' was the beleaguered 'romantic poet' and he found himself, rather a miniscule fraction of himself, in the thick of the action. Unlike the comprehensive statue of Schopenhauer's doctrine and, to a lesser degree, Max Stirner's 'The Ego and Its Own', Schlegel's artful 'theory', as we well know by now, was of a decidedly piecemeal character.

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<sup>274</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 89).

<sup>275</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 154).

<sup>276</sup> John C. Blankenagel, 'The Dominant Characteristics of German Romanticism' (1940 p. 4).

The reader, if he or she wishes to patch together something that resembles, if only in name, an 'image' of Schlegel's subject, will be faced with puzzle whose numerous pieces are scattered throughout the 'Dialogue on Poetry'. To that end, we are compelled to sift through Schlegel's fragments to get - to use something of a misnomer, a 'clearer' estimation of his subject. Nonetheless, it is possible to detect, if only dimly, a billowing impression of the 'romantic poet'. One certainly develops a far keener estimation of the destructive nature of Schlegel's objectives and the 'ruthlessness', as I described it earlier, with which he pursued them.

If we turn our attention to the aforementioned subject, the romantic poet, we will 'appreciate' certain effacing measures, if Schlegel was to successfully achieve his aim, had first to be performed. The critic's eye, rather mind's eye, was 'focused' on an 'invisible', 'magical' and 'unconscious' principle which was said, as we know, to exist 'within' the heart of the poet and nature alike. If Schlegel was to successfully prise out this visceral quality then clearly something had to be done about his integument. It was something of an inconvenience and rather got in the way of Schlegel's aims. The same went for any of the poet's other definitive features. All of which acted to distinguish him, to Schlegel's disapproval, from the likes of any other.

'It is individuality', as a still concussed Schlegel wrote, 'which is the original and eternal within man' but, as he conceded, 'personality doesn't matter so

much'.<sup>277</sup> The value Schlegel accorded to the poetic subject was determined by that which was 'universal' and unifying 'within' him; all that was particular to him - his 'personality' for instance, did not, by comparison, stand up at all well. It acted to differentiate the subject from the 'the whole' and upset the trim, even outline of Schlegel's uniform and perfectly hollow vision.

The critic by far preferred to work with an insubstantial 'essence'; it was 'invisible' and 'unconscious' and, to its further credit, proved incomparably more open to manipulation than the poet's bodily person. It allowed Schlegel to take certain liberties with it that he was simply not able to do with his determinate form. The latter, that is to say, the essence, was certainly not accountable to any of the 'restrictive laws' which presided over the former, the flesh. It was an enormous 'advantage'. Schlegel was now able to magically transgress the 'obstacles' which would otherwise have impeded his ideal.

And, as a matter of due course, all the poet's peculiarities and distinguishing features were whitewashed. Then, and only then, was Schlegel's subject ideally positioned to express, not simply his 'limited' self but the lumpish whole of 'humanity' not to mention the entirety of nature itself, within reason of course. The poet was now an 'essence', a sweeping generality at one with the world rather than an individual person at variance with it.

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<sup>277</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 155).

The poet's somatic state as well as all the intricate qualities which accompanied it were 'void' and 'useless'; they did not serve Schlegel's purposes nearly as well as his 'essence'. In ridding, as a matter of utmost urgency, the poet of his 'personality', his sense and other 'encumbrances', Schlegel reduced the poet to his lowest possible condition. And, in this state, he was a far more profitable proposition for Schlegel to entertain.

The very standing of the 'romantic poet' had been whittled away to such a violent degree that he was no different from the most insensate of things. Finally, Schlegel was able to extend something, though not very much, of the poet to the world at large. 'Man', as Schlegel enthused, 'is Nature creatively looking back at itself'.<sup>278</sup> He is, Schlegel gushed, 'the flower of the earth'.<sup>279</sup> 'Think of something finite moulded into the infinite', as the critic imagined, 'and then you think of man'.<sup>280</sup> 'And is not this soft reflection of the godhead in man', as Schlegel asked of the subject's disfiguration, 'the actual soul, the kindling spark of all poetry'.<sup>281</sup> What did the 'romantic poet' not resemble in this rudimentary state? Absolutely 'everything' was common to him.

Schlegel was determined to push squares through circular holes, but he forced them through with such violence they eventually yielded and slotted into an uncustomary mould.

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<sup>278</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 243).

<sup>279</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 253).

<sup>280</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 157).

<sup>281</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 85).

But if one wishes, like Schlegel, to make circles out of squares, as it were, then one is obliged to cut them down to size, round off each one of their crisp, unwieldy corners and mutilate their very form to do so. Having adopted a similarly crude technique, Schlegel made 'all things' fit into his unifying scheme; even if it left a jumble of 'distinguishing features' at the critic's feet.

To put it more simply still, Schlegel valued all that was homogeneous and uniform rather than that which was heterogeneous and distinct; Schlegel discarded all of these 'pointless' things as they conflicted with his primary objectives.<sup>282</sup> And those, need I say, were not only entirely conceptual, but somewhat barbaric.

If Schlegel were to see 'homogeneity' in 'heterogeneity', to see the 'universal' in the 'individual', to see circles in squares as I rather clumsily put it, 'all things' must first be decorticated and dispersonated; in other words, they had to be stripped of skin and divested of personality. These measures, drastic as they may sound, were of paramount importance to Schlegel and paid, if he was to be believed, certain 'dividends'.

'If you cast your life into a human mould', as Schlegel patronised to tell us, 'you've done enough; but you'll never', he was quick to add, 'reach the heights of art and the depths of science without some portion of divinity'.<sup>283</sup> Whatever 'truth' Schlegel's 'theory' afforded the poet, would not present itself to him if remained as he was. Of course, it was perfectly

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<sup>282</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 241).

<sup>283</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 247).



acceptable if he derived ample satisfaction from all that was humdrum and banal; if that was the case, the soaring 'heights' of 'art', given his obvious insusceptibility to such things, were probably not for him - not in any circumstance.

If, on the other hand, he aspired to reach such exultant 'heights' then he was expected to pay, as is common practice, at least something for the 'pleasure' and, quite in keeping with the seemingly inescapable status quo, the 'romantic poet' was made to pay a hefty price for the privilege of Schlegel's 'revelatory' view.

While the procedure afforded him a certain advantage in span (he was now able to 'reach' the exclusive and otherwise unobtainable 'heights' of 'art' etc.), it left the poet somewhat disfigured. He was certainly not the same man, if indeed he could be described as anything resembling a 'man' at all. The critic brutalised the poet's 'human' form by putting it through a grindstone of sorts and, having done so, compressed the little that remained into a elementary, single mould. Needless to say, it accommodated all shapes and sizes. The poet was now in an ideal state to appreciate all that was 'celestial' and otherworldly as he no longer resembled anything that was faintly human. 'One mentions many artists', as Schlegel pontificated, 'who are actually art works of nature'.<sup>284</sup>

Schlegel, as we well know by now, had far wider concerns on his hands; he was not dealing with anything as secular or ordinary as a corporeal human figure, but the *spirit*.

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<sup>284</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 121).

And the latter should not be encouraged in any way whatsoever if any significant inroads were to be made with regards to the former. Certain sacrifices had to be made, after all. 'But', as Max Stirner might have pertinently added, 'truth is spirit, stuff altogether inappreciable by the senses, and therefore only for the "higher consciousness", not for that which is "earthly-minded"'.<sup>285</sup> And, quite in keeping with Stirner's fears, Schlegel's revelations were certainly not for the 'earthly minded', but those of 'higher', more rarefied tastes.

The poet's very standing was jeopardised, put in utmost peril, by Schlegel's 'theory'. The needs of an anonymous 'essence' superceded his own. The two were at loggerheads. The inflexible state of one conflicted with the 'higher', more expansive demands of the other. And the poet politely and somewhat foolishly acceded and gave way to the bigger of the two parties.

Schlegel saw it differently.

The poet, as the critic warned, 'must not allow himself to be robbed of his own being, his innermost strength by a criticism that wishes to purge and purify him into a stereotype without spirit and without sense'.<sup>286</sup> But if one takes into consideration the decidedly skewed nature of Schlegel's 'dialectics' - working, in the most preponderant way, to the favour of the 'universal' at the expense of the 'individual', the critic's 'theory' did exactly that. It 'robbed', as a matter of necessity, the poet 'of his own being' as well as his 'sense' as these

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<sup>285</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 76).

<sup>286</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

were the very qualities that prevented him from communing with Schlegel's aloof and standoffish muse: 'Mother Nature'.

What mattered to Schlegel, in a further attempt to clarify the point, was the poet's 'innermost being', but it did not, as we know, solely belong to him; it was common property and, given the satisfaction of certain criteria, belonged to one and all. Schlegel was only able to extend his subject to 'all things' by destroying the very qualities which constituted his 'individuality' in the first place.

The 'romantic poet' was little more to Schlegel than a soporific force of nature, no different from the likes of dormant seed. And, somewhat unsurprisingly, Schlegel's ontology faithfully mirrored the fragmentary and bewildering means the critic chose to express himself. His subject was also a 'fragment' in whom, as Schlegel imagined, 'the whole' was conflated: an 'infinite poem concealing the seeds of all other poems'.<sup>287</sup> The 'romantic poet' was the microcosm in which the macrocosm duly resided. And, no doubt to the sophist's delight, the 'romantic poet' was no less fathomable than his 'theory'. 'We will know man', as Schlegel cautioned his readers, 'when we know the center of the earth'.<sup>288</sup> Elsewhere he said, 'mankind struggles with all its power to find its own centre'.<sup>289</sup>

The 'romantic poet' certainly came out of Schlegel's

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<sup>287</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 82).

<sup>288</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 250).

<sup>289</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 83).

'theory' the worse for wear. Whatever gains he made on the universal front, the poet lost out in a personal capacity. Schlegel's mind's eye was 'focused', in the most calculating of ways, on the 'infinite', ever receding expanse of his 'theory' rather than that which was immediately present. And the same was equally true of his subject. The ontology of the 'romantic poet' was ghoulish in the extreme.

'Everyone's view of poetry is true and good as far as that view itself is poetry', as Schlegel wrote. 'But since one's poetry', he added, 'is limited, just because it is one's own, so one's view of poetry must of necessity be limited. The mind cannot bear this; no doubt because, without knowing it, it nevertheless does know that no man is merely man, but that at the same time he can and should be genuinely and truly all mankind. Therefore, man in reaching out time and again beyond himself to seek and find the complement of his innermost being in the depths of another, is certain to return ever to himself'.<sup>290</sup>

Taking the above passage into consideration, the poet was given, as one may appreciate, something of an almighty and unenviable undertaking. His 'creative spirit', if he harboured any inclination to express it (in view of the severe drawbacks), was spread very thinly indeed; it was the music of the 'universe', a poem of 'the earth' that resided in 'us' all. The poet is 'obviously' limited in himself - he is 'merely' an individual, after all. Schlegel talked, at one point, of 'man's feeling for

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<sup>290</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

something beyond man'.<sup>291</sup> And, at another, he claimed: 'It is peculiar to mankind to transcend mankind'.<sup>292</sup> In turn, the poet was compelled, as a matter of necessity, to trawl the absolute 'depths' of 'mankind' if he wished to capitalise on the extreme 'good fortune' Schlegel afforded him and express, not necessarily his, but *its* so called 'transcendent' spirit.

'The I', as Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert spoke on Schlegel's behalf, 'is only one part of what forms the essence of philosophy. More important is the whole that transcends any particular I, and indeed, without which each individual I would be without meaning'.<sup>293</sup> Presuming Millán-Zaibert was correct and Schlegel's poet 'transcended any particular I', one must surely cast doubts as to whether he was in any fit state, having stooped so very low in a desperate bid to find a common point of contact with 'all and sundry', to express very much at all.

The poet's 'innermost being' was spread so far and wide and, for that matter, hit such lowly depths that he was, for all intent and purposes, absolutely defunct as an individual person. But, once again, it hardly mattered. He was 'only' a single part of a far greater 'whole' of which Millán-Zaibert spoke with all the customary deference one associates with the likes of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy *et al.* One can only conclude that somewhere 'within' the poet lay an incalculable number of other slumbering 'individualities' and they were, in a

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<sup>291</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 246).

<sup>292</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 151).

<sup>293</sup> Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, 'Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy' (2007 p. 150).

quantitative sense, far more important to Millán-Zaibert as indeed they were to Schlegel, than the poet's own. The subject was not only outnumbered, but overpowered by the collective presence of *the spirit*.

It was always that which was 'whole', 'infinite' and 'universal' and, for that matter, completely inhuman that was of most importance to the theoretically minded critic. As for the question of the poet ever 'returning to himself', it hardly seemed likely. On his current trajectory it was far more probable that he would return to the communal, 'unconscious' cradle from which his vegetal 'essence' originated - that is to say, the 'primordial' bosom of nature.<sup>294</sup>

The romantic subject was valued only by virtue of his relationship to 'the whole', the 'infinite' and 'universal' not by anything that might be said to have distinguished him from the likes of these stark and foreboding sounding things. He was merely a 'hint', as Schlegel put it - an allusion, one is encouraged to believe, to 'something higher'. 'It is', as Schlegel said of his poetic principle, 'an infinite being and by no means does it cling and attach its interest only to persons, events, situations, and individual inclinations; for the true poet all this - no matter how intensely it embraces his soul - is only a hint at something higher, the infinite, a hieroglyph of the one eternal love and the sacred fullness of life of creative nature'.<sup>295</sup>

Schlegel's use of the term 'higher' was, to say the

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<sup>294</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>295</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 99 - 100).

least, extremely questionable. The only reason, as far as I can gather, the poet was able to witness for 'himself' the sacrosanct 'glory' of nature, rather 'Mother Nature', was that a certain number of reductive measures had been taken. The term 'higher' hardly describes the means by which Schlegel 'enabled' the poet to 'reach' or, as I am inclined to believe, *stoop* to that end. As a 'hieroglyph' of 'creative nature' rather than a corporeal or distinct figure, the 'romantic poet' had, after all, been robbed of his personality, singularity and bodily presence.<sup>296</sup> The term 'lower', given the number of effacing measures taken, was surely more appropriate.

The 'romantic poet' paid dearly for all of the theoretical liberties, outrages even, Schlegel took with him. His stature was not heightened a single notch by Schlegel's 'theory', but cut down, in brutal fashion, to its dullest, most vegetal level. Only in this disfigured state were 'all things' common to him. The subject's characteristic qualities, those personal to him, were of far less use to Schlegel; they got in the way and hindered, to reiterate the point, the critic's 'process' of extension and, ultimately, mutilation.

The 'universal' ideal was an enormous 'dispersonating pool', as I described it in the introductory chapter, into which the individual subject was thrown and sank without trace. 'All streams of poetry', as indeed Schlegel maintained, 'flow together into the one vast sea'.<sup>297</sup> But no clear cut distinction could possibly be drawn between one measure of water or another; it was

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<sup>296</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 99 - 100).

<sup>297</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 53).

rather by the bye whether it was led to the sea by a tributary or fell violently from a cloud in the sky. It was, as proved the case time and time again, of absolutely no consequence.

Schlegel was solely concerned with the fathomless sea into which the water, whatever its source, was directed. The subject was merely a droplet in an expansive 'primordial' ocean and, as one may well appreciate, it is hardly possibly to distinguish a single droplet from the voluminous element into which it has immediately merged.

Schlegel even had the nerve to speak of 'the spiritual sphere as a firm point from which the creative energy of man can safely expand, developing in all directions, without losing itself'.<sup>298</sup> I disagree. The bonds of the said 'spiritual sphere' were secured by the loosest, not the 'firmest' of anchors. As for the subject's 'creative energy' - well, that certainly 'expanded', but, like a modest measure of concentrate in umpteen thousand gallons of water, it expanded in the most dissolvent and dissipated of ways.

The subject's 'immeasurable sense of being' emanated, not from him or her self, but the murky waters into which the he or she, not that it particularly mattered, had been plunged. The poet was neither man nor woman but *the* elemental 'essence' from which 'the him' and 'the her' sprang.

Schlegel's subject was not a person, but a poetic essence and as an essence - in fact, *only as an essence*, was he

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<sup>298</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 82 - 83).



able to transgress his earthly state; even then, it was on the strict proviso that he first disrobe, neatly fold up his vestiture and put, while he was at it, all of his other 'belongings' to one side - they would, if he still wished to immerse himself in nature's communal pool, no longer be of any use to him.

Schlegel's 'theory' managed to prise his subject's nature out of himself and, having stripped it down to its bare minimum, it no longer possessed any characteristic attributes; they did not 'matter so much', after all. The poet's 'spirit' may well, as a 'base element', have found itself a component part in a countless array of other phenomenal forms, but it was no longer remotely human. Having divested himself of himself, the 'romantic poet' was cast to the high seas and completely lost to Schlegel's totalising 'theory'.

Schlegel's ideal was completely hollow from top to toe, but even then it worked to the charmed critic's advantage.

#### IX. THE BLANK PAGE

Schlegel was enormously fond of half-formed ideas. They alluded, in some way or another, to something infinitely larger than themselves and vastly superior to one's intellectual prowess, whatever its strength, to comprehend. The critic's 'theory', rather what it alluded to, was certainly beyond one's ability to communicate or envisage in its entirety.

You will possibly remember what Schlegel said in one of the previous passages: 'In poetry, too, all that is whole

might be only half-done, and yet all half-done might actually be whole'.<sup>299</sup> And Schlegel turned the 'half-done' and 'whole' on their head just as he had done with the 'individual' and 'universal'. The 'half-done' was no less 'whole', no less 'complete' than the 'individual' was said to be 'universal'. Schlegel's concussive condition was, it seems, irreversible.

The sketchy and inconclusive nature of Schlegel's fragmentary work suggested a 'whole' whose scope and magnitude was far greater than any complete work could ever possibly hope to be. The critic aspired to conflate the 'poetic whole' within a few short and utterly confusing sentences.

Schlegel churned out an arcane array of fragments in some sort of attempt to allude to a 'whole' whose magnitude and revelatory 'truth' he deemed beyond one's ken to grasp or successfully articulate; it was certainly not for the 'earthly-minded', as Stirner put it. In the turn of events, the reader is made to feel extremely small and inadequate compared to Schlegel's inflated, quasi-mystical 'theory'. 'And', as Wyndham Lewis might have said, 'feeling very, very small indeed, after that, in the ensuing discouragement almost any "truth" can be put across'.<sup>300</sup>

Schlegel's 'theory', as we know, emphasised all that was 'becoming', 'primordial', 'invisible' and, as he described it, 'half-done'.<sup>301</sup> Whatever its meaning, it was

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<sup>299</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 122).

<sup>300</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 182).

<sup>301</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 122).

certainly not found in its actual content rather the sense of expectancy and potentiality it engendered. His pretentious 'theory' was founded upon that which was, as it were, 'without'. Whether it was without presence (although something big, colourful and revelatory was, any second now, rumoured to be on its way), without a tongue (the mute array of flowers), without sense and personality (the poor old 'romantic poet'), without any definite shape or form (true of both the poet as well as Schlegel's 'boundless' 'theory'), and without anything that was ever likely to reach an end - presuming, of course, it came into existence in the first place (again, the specious 'theory').

The fact that Schlegel was only able to allude to his ideal elevated, all too artfully, its 'gravity' and 'mystique'. That words failed him, as the smug critic no doubt imagined, was to his enormous credit.

Silence spoke volumes.

Schlegel's 'theory' hinted at something far grander than itself; his ideal was, in a word, ineffable. Its inexpressibility rather suited and complimented the critic's aims. His 'theory' was characterised, if it can be described as such, by something of an 'anti-quality' quality. Its fundamental value lay, in no small part, on that which was missing - on in its 'absence', on its complete and utter vacuity.

While Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, to cast your mind back to that purgatorial pair, were not the least bit free of Schlegel's 'Schlegelisms', they certainly had the measure of him in one respect. 'Romantic criticism', as they

wrote, '... occupies the place of the absence of the work'.<sup>302</sup> 'It is the work of the absence of work', as Maurice Blanchot similarly said of Schlegel's hollow efforts, 'poetry affirmed in the purity of the poetic act, affirmation without duration, freedom without realization, power that is exalted as it disappears, in no way discredited if it leaves no traces'.<sup>303</sup>

The gravity of Schlegel's fragments, as I have already said, were supposedly 'heightened' on account of that which was 'missing' and 'without' and very much the same thing could be said about his subject. The poetic 'figure' - and I use that term with a fair amount of reservation, was apparently 'without' a body, 'without' a personality, 'without' consciousness, and 'without' any of the other qualities one tends to ordinarily associate with a normal person. But Schlegel's subject was, as we know, anything but normal and ideally placed to reflect the critic's dispersonating ideal.

The English novelist, Thomas Hardy, reputed to be something of a Schopenhauerian, perfectly expressed Schlegel's intentions when, in 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' (1891), he wrote: 'corporeal presence is sometimes less appealing than corporeal absence; the latter creating an ideal presence that conveniently drops the defects of the real'.<sup>304</sup> And Schlegel's ontology similarly created, in the most contrived sense, an 'ideal presence', as Hardy described it, that all too 'conveniently' dropped the 'defects of the real' purely

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<sup>302</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Literary Absolute' (1978 / 1988 p. 102).

<sup>303</sup> Maurice Blanchot, 'The Athenaeum' (1983 p. 164 - 165).

<sup>304</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' (1891 / 2001 p. 279). Modern Library, New York.

to serve his 'grandiose' conceptual aims. The absence of these 'unpoetic' qualities, the 'real' in other words, intimated the presence of something far more profound and extraordinary than your average corporeal being or, for that matter, your average theoretical scheme.

Schlegel's 'theory' asked far too much of the 'romantic poet'. If he was to reflect the 'poetry of nature', he had to allow himself to be 'extended', 'grindstoned' and 'processed' if you will, to an insensate and impersonal 'godhead' whom Schlegel encouraged he ape. In turn, the poet, all too naively, strove towards all that was aphonic, oscitant and 'unconscious' in the hope of fulfilling his master's objective. It was reductive in the extreme. He was foolish to take Schlegel's lead as it spelt his end.

The foreboding powers of the 'unconscious' and the 'unintelligible' were very much in the ascendancy. And the poet all too happily accepted the terms on offer in the expectant, if vain hope they proffered 'higher' rewards. He may well have hit rock bottom but, far more importantly, Schlegel's subject had mastered the perverse Esperanto of nature itself. He was now able to 'commune' on a universal scale - an unthinkable prospect had he not followed Schlegel's lead and remained as he was. But having successfully shed his 'defects', he was perfectly attuned to Schlegel's 'ideal', if he was not fit for very much else.

The critic hardly had his subject's best interests at heart nor did he display, intellectually speaking, very much in the way of genuine ambition. Schlegel's subject may well have made gigantic territorial 'advances', as it

were, but they were confounded by the sacrificial measures which secured them. Having taken so many destructive and injurious steps to align his subject's 'inmost' being with an all too haughty 'Mother Nature', Schlegel reduced the poet's status to its sleepest, most slumberous state. Schlegel sacrificed not only his subject's bodily form but all of his 'intellectual faculties' to achieve his all too precious 'universal' goal.

Once again, the intellect suffers the same fate as the personality; neither of which enter the fray to exert any significant influence on the slumberous scheme, least of all any resistance to it. The 'weighty' significance attributed to all that was atramental, petrous and rudimentary 'within' did a grave disservice to the intellect as well as the personality, not to mention the subject's somatic state. All of which receded well into the background and retired for the longest, most interminable of nights.

Maurice de Guérin expressed something of the stupefying and utterly torpid 'conclusion', has one the audacity to use such a term with regards to Schlegel's 'theory', when he wrote: 'The soul also becomes insensibly filled with a languor which deadens all the activity of the intellectual faculties, and lulls it into a half-sleep, void of all thought, in which it still feels the power to dream of the most beautiful things'.<sup>305</sup> But, as Wyndham Lewis might have asked, 'what happens to the *personality* - and all its unique, precious, delicate, fugitive, incommunicable self-hood...? Surely the essence of a

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<sup>305</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 129).

personality, or of an "individual consciousness", is that it should be *stable*. And how can it be stable if its resistances are overcome, and if it is "sent to sleep"? If it is reduced to "a condition of perfect docility," in which anything that is "suggested" to it it accommodates, in which it sympathizes ecstatically with its dear hypnotist - that may or may not be very agreeable for it; but we cannot claim, except with our tongue in our cheek, that, if we are the hypnotist, we are liberating it from oppression, or that we are enhancing its "individuality"'.<sup>306</sup>

Schlegel exploited his highly advantageous 'presbyopic' and 'aphasic' conditions to 'heighten', in his opinion, the effect of his 'theory' as well as the 'statue' of his subject. But whether, as Lewis suggested, it 'enhanced' or 'heightened' his subject's standing in any meaningful way again remained entirely unlikely. 'Even in art', as Henri Peyre said of the romantics, 'their ideal seemed inaccessible to them as it was so far above them, and the deficiencies of linguistic or pictorial resources in relation to their dream led them to despair'.<sup>307</sup>

Schlegel's romantic vision undoubtedly capitalised on certain 'linguistic' and visual 'deficiencies', as Peyre astutely described them, in an ingenious effort to 'aggrandise' his aims and put them 'beyond' one's reach. They were certainly 'inaccessible', not because they were, as Peyre believed, 'so far above them', but because they had plummeted to such 'unfathomable' depths.

Given his emphasis on all that was subdermal,

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<sup>306</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 192).

<sup>307</sup> Henri Peyre, 'What Is Romanticism?' (1977 p. 80).

inframundane and limaceous, Schlegel's vision can hardly be described as 'transcendental'. He accorded far too much value to that which was missing, absent, deep seated and vegetal. Schlegel appealed to all of these insensate things in a desperate bid to align his poet, by the crudest possible means, with the dull thud of nature's embryonic, if 'beautifully' measured rhythm.

But 'Mother Nature', if you remember what Schlegel said a little earlier, was not only 'beautiful' - her beauty stimulated, in response, a 'sense of the infinite fullness of life'. Not that her 'qualities' ended there. She was also, as Schlegel went on to say before I saw fit to cut him short, 'organic'. 'And whatever', as he added, 'is most sublimely beautiful is therefore always vegetal, and the same is true of morality and love'.<sup>308</sup> As, indeed, it was true of 'everything' else. In reciprocal fashion, Schlegel's 'theory' cordoned off an enormous clearing - a completely fallow, unoccupied space for all that was 'vegetal' and 'organic'. The clammy atmosphere of his 'theory' was perfectly in keeping with the necessary conditions to maintain, for an indefinite period of time and to exactly the right degree, all that was 'vegetal' in an incubative state.

Schlegel's 'theory', at risk of belabouring the point, was an anticipatory ideal. It was crafted by the critic's sophistry, his linguistic evasiveness, his firm and rather intimidating form of brow beating by means of the 'infinite', 'unconscious' and 'unfathomable'. As for the 'despair' Peyre mentioned, it quite possibly describes our own, having trawled through the laborious 'ins and

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<sup>308</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Lucinde and the Fragments' (1797 - 1799 / 1971 p. 248).



outs' of his theoretical scheme, rather more faithfully than it did Schlegel's. He was not, like Sénancour, Amiel or de Guérin, the despairing type. Schlegel was a distinctly dispassionate writer with little in the way of charisma or genuine presence. His 'master passion', as you may recall Robert W. Wernaer saying earlier in the chapter, was of a decidedly intellectual order.<sup>309</sup> 'If he was now a romanticist', if you remember what Wernaer said of Schlegel, 'it was not merely for temperamental reasons, but because he had thought it out'.<sup>310</sup>

Schlegel's 'theory' was completely hollow from top to toe. It was riddled with holes, but rather than make any sort of effort to cover them up, Schlegel glorified the unfathomable depths of what were, in actuality, little more than a collection of shallow and miserly puddles. Schlegel cleverly turned all these 'negatives' upside down and transformed them into 'pluses'. All of these things were missing for an extremely good reason.

Absence intimated a presence far greater than presence itself.

One, then, may well begin to get a sharp sense of the value Schlegel accorded to that which had been left unsaid. A distinct impression of Schlegel's passion for all that which was incommunicable and bereft of language - for all that 'thumped' and 'throbbled', in the most 'mesmeric' of ways, in the imbecilic and, with one eye on Schopenhauer, none too pleasant heart of nature. Schlegel achieved the 'effect', not through the use of his tongue

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<sup>309</sup> Robert M. Wernaer, 'Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany' (1910 p. 65).

<sup>310</sup> Robert M. Wernaer, 'Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany' (1910 p. 67).

but by conveniently losing it. It all hung on the dubious 'promissory note' he 'issued', so to speak, in the 116<sup>th</sup> fragment - on its 'infinite' state of 'becoming'.<sup>311</sup> Schlegel's emphasis was not on that which was *present*, but on that which was *absent* - on all that had yet to come into 'being'.

Schlegel's 'mystical streak' served, as I said earlier, a 'higher calling' than the plain and mundane 'callings' of literary criticism; his was more than simply a literary 'theory' - it exceeded those restrictive bounds and strayed, opportunely, into the more exalted and incomprehensible realms of 'spirit'. Its expectant claims were based purely on *absence* - on the expansive clearing Schlegel had reserved, in the largest of capital letters, for all that was revelatory, should it decide at some point in the far flung future, to occupy it.

Schopenhauer, for one, certainly capitalised on the empty expanse Schlegel prised open and given Schlegel's reluctance to occupy it in any substantial or meaningful way, the philosopher went about the business of populating it with a singularly unpleasant force of nature.

Let me now turn your attention to the third chapter and the 'watershed' philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. I say 'watershed' as Schopenhauer's subject, quite unlike Schlegel's 'romantic poet', was highly suspicious of 'Mother Nature's' intrusion into his affairs; she had, in the intervening years, gone from bad to worse. She no longer resembled the 'beautiful' figure Schlegel 'courted' in an earlier period and, as a measure of last

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<sup>311</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 140 - 141).

resort, Schopenhauer set out, from the beginning, to dissolve the relationship in the hope of getting away from her for good.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE WORM IN THE APPLE: NATURE'S WILL AND SCHOPENHAUER'S CONSPIRATORIAL SUBJECT

'And of what importance is it to eternally creative nature if this mass of flesh which today presents the shape of a woman, would tomorrow reproduce itself in the guise of a thousand different insects? Would you dare to claim that the construction of individuals such as we, costs more effort than the construction of a worm, and that she ought, in consequence, to take a greater interest in us?'.<sup>312</sup>

Marquis de Sade, 'Justine or The Misfortunes of Virtue'

'"How is the permanence of mere dust, of crude matter, to be regarded as a continuance of our true inner nature?"  
Oh! do you know this dust then? Do you know what it is and what it can do? Learn to know it before you despise it. This matter, now lying there as dust and ashes, will soon form into crystals when dissolved in water; it will shine as metal; it will then emit electric sparks. By means of its galvanic tension it will manifest a force which, decomposing the strongest and firmest combinations, reduces earths to metals. It will, indeed of its own accord, form itself into plant and animal; and from its mysterious womb it will develop that life, about the loss of which you in your narrowness of mind are so nervous and anxious. Is it, then, so absolutely and entirely nothing to continue to exist as such matter?'.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Marquis de Sade, 'Justine or The Misfortunes of Virtue'.  
Translated by Alan Hull Walton (1787 / 1791 / 1797 / 1964 p. 138).  
Corgi Books, London.

<sup>313</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 472).

Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation',  
Vol. II

'There are two men within him: one believed in his theory with a fanatic obstinacy, desiring annihilation and death; the other feared them, choked with detestation and vented his own cowardice and despair on every one else'.<sup>314</sup>

Michael Artzibashef, 'Breaking-Point'

#### I. THE FALLING OUT

Having spent the greater part of the previous chapter in the company of Friedrich Schlegel, we will spend the majority of the present one in that of Arthur Schopenhauer. In turning one's attention from Schlegel to Schopenhauer, a number of things become quite clear. Most clearly of all, one gets the sharp impression that Schlegel's romantic vision had, in certain respects, turned sour, very sour indeed. Having led something of a charmed life, comparatively speaking, in Schlegel's 'theory', the individual subject discovered, to his disgust, that nature was far from the flowery godhead Schlegel had mistaken her for.

Mother Nature may not have been the hospitable friend she was to Schlegel, but that it not to say she had frozen Schopenhauer out completely. That was not the case at all. What was hers was still very much his. 'Man is nature herself', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'and indeed nature at the highest grade of her self-consciousness,

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<sup>314</sup> Michael Artzibashef, 'Breaking-Point' (1915 p. 266).

but nature is only the objectified will'.<sup>315</sup>

Schopenhauer's 'subject' was still at liberty to see in her a complete, if fragmented picture of himself, but the picture was not nearly as pretty or alluring as the one 'she' presented to Schlegel. It certainly did not depict a cheery assortment of 'flowers' and vacant grins. She continued to smile, but her smile now expressed something far more menacing than simple joy; it was an unnerving, corrupt sort of smile that made Schopenhauer extremely uncomfortable and agitated in 'her' presence. It had a malevolent quality to it that was disconcerting to say the least. It resembled more of a rictus than an ordinary smile and, if Schopenhauer was not mistaken, it appeared to broaden at the sight of misfortune and folly. It was a sickening sight and his thoughts quickly turned, understandably, to matricide.

In that respect, Schopenhauer's doctrine marked a transition - a dramatic change of heart, if you will. 'Schopenhauer was a transitional thinker', as Barbara Hannan wrote in the 'The Riddle of the World' (2009), 'bridging the gap between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century paradigms. It is typical of such transitional thinkers that they are officially working within a framework that they are also (half-consciously) trying to overturn'.<sup>316</sup>

The subject's 'inner-being' or 'will', as Schopenhauer preferred to call it, was still very much part and parcel of that which dominated nature, but it had not, up until

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<sup>315</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 276).

<sup>316</sup> Barbara Hannan, 'The Riddle of the World: A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer's Philosophy' (2009 p. 15).

this point, started to terrorise it. The 'substratum of all appearances and consequently of the whole of nature', if one turns to Schopenhauer, 'is nothing but what we know immediately and very intimately and find within ourselves as *will*'.<sup>317</sup> Schopenhauer's doctrine of will had a far nastier side to it than the prudish Schlegel would have dared to imagine. 'We may be nature through and through', as Rüdiger Safranski warned in his study of Schopenhauer, '- to this extent he agrees with the Romantics - but for that very reason we are at the mercy of its mercilessness, its jungle-like struggles'.<sup>318</sup>

His affiliation with nature no longer filled Schopenhauer's subject with anything that could be said to resemble the 'joy' Schlegel's 'romantic poet' had described. 'He was possessed', as Bryan Magee said of Schopenhauer, 'by the idea that there is something inherently evil, monstrous, wicked about the ultimate force that constitutes the world'.<sup>319</sup> Leaving that matter to one side for a moment or two, Schopenhauer's doctrine would not have been, in other respects, a wholly unfamiliar one for Schlegel to have entertained.

Nature's will remained identical, in every possible way, to that which bore the name of man's own. It is, I am well aware, something of a misnomer to call it 'nature's will' for it was, strictly speaking, the will's nature made manifest.<sup>320</sup> But it must be said Schopenhauer's use of the term 'will' did not, as it may mistakenly imply,

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<sup>317</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 20).

<sup>318</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, 'Schopenhauer and The Wild Years of Philosophy' (1989 p. 228).

<sup>319</sup> Bryan Magee, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' (1983 p. 146).

<sup>320</sup> The expression, 'nature's will', has certain advantages which, I believe, emphasise its universalism in a way that the simple use of the word 'will' may not and, for that reason, I will continue, for the sake of clarity, to use the expression.

describe a person's 'free will' (if indeed they could be said to have had such a thing); the philosopher's use of the term was far more profound than that.

'We must be careful', as Christopher Janaway cautiously advised us in a recent essay, 'with the concept *will*. Schopenhauer asks us not to think of wanting, desiring, or intentionally acting as constitutive of will in his sense, but to stretch the concept much more widely. So we must think away its traditional associations with rationality and consciousness, and indeed with mentality as such'.<sup>321</sup> 'He never meant', if one turns immediately to something another critic, Frank Copleston, said of Schopenhauer, 'to postulate a willing subject: the metaphysical Will was for him entirely impersonal, a fundamental energy, that lies at the base of, and forms, the world'.<sup>322</sup>

Friedrich Schlegel, as we have know, regarded 'romantic poetry' as a dormant 'seed' and Schopenhauer similarly described his own unitary scheme of will in much the same terms. But the will was not, in Schopenhauer's estimation, a profuse array of seeds but *the* elemental seed, the 'root point of existence' as he described it, from which all things, without exception, had sprung. 'It is', as Schopenhauer said, 'the most real thing we know, in fact the kernel of reality itself'.<sup>323</sup>

Schopenhauer's doctrine of will would certainly not have

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<sup>321</sup> Christopher Janaway, 'The real essence of human beings: Schopenhauer and the unconscious will' collected in 'Thinking the Unconscious. Nineteenth-Century German Thought' (2010 p. 145).

<sup>322</sup> Frederick Copleston, 'Arthur Schopenhauer. Philosopher of Pessimism' ((1975 p. 191).

<sup>323</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 351).



precluded Schlegel from identifying with his aphonic 'godhead' in the least; it would still have afforded the squeamish critic, not exactly the pleasure, but certainly the unsettling experience of encountering nature's primitive powers for himself. If one knew no better, Schlegel may even have momentarily been mistaken for Schopenhauer when he talked, if you remember, of 'the invisible primordial power of mankind'.<sup>324</sup> If one immediately refers to Schopenhauer's description of will, he talked of it in almost identical terms. 'The will', as the philosopher professed, 'is that primary and original force itself'.<sup>325</sup>

The temporal scope of Schopenhauer's doctrine would not have struck Schlegel as unfamiliar; it too was said to be infinite and had also embarked on a similarly Quixotic pursuit of an end it was never likely to reach. 'In fact', as Schopenhauer wrote in 'The World as Will and Representation' (1818), 'absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is an endless striving'.<sup>326</sup> 'It always strives', he wrote on earlier page, 'because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained end can put a goal'.<sup>327</sup>

Nature's will sought its object in all yet, to its constant frustration, found its satisfaction in none. No sooner than it had reached what it took, rather mistook, to be its ultimate aim, the will set on, with immediate

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<sup>324</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

<sup>325</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 293).

<sup>326</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 164).

<sup>327</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 308).

effect, another course seeking a fresh and more alluring end. Once that had been attained, the same sorry thing happened to it all over again. 'No possible satisfaction in the world', Schopenhauer explained, 'could suffice to still its craving, set a final goal to its demands, and fill the bottomless pit of its heart'.<sup>328</sup> Nor did it learn a single lesson from its previous mistakes. The will simply eyed, in the most feverish way, the same old opportunities to affirm itself as if they were brand new and novel.

'To be, for Schopenhauer', as David Cartwright wrote in 'Schopenhauerian Optimism and an Alternative to Resignation' (1985), 'is to be will. And to be will entails constant desire, want, striving, and wishing'.<sup>329</sup> The subject's 'inner-being', the will, may well have set its sights on an ever receding end, but it was something that had become quite ominous in the hands of Arthur Schopenhauer. Even though his scheme resembled Schlegel's 'theory' in outline, it was no longer anything like as hospitable or welcoming. Nor, for that matter, did Schopenhauer's doctrine afford one the hope that, given time, the will's desires would abate. Not if it were left to its own devices.

Schopenhauer's emphasis, concentrating as it did, on all that was rudimentary, universal and infinite 'within' engendered an attitude that resembled, if not surpassed Schlegel's haughtiness towards the subject's finite state. Schopenhauer too regarded it with little more than condescension which bordered, if one considers his

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<sup>328</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 573).

<sup>329</sup> David E. Cartwright, 'Schopenhauerian Optimism and an Alternative to Resignation' (1985 p. 155).

estimation of individuality, the point of derision.

'Schopenhauer's philosophy', as Bertram M. Laing wrote in an essay, 'Schopenhauer and Individuality' (1917), 'is one which fails in a remarkable degree to do justice to individuality. Whether it be examined in its theory of knowledge, in its metaphysics of the will, or in its ethical doctrines, it is found to assign no value to individuality. The latter is viewed as an illusion, and everything tainted with it is held to be defective'.<sup>330</sup>

Laing was not entirely correct in his evaluation of Schopenhauer's doctrine. The value accorded to individuality in his philosophical scheme may be said to have rested, ultimately, in the symbolic act of *exerting* it; even if it had, as the case may have been, dire consequences for the subject who felt compelled, appalled as he was by his affiliation with nature's inveterate will, to exert it in that particular fashion. It was a 'renunciative' and wantonly destructive act through which Schopenhauer's 'subject' aspired to register his disgust and distinction, symbolically speaking, with nature's odorous will.

Be that as it may, it was almost certainly true that individuality, for a greater majority of its content fared poorly, as indeed Laing had said, in Schopenhauer's scheme. It was not until its late 'rally' that it reaped its own 'victorious', if decidedly meretricious rewards.

One need not have to expend much in the way of time or energy if one wishes to discover Schopenhauer's evaluation of individuality. 'What value, indeed', as the misanthropic philosopher asked, 'can a being have who is

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<sup>330</sup> Bertram M. Laing, 'Schopenhauer and Individuality' (1917 p. 171).

no different from millions of his kind?'.<sup>331</sup> The 'individuality of most people', he wrote in an earlier work, 'is so wretched and worthless that they lose absolutely nothing when, at the end of their lives, they are eventually deprived of it'.<sup>332</sup> Schopenhauer spoke of individuality in the most shadowy of language; he referred to an individual as a 'wavering and unstable phantom'.<sup>333</sup>

Schopenhauer attributed little in the way of credence, let alone anything of true value, 'insignificant' as he thought it was, to individuality at all.<sup>334</sup> It was an all out 'delusion' manufactured by nature's conniving will.<sup>335</sup>

Schopenhauer was reluctant to give individuality any tangible or 'real' value; it was not something that could, on strictly philosophical grounds, be regarded as the least bit tenable, let alone worthy of prizing in and of itself. Not if Schopenhauer wished, as he did, to maintain the structure of his thoroughly dispersonating scheme and keep, as best he could, its deterministic line intact. The will monopolised not only Schopenhauer's system, but all forms of life including that of man. 'The will alone', as Paul Gottfried wrote, 'is the "primum mobile" of all human activity'.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Parerga and Paralipomena', Vol. II (1851 / 1974 p. 598).

<sup>332</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 491).

<sup>333</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 278).

<sup>334</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 279).

<sup>335</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 280).

<sup>336</sup> Paul Gottfried, 'Arthur Schopenhauer and the Heritage of Pessimism' (1975 p. 27).

Nature's will ruled the roost. It had secured and continued to safeguard its majestic position in the wildest of ways. It was, by all accounts, embroiled in an arch and stupendous act of self-deception, not that it had always been that way. The will must surely have found itself, initially, at something of a disadvantage and it was a considerable disadvantage at that. It resembled, in its inchoate state, as one may well be tempted to imagine, a desultory and indignant spirit. Its ghoulish absence of shape or substance ran in alarming contrast with its apparent mania for exhibitionism.

## II. TOM AND JERRY

The 'primordial' and gaseous entity, then, was under an enormous amount of pressure to objectify itself as quickly as possible if it had any hope at all of clearing the first hurdle and making itself apparent. The will clearly needed 'lackeys' on whom it could impress, if not inflict its ambitious desires; it was compelled, as a matter of utmost urgency, to embark on the most iniquitous of schemes if it was to make any sort of headway in the pursuit of its desirous ends.

To its extreme good fortune, for it seldom happened very often, the will gratified its own wishes and granted itself corporeal form. With this exceptional stroke of luck, the will found itself with an abundance of 'lackeys' at its disposal. Capitalising on the rare opportunity it had afforded itself, the will donned all manner of fanciful and brightly coloured costumes with relish. It had an unimaginably vast wardrobe at its disposal; it was as limitless as its fancies and its fancies were so plentiful they could not be numbered.

The will made its sudden and startling appearance in the world, not as a noxious cloud, but as nature itself.

The world was 'merely' a vehicle through which the will, not exactly practiced its art, but almost certainly pursued its artful practice of dissimulation and subterfuge. Its magical transformation from a plume of transpicuous smoke into an unquantifiable number of feathered, furry and scaly creatures proved so successful that it had even started to entertain second thoughts about the actuality of the very beings that it had conjured up.

What it had in the way of inventive flair, the will evidently lacked in common sense; it was hardly the smartest of forces. The will played each 'role' with such attentive detail and aplomb that it had even taken itself in and been fooled by its own aliases. So much so, the will no longer saw anything of itself in its own creations; they had assumed an 'independent' life of their own and, more often than not, they were at odds with one another.

The desires of one frustrated, if not completely conflicted with those of another. A cat, to take an obvious example, may well be dead set upon catching and devouring a mouse and the mouse in question would no doubt object, not unsurprisingly, in the strongest possible way to the cat's unwelcome interest and, in swift response, turn about heel and take flight; however, in Schopenhauer's doctrine, the cat - Tom say, and the mouse - Jerry, were 'merely' pandering to the will's desire to simultaneously experience all the thrill of the

chase in both its pursuit and evasion. It 'acts out', as Schopenhauer said of will, 'the great tragedy and comedy at its own expense'.<sup>337</sup> Not that that news would have calmed the racing heart of any fleeing mouse nor, for that matter, silenced the rumbling stomach of any starving feline.

'It is so closely concealed behind all these masks', as Schopenhauer explained, 'that it does not recognize itself again and thus treats itself harshly'.<sup>338</sup> The will had clearly not given the outcome of its machinations much in the way of thought; it had not, in fact, given its expansive material enterprise any consideration at all. It was not a reflective will, far from it; it was a will that purely and simply willed and there would have been nothing more foreign to it than the prospect of stopping to calculate and weigh up the pluses and minuses of its willing. 'The will, which constitutes our being-in-itself', Schopenhauer explained, 'is of a simple nature; it merely wills and does not know'.<sup>339</sup> It was simply enlivened, if not delighted by the antagonistic and warring illusion it had, somewhat miraculously, spun out of itself.

Nature's will entertained an adversarial and wholly schizophrenic position with itself; it was pimp and prostitute alike, the huntsman and the startled pheasant in his sights. The will had found the apparent satisfaction of its desires in its own fractured image. One of which, to take an example, might simply have

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<sup>337</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 358).

<sup>338</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 318).

<sup>339</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 499).

tickled its fancy, as indeed Jerry had done, when its attention, in the feline form of Tom, turned to meal time. The will, in another instance, may well have been struck by a quality so sexually arousing in another of its appearances, so impossible to ignore, that it found itself strutting and prancing in its direction until it caught its eye and won whatever sensual reward that was to be found in the fleeting encounter. In another example, the will may have simply detested its appearance in another creature and longed for nothing more than the pleasure of not being subjected to such an off putting and repellent sight ever again.

Take Hjalmar Söderberg's anecdote, for example. 'One evening the austere philosopher', as Söderberg said of Schopenhauer in his novel 'Doctor Glas' (1905), 'was sitting, alone as usual, in a corner of his café, when the door opens and in comes a person of disagreeable mien. His features distorted with disgust and horror Schopenhauer gives him one look, leaps up, and begins thumping him over the head with his stick. All of this, merely on account of his appearance!'.<sup>340</sup> But if one were to reinterpret the novelist's anecdote along the lines of Schopenhauer's doctrine, the philosopher's 'disgust' and 'horror', as Söderberg described it, were directed, not necessarily at his nameless victim, but the will in whom it had obviously made a strong and particularly objectionable appearance.

If one takes into consideration the universal quality of nature's will, Schopenhauer was doing nothing more productive than thumping himself over the head with his own stick. 'We recognize ourselves in every human being,

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<sup>340</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, 'Doctor Glas' (1905 / 1963 p. 13).



no matter who it is', as Thomas Bernhard might have reminded the stick brandishing philosopher, 'and we are condemned to be each of these human beings for as long as we continue to exist'.<sup>341</sup> Barbara Hannan also made a similar point when she wrote: 'since we are all manifestations of a single will, tormentor and tormented are one; in harming others, we ultimately harm ourselves'.<sup>342</sup>

All individual figures, whatever form they assumed, were little more than phantasmic images of nature's repulsive will. Schopenhauer referred to it, in one of his books, as the 'lord of the worlds' and it was a lord who, by all accounts, reigned with all of the tyranny and unpredictability of an absolute madman.<sup>343</sup>

Let us suppose, for a moment or two, that a guest at a fancy dress party forgets all about the party, he has helped himself, I should have said, to one too many bottles of red wine, and finds himself so taken aback by his own uncustomary reflection, so shocked and disgusted by the sight of it, that he decides to take it on and fight it there and then in the toilet. His reflection had, in its defence, obstinately refused to stand down and take its leave, as indeed it had been commanded to do in the most forcible of language.

The intentionally crude example is not so very far removed from Schopenhauer's grotesque depiction of a will hell bent on picking a fight with itself. 'Thus in the

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<sup>341</sup> Thomas Bernhard, 'Gathering Evidence' (198\* p. 212). Translated by \*\*\*\*.

<sup>342</sup> Barbara Hannan, 'The Riddle of the World: A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer's Philosophy' (2009 p. 139).

<sup>343</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 501).

fierceness and intensity of its desires', as Schopenhauer wrote in the first volume of 'The World as Will and Representation' (1818), 'it buries its teeth in its own flesh, not knowing that it always injured only itself'.<sup>344</sup> It was a sentiment he echoed twenty six years later in the second volume of the same work. 'At bottom', he explained, 'this springs from the fact that the will must live on itself, since nothing exists besides it, and it is a hungry will'.<sup>345</sup> And if one turns to another of his works, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836), one reads: 'wherever a living thing breathes, another has at once appeared for the purpose of devouring it'.<sup>346</sup>

Nature's will was its own worst enemy: it defiled itself at every given opportunity and by every imaginable means.

The will had not only pulled the wool over the eyes of its 'lackeys' but it had, all too blatantly, pulled the wool over its own. Since there was little in the way of company besides itself, the will had to amuse itself as fruitfully as it could; one may even begin to harbour the grave, if rather outlandish suspicion that it had concocted the world and its inhabitants simply to ward off an acute, if not incurable case of cabin fever.

Wyndham Lewis, sensed something of the will's 'apparent' purposelessness: 'The Will that "objectifies" itself in this way is a will *to what?* To nothing, Schopenhauer replies... the picture of the Will that just goes on for some reason "objectifying" itself, resulting in the

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<sup>344</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 354).

<sup>345</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 154).

<sup>346</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 58).

endless rigmarole in which we participate, and of which (qua Will) we are witnesses'.<sup>347</sup> 'It is', Lewis added, 'a quite aimless, and, from our limited point of view, nonsensical, Will'.<sup>348</sup> While one may or may not agree with Lewis, his curious turn of phrase, describing as he did 'our limited point of view', may strike one as more than a little strange. Not that Lewis was expressing his own opinion, I should add; he was aping Schopenhauer and his tongue was planted firmly in his cheek.

Lewis may well have admired Schopenhauer's work in certain respects; the philosopher's high regard for 'objectivity', exemplified by his lifeless ideal, indubitably appealed to Lewis' own disdain of gratuitous emotional displays, but he certainly did not share the philosopher's enthusiasm for languorous, dimly-lit forces that were said to mysteriously bungle about 'within' one's person nor did Lewis welcome his assault on the visual sense, illusory as Schopenhauer thought it was, with any degree of warmth. Lewis had the interests of his own vocation very much at heart, he was a painter, after all; and it was in defence of those ocular ends, that his critique, if not all out attack of the 'time-mind', his brilliantly skewed interpretation of romanticism, was directed.

Be that as it may and putting Lewis' preference for space, solidity and exteriority of form over the disorientating wish wash of time and the visceral 'insides of things' to one side, what, one may well be tempted to ask, did the somewhat haemophobic painter

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<sup>347</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 332).

<sup>348</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 332).

actually mean when he said 'our limited point of view'?<sup>349</sup> Why, indeed, should one's point of view be considered 'limited' in any way whatsoever? Let me direct your immediate attention to Schopenhauer's disdainful opinion of one's percipient faculties.

### III. THE UNDERTOW

The will may not have been the brightest will Schopenhauer could have possibly come up with, but it was, by all accounts, an extremely crafty and mendacious one. It is as well to remind you that one underestimated the will at one's peril; it was insidious in the extreme and revealed, from the little one can tell, in subterfuge and conflict.

The will kept one thing tucked securely up its sleeve and it was, presumably, its most closely guarded secret. The will did not let on, not to any of its 'lackeys', other than one notable exception - Schopenhauer himself, that they were all one and the same thing beating itself about the head with exactly the same stick. Schopenhauer referred to this hapless bunch of flagellants as 'manifestations', more commonly known to you and I as people, and the philosopher's decidedly ghoulish term betrayed something of the prejudice he harboured *against* them.

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<sup>349</sup> The following passage reflects what I described as Lewis's 'haemophobic' condition: 'I am not an anatomist. I enjoy the surface of life, if not for its own sake, at least not because it conceals the repulsive turbidness of the intestine. Give me the dimple in the cheek of the Gioconda or of St. John the Baptist, and you can have all the Gothic skeletons or superealist guts you like! And what applies to the body applies likewise to the mind. I do not like all these doctors. Give me the surface of the mind, as well. Give me the *outside* of all things, I am a fanatic for the externality of things'. See Wyndham Lewis, 'Blasting and Bombardiering. Autobiography 1914 - 1926' (1937 p. 9).

It was only by dint of a certain principle, that of 'sufficient reason' as Schopenhauer called it, that Tom, given my recent example, did not recognise himself as Jerry. Were the will to be granted three wishes, its very first, one imagines, would be to safeguard this very secret; it did not, not at any cost, relish the prospect of being 'unmasked' and forsaking the grim and rather alarming amusement of its self-spun illusion.

Were that to happen all creatures - be they cat, mouse or man, would finally recognise the falsity of their cathood, mousehood and manhood. They would no longer regard themselves as distinct creatures with a range of conflicting interests (presuming, of course, you happen to agree that a cat or mouse senses, however dimly, something of its inherent and singular state of Tomdom or Jerrydom), but as manifest forms of nature's single will. They would be little more than a collection of ghosts and ghouls, illusions of matter and form, that an inherently dishonest will had mischievously planted in each one of the objectified brains concerned.

It is hard to imagine the will would have been the least bit eager to entertain such an unwelcome prospect, not in any of its manifest forms let alone one in possession of Schopenhauer's acumen and matricidal intent. Nature's will, at the risk of belaboring the point, was the most scheming and artful of wills and the likelihood of it spilling out its heart to Arthur Schopenhauer, of all people, remained remote if not entirely improbable. It would not only have been imprudent, but potentially fatal; the philosopher, from what one can gather, actively detested it and would no doubt have exploited

any sign of weakness, absolutely any opportunity that came his way to undermine, if not destroy it.

If the principle were to fall it would be ruinous for nature's will. It would not only spell the end of its 'lordly' reign, but also herald the end of whatever form of perverse entertainment it derived from biting and spitting out its own finger nails. The will would be thrown back to its solitary confinement where it would, given its enterprising nature, indubitably contrive of another means to distract itself from its endless tedium and want. But, it is well to remind you, nature's will had broken countless promises and there was absolutely no reason to suppose its 'word' was to be taken at face value. Schopenhauer would have done well to have heeded such advice as he reached the end of 'The World as Will and Representation' where he appeared to have been taken in and completely duped by his own deceitful creation.

For all the talk of cats and mice, it was only the individual subject and only the most exceptional among them at that, that had any 'hope' of seeing through the 'principium individuationis', an expression Schopenhauer used to describe the piecemeal and thoroughly disjointed way in which the human brain registered the world around it. It could only take things in, according to Schopenhauer, by means of time and space. These 'categories' were not only wholly divisive but also completely illusory, Schopenhauer believed; they simply acted to chop up all that was whole (I am referring to the nature's collective will) into smaller, more comprehensible 'bit parts' (I am referring to people, plants, animals and the like) the human brain could actually register and begin to understand.

The 'brain with its consciousness', Schopenhauer believed, 'isolates human individuals'.<sup>350</sup> Individuality, then, was a 'mere' neurological phenomenon and our apprehension, the very means by which such a thing was able to exist in the first place, a decidedly prejudiced and 'limited' function that purely served and secured the will's interests. I say 'limited', as indeed Wyndham Lewis had done, as the principle in question acted to impede, if not completely compromise the stark, if extensive canvas of Schopenhauer's universal ideal. It certainly spoilt the thoroughly robotic view the philosopher aspired to take of the world.

What made matters incalculably worse for Schopenhauer was that the will engendered all manner of secondary offshoots which further separated him from his barren ideal. It cluttered it up with spools of annoying data and all of this annoying data, abundant and frivolous as he thought it was, proved even more annoying by virtue of its erroneous claim on reality. To make matters more annoying still, every single 'item' of data defended its own particular realm of numerical information in the most assertive and aggressive of ways as if it had something truly precious to protect and valuable to reveal. Not so, Schopenhauer believed.

People, for instance. Schopenhauer, whom I have already called a misanthrope, was hardly their most loyal champion. Each one of these 'fleeting dreams', as he referred to them, did not necessarily share the philosopher's lowly estimation of their ontological

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<sup>350</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 326).

state. While they valued, in most examples, their 'particular' standing as independent, individual figures Schopenhauer believed whatever value they had certainly did not reside there. It lay, instead, in their 'universal' inner-nature, in his own totalising conception of nature's will. This, however, was not a positive attribute at all. It was something one was better advised to immediately turn one's back on in a bid to flee and make one's determined escape. The phenomenal world did not simply conspire against Schopenhauer's sweeping 'presbyopic' dream state but, in a more immediate and predaceous sense, against the philosopher himself.

The secondary phenomena, in turn, gave rise to all manner of tertiary phenomena which proved, again, to be even more annoying than either the first or the second. Noise, for instance. Schopenhauer actively detested that. It disrupted, mercifully one may well be tempted to believe at times, the train of his dispersonating thought. History, to cite another example. Putting Herodotus to one side, Schopenhauer did not think very much of that either.<sup>351</sup> Science, again Schopenhauer was not, by and large, its keenest advocate. He may well have sought its corroboration in, what I consider his strongest, most clearly written work, 'On the Will in Nature' (it includes the particularly concise and impressive chapter, 'Comparative Anatomy' p. 47 - 67), but it was little more than an instrumental method Schopenhauer employed to substantiate his own ghoulish claims. Lastly, academia. He never spoke of it with anything other than derision. It resembled a snake pit in the philosopher's brief and

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<sup>351</sup> 'If we have read Herodotus', Schopenhauer wrote, 'we have already studied enough history from a philosophical point of view'. See 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 444).



unsuccessful skirmish with it. Full of Hegelians in his time, motivated, not by the 'truth', as Schopenhauer saw it, but their advantageous contortion of it for their own professional ends.

Why did Schopenhauer care so little for the preceding flurry of examples? The answer was extremely simple. They expressed, with the obvious exemption of 'noise', an erroneous interest in 'phenomena', a 'mere' array of images, and, subsequently, ignored the very thing whose expression they were: nature's inalterable will.

Schopenhauer did not care for any of these tertiary manifestations for exactly the same reason and it betrayed the monomaniacal and thoroughly deterministic character of what he even called his 'single thought'.<sup>352</sup> The philosopher only had eyes for one thing: his own totalising, if utterly repellent conception of will. It certainly coloured, as we will see, his estimation of individuality and everything else of 'mere' phenomenal standing.

'When once the time comes for me to be read', as a rather pompous sounding Schopenhauer wrote, 'it will be found that my philosophy is like Thebes with a hundred gates. One can enter from any direction, and through each gate arrive at the direct path to the very centre'.<sup>353</sup> Needless to say, there was only one thing to be found at the dead centre of Schopenhauer's philosophy and that one thing, not too unsurprisingly, was a shadowy will. And it was to his very own omnipotent pocket god, the will,

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<sup>352</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. xii).

<sup>353</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Basis of Morality' (1840 / 1965 p. 4).

Schopenhauer repeatedly returned one's attention. His philosophy was extremely predictable in that respect. 'There can', as he wrote, 'be no matter without a manifestation of will'.<sup>354</sup> If one turns, for a second opinion, to Ladislav Klíma's 'My Autobiography' (1924), one hears much the same thing: 'Everything, every little thing', as Klíma wrote, 'is subject to Will alone'.<sup>355</sup> And with that sentiment, Klíma can be said to have expressed the way in which Schopenhauer viewed *all* material or phenomenal forms whatever their 'particular' manifestation may have been, past or present.

With regards to history, to take one example, it invariably focused on events and dates as if the events and dates in question had actually revealed something 'unprecedented' and entirely 'new' which had not, as indeed Schopenhauer thought more likely, already been witnessed tens of dozens, if not tens of thousands of times before. That one scene transpired in the valleys of South Wales during the 1980's and another in down town Manhattan in 2001 was, again, inconsequential. Schopenhauer's chief gripe with history was that it tended to 'isolate' events by means of the calendar and map. But the calendar and map, depictions of its objectified state, simply reflected the will's reluctance to reveal its 'true' identity. In every instance, no matter the continent or century, the will was singularly culpable.

The 'march' of time, in particular, encouraged the misguided belief in such things as 'teleology',

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<sup>354</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 19).

<sup>355</sup> Ladislav Klíma, 'My Autobiography' collected in 'The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch' (1924 / 2000 p. 199). Translated from the Czech by Carleton Bulkin. Twisted Spoon Press, Prague.

'progress', 'evolution' and the like. There was little or no room in Schopenhauer's scheme for any ameliorative notion; the will's ways were set in stone. 'It does not', as Schopenhauer said of nature's will, 'grow weary or old; it does not learn or improve with practice, and is in the child what it is in the old man, always one and the same; and in everyone its character is unalterable'.<sup>356</sup>

'Schopenhauer', as Henri-Frédéric Amiel noted in his 'Journal' (1882), 'believes in the unchangeableness of innate tendencies in the individual, and in the invariability of the primitive disposition. He refuses to believe in the new man, in any real progress towards perfection, or in any positive improvement in a human being. Only the appearances are refined; there is no change below the surface'.<sup>357</sup> And that, just as Amiel said, was exactly where Schopenhauer's fundamental interest proved to reside; his attention was entirely focused on the vortical undertow that swept historical phenomena along an imaginary temporal current.

The philosopher's patience ran little more than a course of forty years. What more, he asked, could one possibly hope to see that one had not already seen over the span of four decades? Whatever event history recounted, it was largely irrelevant to Schopenhauer as it 'merely' described, in his opinion, the machinations of a will hell bent, as I have said, on mutilation and self-harm.

Schopenhauer's interest did not extend to the particular method, you have, by means of an example, your own pick

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<sup>356</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 43).

<sup>357</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 160).

of atrocities to chose from, the will may have chosen to exhibit its vice. One massacre served to illustrate, just as well as any other, the callous, deceitful and harrowing way men went, quite literally, about their business. The very suggestion that one could actually learn a single corrective or edifying lesson from history was evidently untrue. 'This world', Schopenhauer believed, 'is the battle-ground of tormented and agonized beings who continue to exist only by each devouring the other'.<sup>358</sup> With its emphasis on novelty, history had turned a blind eye to the very thing that was solely responsible for each one of the ghastly tales historians invariably had to tell.

Again, the blame lay squarely, as it always did, with one culprit: nature's will. Unnerving politicians and smarmy statesmen came and went, but the will remained in office. And it shouldered all responsibility for everything that was despicable, corrupt and sinister in the world. 'In Schopenhauer's view', as Iulii Isaevich Eichenwald bluntly if no less astutely concluded, 'nature is guilty'.<sup>359</sup> It hardly helped diffuse the situation, in fact it inflamed it to an uncomfortable and extremely neurotic degree, that Schopenhauer need not have looked very far to find the guilty party: the despot was far closer to home than one dared imagine. As for the rare and sublime examples of genuine benevolence and selflessness, nature's will could not take credit for those. They were exceptional instances indeed, Schopenhauer thought; inspired, as he believed, by an

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<sup>358</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 581).

<sup>359</sup> Iulii Isaevich Eichenwald, 'A Note on Schopenhauer' (1910) collected in Eric von der Luft (ed), 'Schopenhauer. New Essays in Honor of His 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday' (1988 p. 147).

acute awareness of the inherent powers at play within the world and the terrible realisation of one's complicity with them. They almost always proved to be an individual stand - a symbolic, if self-annulling 'gesture' against the dreadful power the philosopher envisaged in his concept of will. And it was to that very end his own doctrine claimed to work.

And so it went on. One phenomenal form gave rise to another and the principle in question, that of sufficient reason, condemned Schopenhauer, one imagines, to a sensory hell. It conspired against the 'pure' vision he wished to have of the world. It proved so 'pure', in actual fact, as to border the brink of complete sterility. Be that as it may and putting Schopenhauer's 'ideal' temporarily to one side, the principle, returning to the matter at hand, divided one large, if invisible monster, nature's will, into a countless variety and number of more vocal, familiar and 'petty monsters'; all of which stridently and forcibly proclaimed their 'independence' from each other.

The will spawned off shoot after off shoot and each off shoot proceeded to animalise and personify whatever latent desire the will wished to express through it. 'The animal's body', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'is simply its will itself seen as a representation in the brain, and therefore under the forms of space, time, and casuality, and hence the mere visibility, objectivity of the will'.<sup>360</sup> Consequently, its need to squawk or bray at the top of its voice was made manifest by the cockatoo and donkey. Its desire to sing in more melodious tones was granted to it in the form of the blackbird and thrush.

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<sup>360</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 64).

Its wish to stop all the incessant and repetitive fuss emanating from the blackbird and thrush gave rise to the sparrow hawk. Its predilection for bombast was delivered to it, and quite possibly satisfied one suspects, by its unveiling of Friedrich Schlegel. Another of its wishes may have been to glorify its own manifest 'might' and for that express reason Max Stirner suddenly appeared. Another of its desires, for the little we know, may have been to undermine its manifest 'might' and, in the weeks preceding Stirner's death, the will conjured up an insect whose sole purpose in life was, as we will hear in the following chapter, to address that particular matter.

The will was despicable in its primary state, its secondary state, as well as its tertiary state and the interplay between all of its states was ultimately, like the rest of its contrivances, an unknown quantity.

#### IV. AN UNHEALTHY DISTANCE

Schopenhauer regarded the world at arm's length, as one tends to do with foul and sickly smelling things. The resultant effect was that only its crudest, most rudimentary features were made apparent to him. 'We must always try to preserve large views', Schopenhauer implored. 'If we are arrested by details', he snobbishly and unreasonably feared, 'we shall get confused, and see things awry'.<sup>361</sup> But an indistinct lump seen from afar is fundamentally removed from one's immediate and active concern. Some writers have even seen fit to single out Schopenhauer's impediment, a 'presbyopic' condition as I described it an earlier chapter, and heap an undue amount

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<sup>361</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Wisdom of Life'. Aphorisms. French book. **Find ref** P & P.

of praise on it.

Take, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche. In his commendatory and uninformative essay, 'Schopenhauer as Educator' (1874), Nietzsche wrote: 'His greatness lies in having set up before him a picture of life as a whole, in order to interpret it as a whole'.<sup>362</sup> Consequently, all of life's more intricate 'details', mostly the more agreeable ones, given Schopenhauer's pessimistic disposition, were completely lost to the 'whole'; they were, by comparison, microscopic in the extreme and barely appreciable to the philosopher on account of his 'impediment'.

In one sense, Schopenhauer's indiscriminate take on life may be seen, albeit mistakenly, to have let a gallery of rogues off the hook. They were 'merely' acting, as a sophist in their ranks might have argued in their collective defence, in abeyance to the will's diabolical demands. But Schopenhauer did not wish to absolve anyone who actively affirmed the will's desires; instead, the philosopher held *everyone* to account, rogue or not, who did so.

Individuals resembled little more than a predictable and rather unpleasant collection of organisms, swarming this way and that, at the bottom of an enormous petri dish, but as they were all phenomena of the active agent in the dish even the most modest among them who simply went about their business in the least obtrusive of ways were no less an exception. The same basic desire was at play 'within' them as it was in the will's most infamous

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<sup>362</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator' collected in 'Untimely Meditations' (1874 / 1983 p. 141).

manifestation.

Schopenhauer was completely enthralled by the scope and stature of the 'whole'. It was not, contrary to Nietzsche's opinion, a laudable quality. It depreciated, in the most belittling way, all ostensible belief in the subject's standing as a distinct, singular and independent figure. If one happened to share Schopenhauer's disinclination to be 'arrested by details' then every single person would be lumped together in an indeterminate, unsightly and odorous heap. And that reflected, one fears, Schopenhauer's ambitions. The philosopher's 'impediment' engendered, as indeed Wyndham Lewis keenly observed, 'an ecstatic stupefaction at the picture of the colossal, of a ready contempt for a mere "individual"'.<sup>363</sup> Every single person was 'merely' a manifestation of an omnivorous and inherently loathsome will that was, in the simplest of terms, far bigger and more persistent than them.

Appearances were of the most deceptive order; they were little more than so many illusory forms a wholly duplicitous will had strategically placed in one's path to cover up its own predilection for self-harm. They encouraged the belief, the absolutely 'delusional' belief that its manifestation in one objectified form had little, if any relation to its manifestation in another. This, however, was not true at all; every single one of these 'illusory forms', according to Schopenhauer, were not simply the will's doing but were, in actual fact, nothing other than the will itself.

'The body is the will itself', as Schopenhauer said,

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<sup>363</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 241).



'objectively perceived as spatial phenomenon'.<sup>364</sup>

Consequently, one could not see, in a literal sense, the unified nature of the world, the glorified 'whole', as the will, expressing its fervent and libidinous wish to expose itself in public, had taken matters into its own hands and hampered the effort from the very start; when, in other words, it first set foot out of its primordial hiding spot and cluttered up the world with its manifold and distracting image.

The will may well have hogged the limelight with its manifest display, but the true, largely uncelebrated performance actually took place in the wings. The performance on stage was little more than an elaborate ruse that capitalised, if by way of allegory, on the favourable seating arrangements of the tiered auditorium as well as the strict running time of the performance. The number of apparent wills on stage did little more than mouth and repeat the lines prompted to them by the authoritative will in the wings. But one could not see the all important impresario, the 'true' will, as it was off stage and one's eye, in any case, was immediately drawn to the illuminated pool of light that encircled the 'performance'. One was enthralled not by the impresario, but the dancing figures at the centre of the stage. The impresario's unified vision, then, largely passed one by.

'We are nothing else in the universe', as a clearly none the wiser Sénancour suspected, 'but marionettes worked by a showman, set in opposition, whirled here and there, made to laugh, to fight, to weep, to jump, for the

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<sup>364</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 609).

entertainment of - whom?'.<sup>365</sup> Again and again, time and space, the unavoidable arrangements of the auditorium acted to conceal from everybody, except Schopenhauer, the 'true' identity of the 'showman' in question. 'In outer as well as in inner teleology of nature', Schopenhauer revealed to the reader, 'what we must think of as means and end is everywhere only *the phenomenon of the unity of the one will so in agreement with itself*, which has broken up into space and time for our mode of cognition'.<sup>366</sup> But having apparently gained unprecedented access to all areas of the auditorium, front and back of the house, Schopenhauer had not only seen the 'showman' for what he was, but also identified him as the 'real' villain of the piece: 'that which exhibits itself in a million forms of endless variety and diversity, and thus performs the most variegated and grotesque play without beginning and end, is this one essence'.<sup>367</sup> Needless to say, the impresario, the 'showman' and troupe of beleaguered performers were all one and the same thing: nature's will.

Schopenhauer described the will, several moments ago, as unitary whole 'in agreement with itself', but it is as well to remind you that his use of the term 'agreement' was somewhat idiosyncratic.<sup>368</sup> It described an agreement of sorts but it was not the sort of harmonious agreement that would have struck a chord with the likes of Friedrich Schlegel nor, for that matter, was it readily apparent to anyone other than the 'privileged' figure

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<sup>365</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sémancour, 'Obermann', Vol. I (1804 / 1910 p. 177).

<sup>366</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 161).

<sup>367</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 318).

<sup>368</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 161).

whom, unaccountably, had been granted the revealing view in the first place.

Unlike Schopenhauer, the 'agreement' was completely beyond one's customary powers to discern or readily appreciate and hardly boded at all well for the 'performers' concerned. Not, I should add, if one dared consider the world from a 'feeble' phenomenal perspective.

Schopenhauer's unifying principle, the will, was 'held' together by means of disharmony and discord. That summation, however, was only superficially true. If one forgets all about the diversity of beings and imagines the world as a whirling, noxious plume of smoke the robotic Schopenhauer was quite correct, it did represent a self-adjudged 'agreement'. One creature, as we have heard him say, was born, as indeed seems very likely, for the sole purpose of utilising, if not devouring another. But as one creature was simply the same thing made manifest in another image it hardly made any difference whether Tom ever managed to corner and consume Jerry or not. The two creatures were 'only' manifestations of nature's single will, after all. In that sense, the will had indeed reached an 'agreeable', if purely utilitarian arrangement with itself, costly as it may have been for Jerry, to provide for its own sustenance.

The entire world, then, was 'only' an evanescent image that expressed, not only its fanaticism for display but the sharp and constant pangs of the will's hoggish and cannibalistic appetite. 'It is a hungry will, insatiable and unassuageable', as Bryan Magee said, 'and the will's phenomena have only each other to feed on, for there is

nothing else in the world. In this sense the will devours, and can devour only, itself'.<sup>369</sup>

The will not only satisfied its hunger by chewing on its own tail, but appeased its sexual urges by similarly self-administered means. Thankfully, the principle of sufficient reason spared us the sight of this particularly lurid spectacle and kept the will's 'agreeable' habits to itself. Even so, it is hard to say, if one is pushed, what strikes one as worse:

1). The sight of an enormous, slobbering, and self-consuming will defiling itself in public.

2). The sight of its 'lackeys' abasing themselves in accordance with *its* wishes.

Schopenhauer, for one, decided that he could not possibly choose between the first and second option; both were, in their own way, equally appalling. And, in tune with a sentiment articulated by *Pechorin* in 'A Hero of Our Own Times' (1840): "The world's all nonsense. Nature's a fool. Fate is an idiot. Life is not worth a farthing".<sup>370</sup> Schopenhauer, accordingly, aspired to put an end to both options, 1 as well as 2.

One was only afforded, by dint of the principle in question, the spectacle of option 2. In turn, all that was universally 'true', authentic and veritable (the will, I mean), had, Schopenhauer believed, been chopped up, individuated and fed an unshakable belief - an

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<sup>369</sup> Bryan Magee, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' (1983 p. 155).

<sup>370</sup> Mikhail Lermontov, 'A Hero of Our Own Times' (1840 / 1958 p. 247). Translated from the Russian by Eden and Cedar Paul, Oxford University Press, London.

egotistical belief, in its own fleeting 'illusion' of form (true of all individuals, including Schopenhauer), by nothing other, I should add, than the masochistic and counterplotting will itself.

Cannibalism did not appear as cannibalism, but the pressing appetent need of one animal satisfied by the consumption of another; nor did its sexual habits appear as a forlorn and utterly solitary preoccupation, but foredoomed procreative acts bearing all manner of fine sounding, amative names - 'soap-bubbles', as the tin hearted Schopenhauer described them.<sup>371</sup> As a result, that which was genuine, the will, no longer appeared to be genuine at all, but a ridiculous and outlandish idea. In the world of representation, only its manifestations were credible even if they were little more than unknowing expedients of the will's autophagous appetite.

The 'principle of sufficient reason' determined, as Schopenhauer described it, 'the restricted method of knowledge of individuals'.<sup>372</sup> It referred to the percipient faculties of an objectified will and, understandably, pandered to its pretences and served to protect its treasured illusion. 'The principle of sufficient reason', as Schopenhauer maintained, 'is the universal form of every phenomenon, and man in his action, like every other phenomenon, must be subordinated to it'.<sup>373</sup> Given its purely submissive position, the intellect was unable to comprehend the will in and of itself, but only its manifest and wholly misleading array

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<sup>371</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 535).

<sup>372</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 181).

<sup>373</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 113).

of images. The brain, then, encouraged one to take a misguided belief in things.

If we take, for instance, a figure - any old figure, a Patrick for example, and ask this Patrick character what exactly constitutes the basis and make up of any one person, he would not reply: 'The individual subject is purely a spatial and temporal phenomenon, objectified in one's brain by means of nature's conniving and lascivious will'. Rather, he would be more likely to say, presuming, of course, he was unfamiliar with Schopenhauer's doctrine and not, for that matter, prone to being awkward: 'The subject is a many number of things and they are too countless to name' or, at least, something to that effect.

The principle of which Schopenhauer spoke magically 'transformed' nature's will from an inapprehensible, impersonal, eternal essence into a number of apparently intelligible, egocentric and finite somatic forms. It was, as Schopenhauer wrote, 'only as phenomenon that an individual is distinguished from the other things of the world'.<sup>374</sup> And it certainly described how the world appeared not only to Patrick but to Tom, to Jerry, Max Stirner, and every other creature and character one is able to think of.

It was, as Schopenhauer explained, 'the ultimate principle of all finiteness, of all individuation, and the universal form of the representation as it comes to the knowledge of the individual as such'.<sup>375</sup> However, this

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<sup>374</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 364).

<sup>375</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 169).

Patrick character of mine would have been no different, Schopenhauer would have said, to any other Tom, Dick or Harry. There was nothing the least bit original or singular about him at all. Patrick was 'merely', as Schopenhauer was prone, more often than not, to phrase it, a changing form in which nature's will revealed itself to the world and was hardly worthy of his attention as he was more than familiar with its despicable ways.

Individuality was not worthy of Schopenhauer's praise as it was an all out 'delusion'; it was only by virtue of one's 'limited' and wholly compromised percipient faculties that such a thing existed at all. Individuality was meagre in comparison to that which informed it and gave it substance. It was only a representational 'image' that was as sharp as the pair of eyes that perceived it, as smelly as the nose that smelt it, and, as a loud as the set of ears that were subjected to all of the tremendous noise the will invariably wished to make. One's senses, then, were in league with one's brain and, in turn, pandered to the desires of an exhibitivive will.

The world of representation, the will's vast array of images, was a world in which each bridge was apparently burnt; a world in which no two things appeared to have the least bit in common. All people 'appeared' to be entirely self-contained, autonomous creatures with little affinity with the rest of the world that surrounded them. If any single one of them were told, in no uncertain terms by Schopenhauer, that he was Tom, that he was Jerry and a whole host of other characters, his reply would be expressed, above all else, by adamant shakes of the head, by 'nos' and 'certainly nots'; an endless series of

'nothing to do with mes'.

The common ground between one thing and another, if one took a customary view of the world, came to a quick and rather abrupt end. An oak tree, for instance, was simply an oak tree and nothing more than that. The birds that chirped in its branches, were again, something quite different indeed. They had, between them, only the faintest of things in common, namely the birds, whatever their reasons, chose to spend large amounts of their time in the oak's branches. Apart from that, the tree and the birds perched in it had little else to do with one another. They certainly had nothing in common with a naturalist who may have happened to be observing them from below. They were simply things that one might happen, if one was in the right mood, to take some pleasure in looking at, but, beyond that, they had little more to do with oneself. 'For all that we perceive under these conditions', as Schopenhauer emphasised, 'is mere phenomenon'.<sup>376</sup> If one were asked if one shared a single thing with the oak tree and the birds fluttering about in it, one would again reply, without hesitation, 'No'.

The representational world was a world of colourful shapes and sharply defined outlines; a world of trees and birds and countless other things and creatures of individual standing. But their singularity all hung at the mercy of an individuating principle planted in one's brain; ultimately, it was all little more than an illusion, not only of the highest order, but also of the most compelling. 'It lies merely in the individual's mode of cognition and has', as Schopenhauer added, 'reality

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<sup>376</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Parerga and Paralipomena' Vol. II (1851 / 19\*\* p. 270).



only for that individual'.<sup>377</sup>

Beyond the individuating principle, in the 'primordial' fog of will, the naturalist was not only the oak tree, but also the number of birds in its branches. 'In this root-point of existence', as Schopenhauer explained, 'the difference of beings ceases'.<sup>378</sup> They all reflected, albeit it in gradatory degrees, the stages of his own inborn nature. And with this principle Schopenhauer sliced man's figure, cleanly across the middle, in two.

#### V. ONE IS DOUBLE

The individual subject now found himself as will, primarily, and, by means of an apparent neurological twist of fate, its somewhat less significant objectified image. 'Everyone', as Schopenhauer said, 'finds himself to be this will, in which the inner nature of the world consists, and he also finds himself to be the knowing subject, whose representation is the whole world'.<sup>379</sup>

One side of him, the latter, was said to be 'real', while the former, his manifest and specific image, was not. To compound the matter, the will was inherently evil, if Schopenhauer's skewed account was to be believed, but as it constituted the nature of *all* things including his own, he too, at heart, was no less loathsome.<sup>380</sup> And,

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<sup>377</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 182).

<sup>378</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 325).

<sup>379</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 162).

<sup>380</sup> Having established the will as evil, Schopenhauer argued that it had the effect of a beneficial, if rather severe homeopathic remedy: 'if the existence of evil is already interwoven with that of the world in the foundation of a system, then it need not fear that specter like a vaccinated child need not fear smallpox'. See Arthur

reflecting a fear expressed by Gérard de Nerval, Schopenhauer's subject had 'doubled'. 'A terrible idea came to me', as Nerval wrote in 'Aurelia' (1855). "Man is double", I said to myself'.<sup>381</sup> And Nerval's fears certainly proved to have catastrophic consequences for Schopenhauer's 'knowing subject' who was struck by the same terrifying, revelatory 'idea'.<sup>382</sup>

'We distinguish in man', as Paul Deussen, founder of the Schopenhauer Society, similarly observed in 'The Elements of Metaphysics' (1894), 'a *twofold character*, that of the species and that of the individual'.<sup>383</sup> But the relationship between the one and the other was neither the most amicable, sympathetic nor balanced of unions. Patrick, to take a recent example, appeared to be straddled, in the most precarious way, between the conflicting demands of his, by now, divided and grotesquely mismatched person. Patrick's will, the weightier side of him which pertained to the 'species', seemed intent on little more than tormenting him, the phenomenal Patrick, with its desires (faithfully performing the villainous role assigned to it by Schopenhauer), while the 'paltry' leftovers which constituted Patrick's 'individual' character, objected to its unreasonable and hostile intentions. But as the two sides of Patrick emanated from the very same source, one can only derive a meagre amount of solace in the confirmation of one's worst fears.

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Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 142).

<sup>381</sup> Gérard de Nerval, 'Aurelia' (1855 / 1931 p. 26).

<sup>382</sup> 'Every being in nature', as Schopenhauer asserted, 'is simultaneously *phenomenon* and *thing-in-itself*'. The 'sudden' and unpleasant realisation of one's 'double state' constituted the basis of the renunciative process. Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Parerga and Paralipomena' Vol. II (1851 / 19\*\* p. 91).

<sup>383</sup> Paul Deussen, 'The Elements of Metaphysics' (1894 / 19\*\* p. 202).

The will was clearly intent on pursuing the most destructive and calamitous of ends.

That is not to say that the will found itself at the sharpest end of the stick; its rather less fortunate 'manifestations' - the 'lackeys' of whom I have spoke, bore the brunt of its caprice. Needless to say, they did not happen to share, not in any substantial way, its immortal nature and paid dearly for all the grotesque and reckless liberties the will took with them. They were 'merely' playthings of its umpteen million desires and it expended with them accordingly. 'One of Schopenhauer's major themes', as Christopher Janaway quite rightly identified, 'is that the will in nature is greater than the individual living being, and has the individual at its mercy'.<sup>384</sup>

The will toyed with generation after generation; no sooner than it had exhausted one, it turned its attention to the next and set about it in exactly the same ravenous way. 'Every time a man is begotten and born', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'the clock of human life is wound up anew, to repeat once more its same old tune that has already been played innumerable times, movement by movement and measure by measure, with insignificant variations. Every individual, every human apparition and its course of life, is only one more short dream of the endless spirit of nature... is only one more fleeting form, playfully sketched by it on its infinite page, space and time; it is allowed to exist for a short while that is infinitesimal compared with these and is then

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<sup>384</sup> Christopher Janaway, 'The real essence of human beings: Schopenhauer and the unconscious will' collected in 'Thinking the Unconscious. Nineteenth-Century German Thought' (2010 p. 153).

effaced, to make new room'.<sup>385</sup> Max Scheler described nature's will as 'that thrusting, covetous, demonic power, throwing out new forms of existence in ever greater profusion'.<sup>386</sup> But all the 'new forms of existence' it threw out simply replaced those it had lost to its grim and alarming form of 'entertainment'.

Nature's will imparted its most concupiscent and gluttonous of desires to each and every person; they were not welcome gifts, but damnable ones. The will found itself, 'to its astonishment', cooped up within each of these people like a gigantic, if lithe contortionist in an impossibly small box. 'If anyone asks me what it is', as Schopenhauer explained, 'I refer him to his own inner being, where he will find it complete, and indeed of colossal magnitude'.<sup>387</sup> Even the most intent and wildly licentious of personal endeavours to satisfy its desires would leave the will in a state of want. Why? Because no single person, not even the most voracious or dissolute among them, could possibly satisfy the sum total of its desires. And, by proxy, they all felt an indeterminate sense of its dissatisfaction. 'The will is often inflamed to a degree far exceeding the affirmation of the body', as Schopenhauer wrote.<sup>388</sup> Elsewhere, the philosopher talked of 'life's inadequacy to satisfy the spirit'.<sup>389</sup>

A pool of sea water cut off at high tide might, one imagines, feel much the same way. Having grown used to

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<sup>385</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 322).

<sup>386</sup> Max Scheler, 'On the Eternal in Man' (1921 / 1960 p. 116).

<sup>387</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 142).

<sup>388</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 328).

<sup>389</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 322).

its former abundance, the Atlantic ocean for example, it now finds itself confined to a dismal rock pool. It still feels the enormous swell of the Atlantic's waves but, to its dismay, it is no deeper than a puddle and, understandably, frustrated by the severe limitations inflicted on it. It may well wish to roll unimpeded across vast stretches of water, but it can do no more than vent its frustration in the form of pitiful little ripples. And, like the pool of sea water, every individual person felt, however indistinctly, the immeasurable scope of one (the universal will of which they were a part) and the confinement of the other (the 'paltry' rock pool, the body in this case, in which the will was confined). But if the Atlantic ocean and the remaining six seas proved an insufficient paddling pool, one can possibly sense something of the will's 'astonishment', if not complete horror, when it found itself interned within the ailing frame of any old body.

'There is', as Bryan Magee wrote, 'something horror-stricken about Schopenhauer's view of the world'.<sup>390</sup> And 'that something' was nothing other than the parasitic worm in the apple, his own inborn enemy: nature's will. It was a monstrous libidinal power in complete dictatorial control of its 'hosts'. They not only sang but danced to its tune like so many servile idiots and fools; they were at its constant beck and call and it led them, as often proved the case, on the wildest, most perilous of goose chases. A person was led this way and that by the will's senseless desires over which he had little, if any control. Nor can Schopenhauer be said, as we will hear, to have helped disabuse his readers of that impression.

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<sup>390</sup> Bryan Magee, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' (1983 p. 154).

The will urged man on, often in the most ruinous of ways, to fulfill its impossible callings. Sénancour had something of, what can only be described as, an extraordinary presentiment of Schopenhauer's doctrine of will, when, in the second volume of 'Obermann', a good fifteen years before the philosopher's disturbing scheme made its appearance, he wrote the following startling and profound sentence: 'I am the sport of that power which will shatter us all'.<sup>391</sup> Nature's malefic will could not be characterised more succinctly and perfectly than that.

#### VI. NATURE'S TRUE COLOURS

Having spoken a little of Schopenhauer's doctrine, one can possibly begin to appreciate its divergence from Friedrich Schlegel's totalising 'theory'. Schopenhauer's portrayal of nature and the subject's affinity with it, was a far cry from Schlegel's all too frothy and flowery vision. If one turns to page 101 of Michael Artzibashev's novel, 'Sanine' (1907), one reads: "Nature! Ha, ha!" Sanine laughed feebly, and waved his hand in derision. "It is customary, I know, to say that Nature is perfect. The truth is, that Nature is just as defective as mankind. Without any great effort of imagination any of us could present a world a hundred times better than this one. Why should we not have perpetual warmth and light, and a garden ever verdant and ever gay?".<sup>392</sup> And Schopenhauer's 'garden' was certainly not nearly as 'verdant' nor as 'gay' as Schlegel's; an extremely nasty and unpleasant thing remained hidden in the dense

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<sup>391</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. II (1804 / 1910 p. 254).

<sup>392</sup> Michael Artzibashev, 'Sanine. A Russian Love Novel' (1907 / 1932 p. 101). Translated from the Russian by Percy Pinkerton. Three Sirens Press, NYC.

undergrowth.

Nature had opened up to Schopenhauer in a way she had not been able to do with the all too selective Friedrich Schlegel. 'Schopenhauer', as Arthur Hübscher wrote in 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context' (1989), 'teaches us to know the world, and to look into its heart'.<sup>393</sup> However, the sight no longer afforded Schopenhauer's 'knowing subject' any particular form of joy. A 'glance into the *interior of nature* is certainly granted to us', Schopenhauer acknowledged, 'in so far as this is nothing but *our own inner being*'.<sup>394</sup> Having upturned a large and weighty stone, Schopenhauer recognised all sorts of unpleasant things crawling about in the moist soil. Most alarming of all, his own 'inner being'; the sight proved to be a source of acute distress and alarm, and, in tune with the horrific discovery, Schopenhauer's objectives changed dramatically.

'Look into the heart of nature? What pleasure can there be in that?', as Pär Lagerkvist asked in his novel 'The Dwarf' (1944). It was a question that Schopenhauer would have been eager to direct, one imagines, to the likes of Friedrich Schlegel; he would certainly have welcomed Lagerkvist's sentiments, as they expressed his own, when the novelist immediately added: 'And if they really could do such a thing it would fill them with terror. They think that like everything else it is made for them, for their well-being and their happiness, so that their life shall be great and wonderful. What do they know about it? How do they know that any heed is paid to them and their

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<sup>393</sup> Arthur Hübscher, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context: Thinker Against the Tide' (19\*\* / 1989 p. 426).

<sup>394</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 352).

strange childish desires?'.<sup>395</sup>

'Mother nature' had revealed her true colours to Schopenhauer and he did not like 'her' one bit and 'she', in return, could hardly be said to have been particularly attentive to his welfare or shown him very much in the way of consideration. His well-being was, in fact, of little consequence to her; she had far larger cares of her own and those primarily concerned the upkeep and perpetuation of the species rather than any one of its constituents.

The 'individual', Schopenhauer wrote in the second volume of 'The World as Will and Representation' (1844), 'has for nature only an indirect value, in so far as it is a means for maintaining the species. Apart from this, its existence is a matter of indifference to nature; in fact, nature herself leads it to destruction as soon as it ceases to be fit for that purpose.'<sup>396</sup> The 'individual', as Schopenhauer said in an earlier work, 'is nothing to her'.<sup>397</sup> Nature's dealings with Schopenhauer smacked of enmity and deceit; he appeared to be little more than her pliant fool. It was no longer, then, the happiest of unions.

In certain respects, the relationship was now on a more honest and faithful footing. Schopenhauer saw a side to nature that Schlegel, given his squeamish and mawkish disposition, was loathed to admit or, for that matter, even acknowledge. It is one thing, as I said earlier, to

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<sup>395</sup> Pär Lagerkvist, 'The Dwarf' (1944 / 1945 p. 29).

<sup>396</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 351).

<sup>397</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 330).



identify oneself, as Schlegel did, with all of the pleasant things nature had to offer, with powered bosoms and the like, but quite another to align oneself with its woe and want. To Schopenhauer's credit, he did not shy away from the prospect, as the all too selective Schlegel had done, but acknowledged it as his own. Rilke faithfully expressed the philosopher's horror when, in 'The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge' (1910), he exclaimed, 'My God it struck me with sudden vehemence, thus then art Thou!'.<sup>398</sup> 'Once we regard humanity in this way', as Christopher Janaway added, 'we have to attribute to ourselves some of the characteristics of the world at large'.<sup>399</sup>

The dreadful realisation that one was complicit, in the most elemental sense, with all the most rotten things in life, past and present, accounted, in no small degree, for Schopenhauer's 'dramatic' change of heart, as I described it at the beginning of the chapter. The subject's 'inner-being' was still very much a universal entity, as indeed it had been with Schlegel, but its point of unity with nature had, in Schopenhauer's doctrine, been widened; it not only encompassed its sublimity, at which point I ought to remind you Schlegel's unitary idea, regardless of his insistence to the contrary, came to an abrupt halt, but it now encompassed all of its misery and suffering to boot. The fundamental difference between the universalism of

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<sup>398</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, 'The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge' (1910 / 2008 p. 198?). Translated from the German by Burton Pike. Dalkey Archive Press, London. Rilke's expression echoed a phrase Schopenhauer derived from the Brahmans, 'Tat tvam asi' or 'This art thou'. See Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 374).

<sup>399</sup> Christopher Janaway, 'The real essence of human beings: Schopenhauer and the unconscious will' collected in 'Thinking the Unconscious. Nineteenth-Century German Thought' (2010 p. 149).

Schlegel and Schopenhauer was that Schopenhauer no longer liked but actively loathed its basis.

'There can be ominous overtones', as Peter McCormick warned, 'to the search for the hidden self; the suggestion that the self is a problem, that it does not reveal itself simply and directly to the searcher whose self it is, but must instead be sought vigorously and interminably, raises the two possibilities, both rather terrifying: that one may not be able to find the self, or that the self one finds might be utterly horrible'.<sup>400</sup> Schopenhauer was not at a loss to locate his 'hidden self', as McCormick called it, but, in tune with the critic's fears, the discovery filled the philosopher with terror.

'How frightful is this nature to which we belong!', as we heard Schopenhauer exclaim in the introductory chapter.<sup>401</sup> His doctrine, describing as it did, the unnerving and thoroughly ghoulish machinations of nature's omnipotent will was, in fact, was so unpleasant that even its author felt compelled to seek deliverance from it. 'Human beings', as J. P. Jacobsen wrote in 'Niels Lyhne' (1880), 'so often build up theories that they do not wish to reside in'.<sup>402</sup> Jacobsen's suspicion was certainly true of Schopenhauer's relationship to his own theoretical scheme. Schlegel can be said to have been far more comfortable and relaxed with his 'theory' than the neurotic Schopenhauer could ever be said to have been with his.

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<sup>400</sup> Peter McCormick, 'The Concept of Self in Political Thought' (1979 p. 706).

<sup>401</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 356).

<sup>402</sup> J. P. Jacobsen, 'Niels Lyhne' (1880 / 19\*\* p. 167). Translated from the Danish by \*\*\*\*\*.

Schlegel's 'theory' beckoned man to nature, implored his subject, the 'romantic poet', to feel at one with her infinite 'riches'. In the circumstances, that was not so difficult as the affiliation, as we heard, paid certain dividends; Schlegel did not object in the least to submerging himself in nature's communal pool as he kept the company of a beautiful, if inconvertible array of companions. The association flattered his vanity in a way that Schopenhauer's theory certainly did not. Having extended his embrace to nature, albeit rather fussily, Schlegel's 'romantic poet' was, in the most vicarious way, universally glorious whereas Schopenhauer's 'knowing subject' was rotten to the core. Having peered into the 'heart of nature', Schopenhauer's 'subject' also recognised his affiliation with nature; the sight, however, afforded the philosopher little more than a profound sense of disgust.

The subject's will, his 'inner-nature', was now far removed from the purely syrupy thing it was to Schlegel; it was a source of sober reflection as it had extended its reach to all that was execrable and rotten. Schopenhauer also plunged his subject into a communal pool but, unlike Schlegel's, it was open to the public at large, not just a select few, and the water was not nearly so enticing. Schopenhauer implored his subject, as a consequence, to relinquish the grounds of the association; to contest rather than affirm, nature's calling in a determined effort to distinguish himself from its degenerate filth.

The prospect that faced Schopenhauer's 'subject' was perfectly expressed by Hjalmar Söderberg, when, turning

to his novel 'Doctor Glas' for the third time, he wrote: 'For what you say cannot, must not, on any terms whatsoever, be the truth; if it is true, then I don't want to have any more part in things'.<sup>403</sup> Unlike Schlegel's 'romantic poet', Schopenhauer's subject had first to take on board and digest all sorts of unpleasant 'home truths' before he could possibly identify himself with nature's will. 'This truth, which must be very serious and grave if not terrible to everyone', as Schopenhauer implored, 'is that a man also can say and must say: "The world is my will"'.<sup>404</sup> Then and only then was Schopenhauer's 'subject' fully fit to plan his escape. It was born, fundamentally, of a horrific realisation of one's 'true' self.

Nature's will did afford Schopenhauer certain pleasures, but they were few and far between and largely acted to distract him, in spells of melodic repose, from the incessant and impossible demands she made of him. The immersive pleasure he found in Rossini's music, for example, proved unsatisfactory in the long run as it always returned him, all too abruptly, to his former disconsolate state with a dull and rather mundane thud.

Schopenhauer found what little pleasure he could by blotting out the world, miserable and frightening as it was, that surrounded him and, rather conveniently, his doctrine pandered to his peculiar escapist streak. 'Under these circumstances', as Wyndham Lewis said, 'Schopenhauer decided that, as there was nothing to be hoped from it but its eternal mechanical buffooneries, the best line to take was to remove yourself as far as

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<sup>403</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, 'Doctor Glas' (1905 / 1963 p. 87).

<sup>404</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 4).

possible from enforced participation in its quite imbecile impulsiveness and fuss'.<sup>405</sup>

Schopenhauer's predilection for escape would eventually lead his 'knowing subject' into a slumberous, utterly vacant, if imperturbable sort of state one may well associate with an opiate induced stupor. 'Life and its forms', as an apparently addled Schopenhauer wrote, 'merely float before him as a fleeting phenomenon, as a light morning dream to one half-awake, through which reality already shines, and which can no longer deceive; and, like this morning dream, they too finally vanish without any violent transition'.<sup>406</sup>

Having come to his senses, even if that meant losing them completely, Schopenhauer aspired to extricate himself from nature's despotic company for good. Rather than blindly throw his lot in with hers, Schopenhauer aspired to 'liberate' himself and seek refuge from her advances. Schopenhauer objected to the insensible and utterly impossible influence of nature's will and no longer wished, no matter how high the stakes, to be at its beck and call. 'His will', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'turns about; it no longer affirms its own inner nature, mirrored in the phenomenon, but denies it'.<sup>407</sup> All that was individual about man, his intellect and personality, now apparently stood up and contested the infinite and imbecilic force at play within him. But one rather large and notable problem remained.

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<sup>405</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 333).

<sup>406</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 391).

<sup>407</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 380).

He was her.

The association, as one may well imagine, was not so easily dissolved. Having identified an inimical will, the ghastliest of things, creeping about 'within' him, Schopenhauer was compelled to commit a certain degree of violence against himself if he wished to purge himself of its influence for good. The consequences were catastrophic for all concerned.

The subject's relationship to nature was now of the most acrimonious order and his thoughts had turned to escape. But his bid for freedom did not simply involve an escape from the clutches of nature's will, it was far more perilous than that; it involved a desperate struggle from himself.

Nature's will constituted his own will and little in the way of a distinction could possibly be drawn between the two. What was in one was contained, in its entirety, within the other. 'Nature', as you may well remember Schopenhauer saying in an earlier chapter, 'has her centre in every individual for each one is the entire will'.<sup>408</sup> If Schopenhauer renounced the will in himself, he hoped to abolish the claims it had over him, if not, in a theoretical sense, the whole world. This particular matter, as we will eventually hear, remained sketchy to say the very least.

Schopenhauer's plan was far from perfect and had several flaws; one of which was a major drawback. The will in question was not, sadly, any old will but a will that

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<sup>408</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 599).

willed one thing and that one thing was life.

Nature's will was the will-to-live.

If Schopenhauer wished to abolish the will, as he clearly seemed to have set his heart on, he faced the prospect of abolishing the very life force by whose grace, whether he appreciated it or not as the case may have been, he had been given his own. It was, one may imagine, something of a sticking point. Not apparently so. It did not appear to discourage Schopenhauer in the least; it had, in fact, quite the opposite effect on the philosopher: it galvanised him.

Had Schopenhauer had it in him to see his doctrine through to its end and not resorted to the pretence and thoroughly disingenuous tones of the final phase of 'The World as Will and Representation', he imagined one experience, above all others, would present itself to him. He would finally be 'delivered', as he worded it, 'from the miserable self' and that, in itself, would come as an enormous relief and unspeakable blessing. It had, on reflection, been the chief source of his torment.<sup>409</sup> And with that sentiment, Schopenhauer can be said to have revealed the true intent of his thoroughly nullifying scheme.

#### VII. AT ODDS WITH ONESELF

Schopenhauer's subject was now on the run from nature's will, but as nature's will was his own he found himself, on what amounted to a treadmill, running away, if rooted

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<sup>409</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 199).

to the spot, from his own slobbering shadow. 'Do we not with that', as Max Stirner reasonably asked, 'go back into the dreary misery of seeing ourselves banished out of ourselves?'.<sup>410</sup> And, confirming Stirner's worst fears, Schopenhauer's philosophy worked its way to a no less 'miserable' outcome.

Schopenhauer's desire to abolish the will came at an incredibly hefty cost. It did not simply spell the end of nature's tyranny over him, but also heralded the end, to put it very simply indeed, of Schopenhauer's imaginary subject. 'The person who is involved in this perception', as he imagined, 'is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is *pure will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge*'.<sup>411</sup> Not that Schopenhauer appeared to be the least bit concerned by the approach of the noxious, if deceptively friendly cumulo-se looking cloud. If anything, it appeared to spur him on towards the false dawn of his doctrine's destructive and, theoretically speaking, unsatisfactory conclusion.

'Individuality', as Schopenhauer wrote in the second volume of 'Parerga and Paralipomena' (1851), 'is no perfection but a limitation, and to be rid of it is, therefore, no loss, but rather a gain'.<sup>412</sup> If one turns one's attention to an earlier work, the second volume of 'The World as Will and Representation' (1844), one comes across a similar sentiment: 'Every individuality is really only a special error, a false step, something that

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<sup>410</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 33 - 34).

<sup>411</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 178 - 179).

<sup>412</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Parerga and Paralipomena', Vol. II (1851 / 1974 p. 281 - 282).



it would be better should not be, in fact something from which it is the real purpose of life to bring us back'.<sup>413</sup> Schopenhauer's doctrine conspired not only against the will that was at play within the heart of nature, but also against that which resided in his own. 'Free from individuality', as Schopenhauer imagined, 'and from servitude to the will'.<sup>414</sup>

Schopenhauer's doctrine was not without its touch of Stirner's 'Stirnerisms' (his recalcitrant form of individualism), nor, could it be said to have been entirely free from Schlegel's 'Schlegelisms' (his universalism, not his macrology in this instance). To put it rather less clumsily, Schopenhauer's doctrine of a will that was no longer the least bit eager to will, that objected to the grounds of its willing as well as its own objectification of that volitient and insensate urge, can, in the most basic sense, be said to have entertained the two positions, but only in the sense that the bloodiest of battlefields also 'entertains' two warring factions.

The relationship between the 'universal', the will, and the 'particular', the individual, was of the most fractious and perplexing order. Paul Gottfried, for one, sensed something of the conflicting tendencies at play in Schopenhauer's doctrine. 'Egotism and idealism', Gottfried wrote, 'were curiously mixed in his character, and this explains the peculiarly cantankerous tone of many of his polemics'.<sup>415</sup> Schopenhauer's 'polemics', as

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<sup>413</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 491 - 492).

<sup>414</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 180).

<sup>415</sup> Paul Gottfried, 'Arthur Schopenhauer and the Heritage of Pessimism' (1975 p. 19).

Gottfried quite rightly called them, were indeed 'cantankerous', but they had a far more alarming and combative quality to them than that.

Schopenhauer's doctrine may well have entertained the 'universal' as well as the 'particular', but his role was far from a passive one; he did not simply entertain the two positions, but actively stirred and whipped up hostilities between them. But the two positions, that of will and its fractured image, made up the two constituent 'sides' of the subject himself; the 'universal' was his eternal inner-nature (that which was 'real') while the 'particular' denoted his outer, finite form (a 'mere' illusion). What the former desired, the latter now denied; it was a counterstroke between a ravenous, imbecilic will and an obstinate intellect that had grown sick and tired of its ways. If Schopenhauer intended to set one against the other, as indeed he appeared all too eager to do, he would embark, one fears, on the most wantonly destructive of civil wars. And that, I believe, was precisely what Schopenhauer was intent on doing.

Schopenhauer made an arch enemy out of himself and it was an enemy whom he intended not only to confront, but silence once and for all. 'For as a man', Schopenhauer wrote, 'it is natural to him to be at war with himself as long as he lives'.<sup>416</sup> And in tune with those sentiments, the 'top half' of Schopenhauer declared war upon the rest of himself; it was a war primarily waged against the 'universal' force at play 'within' him, but it came at an incredible cost to the percipient and intellectual powers that felt compelled to wage it.

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<sup>416</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Essays from The Parerga and Paralipomena' (18\*\* / 19\*\* p. 61). Parisian book.

Schopenhauer not only envisaged the subject as a character split in two but the two sides, the top and the bottom, were embroiled in a desperate struggle for the destruction of the entire figure. The 'top half' of Schopenhauer's subject aspired to deny, by means of a stern and somewhat bewildering intellectual reproach, the vitalistic desires of his 'bottom half', while his 'bottom half', the seat of the impersonal and insensate will, sought, unsurprisingly (given it also happened, if you remember, to be a pertinacious will that purely willed to live), to preserve itself. 'Thus spoke and groaned within me', as Alfred de Musset feared, 'two voices, voices that were defiant and terrible'.<sup>417</sup> And the two voices that rang in de Musset's ears echoed those that reverberated loudly in Schopenhauer's own.

One voice, the more 'virtuous' of the two, we are encouraged to believe, defiantly schemed and conspired against the other, the universal life force of will, in a bid to drown it out; it implored Schopenhauer's 'subject' to rebel against its desirous demands and commit a sacrificial act against it. While the other voice, the louder of the two one suspects, hardly had Schopenhauer's best interests at heart. It was in league against him and clearly intent on beckoning him to his demise with a string of allurements and empty promises.

The two voices, one 'defiant' the other 'terrible', vied for dominance in Schopenhauer's scheme. But one is never quite sure, given the calamitous outcome of his doctrine, which of the two Schopenhauer's subject would have been

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<sup>417</sup> Alfred de Musset, 'The Confession of a Child of the Century' (1836 / 1910 p. 282). Translated by Robert Arnot, Current Literature Publishing Company, NYC.

best advised to follow. He came off as poorly heeding the call of one as he did listening to the other.

Schopenhauer's 'knowing subject' was left, as the saying goes, with a stark choice between the devil and deep blue sea. He may simply have preferred to walk the plank and 'jump out of himself', so to speak, of his own accord rather than continue to be pushed and shoved about, against his better interests, by Schopenhauer's devilish and endogenous idea, the will. Either way, Schopenhauer's subject was not the least bit happy in the philosophical scheme and, consequently, sought his immediate exit. But if one wished to excuse oneself from a will that willed to live one wished to remove oneself not simply from a hellish philosophical creation but from life itself. 'So vivid was his sense of the cruelty, violence and aimlessness of both animal and human worlds', as Bryan Magee thought, 'that it amounted to a horror of life as such'.<sup>418</sup> It was an opinion seconded by David E. Cartwright. 'To live', as Cartwright wrote, 'is to desire; to desire is to suffer. To suffer, however, is not worthwhile. This meant for Schopenhauer that our life was not worthwhile'.<sup>419</sup>

Schopenhauer almost always adopted the most supercilious of tones when he talked of a person's comparative value to his 'inner-nature', the will. The former was dependent, finite and limited to the phenomena while the latter, his will, was not only preeminent and diabolical but also universal and infinite in scope. It was a grotesquely disproportionate, lopsided association and it did an injustice to the subject's finite state. His

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<sup>418</sup> Bryan Magee, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' (1983 p. 154).

<sup>419</sup> David E. Cartwright, 'Schopenhauerian Optimism and an Alternative to Resignation' (1985 p. 155 - 156).

temporal nature: his personality, his ego and body paled by comparison to that which resided, in the most menacing of ways, 'within' him. 'To assert the primacy of being over becoming and the doctrine of man that goes with this assertion', as Dennis Rasmussen wrote in 'Immortality: Revolt Against Being' (1975) 'is to establish an image of man which cannot do justice to man's full nature. An excessive emphasis on being and on man as contemplator neglects man's temporal nature'.<sup>420</sup>

If one turns to Schopenhauer's appraisal of the subject's finite state, his 'temporal nature' as Rasmussen described it, it was not taken, in most instances, with any degree of seriousness. His somatic form was an 'unreal', expendable and evanescent image; little more than a brain-spun illusion of a feverish will. The decidedly fey philosopher spoke of the individual subject, to reiterate the point, as 'that manufactured article of nature'.<sup>421</sup> Elsewhere, Schopenhauer described him as 'the determined phenomenon'.<sup>422</sup> On another page, an individual person, one reads, was really nothing other than a 'wavering and unstable phantom'.<sup>423</sup> And so went, as indeed we have heard, Schopenhauer's thoroughly condescending ontology of the subject's finite state. He was an image of nature's malevolent will and Schopenhauer's 'subject' objected to the affiliation in the strongest of terms no matter how high the cost.

'Snobbishness and the romantic disposition', as Wyndham

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<sup>420</sup> Dennis Rasmussen, 'Immortality: Revolt Against Being' (1975 p. 67 - 68).

<sup>421</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 187).

<sup>422</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 287).

<sup>423</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 278).

Lewis believed, 'are commutative: to be "romantic about something" is to be "snobbish about something"'.<sup>424</sup> And that 'something' turned out, in Schopenhauer's doctrine, to be nothing other than himself, his own finite and individual state. But the philosopher's condescending attitude to individuality was purely an instrumental move on his part; it was provocative in the extreme and engendered a profound hostility towards one's bodily person. 'Schopenhauer', as Rüdiger Safranski made a point of saying, 'was far from loving that which dominates everyone, his own body'.<sup>425</sup>

One had little if a thing to lose, if one was willing to contest the grounds of the will's claim on life. One was 'merely' a fleeting image of a diabolical will, after all. And Schopenhauer certainly capitalised on the subject's inferiority to nature's will; if one renounced one's bodily self one sacrificed little (one's 'mere' individuality and all frivolity that accompanied it) compared to that which one gained (the 'glorious' prospect of the will's complete annulment). 'He who has come to hold lightly his egoism and his ego... will', as Eduard Von Hartmann wrote in 'Philosophy of the Unconscious' (1868), 'less reluctantly accept the result of an investigation which exhibits the Ego as a mere *phenomenon* of a Being that for all individuals is one and *the same*'.<sup>426</sup>

Any right minded person, Schopenhauer imagined, would no doubt have grown more than a little tired, sick to death

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<sup>424</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 32).

<sup>425</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, 'Schopenhauer and The Wild Years of Philosophy' (1989 p. 225).

<sup>426</sup> Eduard Von Hartmann, 'Philosophy of the Unconscious', Book III (1868 / 1931 p. 98).

even, of his own 'inner-being' and, understandably, given the philosopher's horrific account, started to entertain second thoughts about his subordinate relationship to it. In exceptional circumstances, he may have even developed a strong aversion to its fatuous demands and no longer wished to affirm them for any longer than was absolutely necessary. 'In my head', as Schopenhauer admitted, 'there is a permanent opposition-party'.<sup>427</sup>

And, 'luckily', if Schopenhauer was to be believed, the subject had one thing in his favour and it gave him a significant edge over nature's will. It may well have been 'universal' and 'eternal' and dwarfed, in that respect, his 'finite' and 'particular' standing as an individual person, but the will did not, crucially, possess an intellect that it could call its very own. 'The will, which constitutes our being-in-itself, is', as Schopenhauer said, 'of a simple nature; it merely wills and does not know'.<sup>428</sup> But, unlike the will, man *did* possess an intellect and it constituted its downfall as well, I should add, as his own.

The will had, then, slipped up and made an extremely costly error; in granting one of its phenomenal forms, man in this instance, an intellect it clearly had not banked on the 'advantage' it had afforded him. The will had vastly, if not catastrophically underestimated one of its own objectifications. Only its 'highest' objectification, the individual subject, was able to boast of such a quality. And it was to that quality, as a measure of last resort, Schopenhauer's subject turned.

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<sup>427</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Studies in Pessimism. Further Psychological Observations* **Find ref.**

<sup>428</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 499).

The intellect and the intellect alone was able to penetrate the 'principle of sufficient reason' and, having seen through it, it 'conceived a horror'.<sup>429</sup> And that 'horror' was the very force that languished at the dead centre of Schopenhauer's diabolical scheme: again, it was nature's will-to-live.

Schopenhauer described nature's will in such loathsome and vile terms that it actively encouraged, if not provoked his 'subject' to take a extremely contemptuous and repellent view of it indeed. 'Exaggerated' and 'rather too thickly blackened', as Frederick Copleston quite rightly described it.<sup>430</sup> But Schopenhauer, agitator that he was, did not leave it at that; he 'afforded' the minority of his readers the 'opportunity', slim though it was, to avenge all of the offences and injuries inflicted on them by the guilty party, nature's will. The 'particular' did not have to put up with his one-sided and abusive relationship to the 'universal'; an individual was not necessarily its underling at all but, by virtue of his intellect, its master. An individual had, in this respect, the upper hand over nature's will.

'To be sure', as Schopenhauer said, 'the best thing he can do is to recognize which part of him smarts the most under defeat, and let it always gain the victory'.<sup>431</sup> Schopenhauer longed to escape the despotic and ruinous influence of the will; if, however, the escape was to prove a success it necessitated a personal and very 'particular', if purely symbolic intervention. I say

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<sup>429</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 382).

<sup>430</sup> Frederick Copleston, 'Arthur Schopenhauer. Philosopher of Pessimism' ((1975 p. 94).

<sup>431</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Essays from The Parerga and Paralipomena' (18\*\* / 1951 Book 7, p. 62).



'symbolic' as the intervention in question meant destroying the very wick that fed the candle and, ultimately, extinguishing the light of the candle itself. 'For the battle of life cannot be waged free from all pain', as Schopenhauer warned, 'it cannot come to an end without bloodshed; and in any case a man must suffer pain, for he is the conquered as well as the conqueror'.<sup>432</sup> And Schopenhauer's 'self conquest', in tune with those sentiments, boded badly for nature's will as well as the cornered intellect that conspired against it and defiantly plotted its downfall.

The conflict in question was the most conspiratorial of conflicts and represented a reversal, a dramatic reversal of fortunes. To put it very simply indeed, Schopenhauer's individual subject not only objected to the 'universal' entity 'within' him, but actively sought its dissolution, if not complete annihilation even if his own demise would, as indeed seemed likely, follow suit. The subject, only in the most extraordinary of cases, had it in him to see off and destroy the very power that had not only blighted his phenomenal experience, but had granted it to him in the first place. Taking into account all we have heard about the will's sovereignty, the turn of events went completely against the grain.

The will, one imagines, faced something of a highly peculiar anomaly; it was accustomed, after all, to calling all the shots, but in this particular instance the boots were apparently on the other foot. The will, unlikely as it seemed, was apparently being threatened by one of its own phantasmagorical forms. 'Schopenhauer

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<sup>432</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Essays from The Parerga and Paralipomena' (18\*\* / 1951 Book 7, p. 62).

himself is not without a panacea for the world's evil', as Francis Hueffer wrote in 'The Literary Aspects of Schopenhauer's Work' (1874). 'It is', as Hueffer continued, 'the Will, the unceasing desire of man, that causes the misery of the race; but the individual has the power of conquering this desire, or at least of paralyzing its baneful effects. When man ceases to wish for the goods of this world, when he passively contemplates external things instead of identifying himself with them, he may obtain freedom from suffering, if not positive happiness'.<sup>433</sup>

Hueffer was, in one respect, absolutely correct; nature's will was entirely to blame, as indeed Iulii Isaevich Eichenwald said, for all of man's ills and woes. But Hueffer entertained a very funny idea of 'positive happiness'. Schopenhauer's doctrine did afford him a certain if obscure pleasure, but it was of the most *expectant* variety. It was certainly not one Schopenhauer could reasonably have expected to experience first hand and for himself. The 'pleasure' in question involved breaking the stranglehold of the will at large, but the will at large was Schopenhauer's will-to-live. If one were to break that, one would, regardless of Schopenhauer's insistence to the contrary, cut one's throat and any talk of gaining anything that even remotely resembled 'positive happiness' would be more than just a little way off the mark.

#### VIII. THE ENSUING CIVIL WAR

Schopenhauer was particularly fond of anecdotes but he

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<sup>433</sup> Francis Hueffer, 'The Literary Aspects of Schopenhauer's Work' (1874 p. 376).

was only fond of those that either illustrated or corroborated his doctrine. If one turns, in this respect, to 'The World as Will and Representation' (1818), there are two cursory examples that can be said to stand out. Regardless of the brevity Schopenhauer accorded to them in his stupendously imaginative work, they present a vivid picture of the civil war the philosopher wished to wage against himself. The first anecdote described an unfortunate ant; the second, an impulsive and rather reckless member of the Spanish clergy.

Let me bring your attention to page 147 of the work in question and, in turn, to the first of the anecdotes. It concerned a fiercely aggressive species of ant called the Australian Bulldog-ant.

If one were to cut one of these insects in half, one would witness a thoroughly morbid spectacle. Having carefully cut the said insect in two, one would, according to Schopenhauer, see the head half, armed with a formidable and powerful set of mandibles, advance upon the lower half and attack it. The abdomen, however, was no push over; it had a large and venomous sting in its tail. The head half of the ant would seize the lower half in its jaws and, in retaliation, the lower half would repeatedly sting its advancing, if unseen foe in the head with its tail. The violent and absolutely senseless encounter would, according to Schopenhauer, last for a good half hour or so. In that time, the warring halves would either have dropped dead or have been dragged off by other ants.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> See Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 147).

Let us suppose, in an attempt to clarify the broader significance of the example, that the Bulldog-ant was representative of the individual subject. It is not, as it may appear, such an outlandish suggestion to entertain. 'Like every other part of nature', as indeed Schopenhauer wrote, 'man is objectivity of the will: therefore all that we have said holds good of him also'.<sup>435</sup>

If one continues in this vein and takes the two dissected halves of the insect to symbolise, respectively speaking, the subject's intellect (the head half of the ant armed with its enormous mandibles) and his libidinal will (the lower half of the ant armed with a poisonous sting), one may well begin to appreciate, in bodily terms, the fundamental character of Schopenhauer's calamitous dispute with himself. In other words, one may begin to appreciate the battle, confusing as it was, between the 'particular' and 'universal', the intellect and will, in less abstracted, more familiar and immediate terms.

With Schopenhauer's doctrine, the individual subject found himself, metaphorically speaking, similarly dissected in two and, like the Bulldog-ant, his upper half, his intellect, was embroiled in a desperate struggle, to no less a catastrophic end I might add, with his blind and inimical lower half, the will. One can see, if one looks at Schopenhauer's doctrine in a purely physical light, the same thoroughly crude divisions at play. The subject's bodily form was also of the most polarised nature. The 'top half' of Schopenhauer's subject objected to the insensate and, for the most part,

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<sup>435</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 287).

domineering life force that languished in its apparent stronghold, his testicles. 'The genitals', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'are the real *focus* of the will, and are therefore the opposite pole to the brain'.<sup>436</sup>

The conflict between the intellect and will, between the head and the genitals, was of the most moralistic order; it was the age old conflict between the intellectual powers of 'good' (so we are told) and the desirous, libidinal powers of 'evil'. 'For he tends to speak of the Will', as Frederick Copleston wrote, 'in terms which imply that it is evil in itself. In any case it is the source of all evil, and subservience or slavery to the Will is represented as the root of all phenomenal evil and suffering. In this case of course it follows that the desirable line of conduct is to turn away from the Will; and as the Will is described as the Will to live, this means turning away from life towards the absence of all striving and desire'.<sup>437</sup> The former, the intellect, no longer wished to affirm the desirous demands, disharmonious as they were, of the latter, the will, and sought an 'ascetic' if not completely disastrous end.

The 'particular', then, wished to dispel and completely destroy the illusion of its particularity while the 'universal' force of will wished to preserve itself (it was, as we well know by now, a procreative life force). But if one pits oneself against a will-to-live, one presumably pits oneself against life itself. And that would appear, one fears, to faithfully describe the intent of Arthur Schopenhauer's perverse wishes.

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<sup>436</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 330).

<sup>437</sup> Frederick Copleston, 'Arthur Schopenhauer. Philosopher of Pessimism' ((1975 p. xv).

Let me turn your attention, firstly, to all that resided beneath Schopenhauer's belt.

The 'organs of reproduction are', as one recent critic established, 'where the will to life is seen most plainly for what it is'.<sup>438</sup> And the 'lower half' had something of a stranglehold, in most cases, over the whole man. '“The consciousness in the abdomen” removes', as Wyndham Lewis said in 'Paleface' (1929), 'the vital centre into the viscera, and takes the privilege of leadership away from the hated “mind” or “intellect”, established up above in the head'.<sup>439</sup>

And with the advent of puberty, just as Lewis feared, the will steadily grew in influence. Having taken the testicles, the visceral life force steadily gained ground and worked its way up the body. For a greater part of the time, it met little in the way of opposition. It took control of the head, in nearly all instances, with ease and clouded it, in turn, with its resultant beliefs (individuality, for instance). These beliefs were not only delusional in basis, but extremely harmful in practice; they acted to distinguish and disconnect, often with the bloodiest results, one phenomenal form from another. 'Affirmation of the will-to-live, the phenomenal world, diversity of all beings, individuality, egoism, hatred, wickedness, all spring from *one* root', as Schopenhauer wrote.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Christopher Janaway, 'The real essence of human beings: Schopenhauer and the unconscious will' collected in 'Thinking the Unconscious. Nineteenth-Century German Thought' (2010 p. 148).

<sup>439</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Paleface. The Philosophy of the "Melting-Pot"' (1929 p. 177).

<sup>440</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 610).

Everything that had fallen under its testicular influence was, if we turn to Schopenhauer, unsavoury and 'bad'; it described all that had fallen under the will's heterogeneous spell. In turn, one hears Schopenhauer talk of the 'bad character' (page 363), the 'uncultured individual' (page 352), and, of course, the 'genitals' themselves (page 330). 'The eyes of the uncultured individual', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'are clouded, as the Indians say, by the veil of Maya. To him is revealed not the thing-in-itself, but only the phenomenon in time and space, in the *principium individuationis*, and in the remaining forms of the principle of sufficient reason. In this form of his limited knowledge he sees not the inner nature of things, which is one, but its phenomena as separated, detached, innumerable, very different, and indeed opposed'.<sup>441</sup>

The will-to-live, as one might reasonably expect of a virulent life force, wished to look after its own interests and vigorously defended all that was 'particular', individual and heterogeneous. The 'lower half' entertained, without question, the will's apparent diversity and actively affirmed it. The will obviously wished to safeguard its universal illusion as its universal illusion was its manifest image of life. 'Under this delusion', as David Cartwright wrote, 'bad characters view this world and everything in it as foreign and other, as non-ego'.<sup>442</sup> These were the ends to which the generic, impersonal 'lower half' of all people worked and, in the great majority of cases, it worked

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<sup>441</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 352).

<sup>442</sup> David E. Cartwright, 'Schopenhauerian Optimism and an Alternative to Resignation' (1985 p. 159).

towards them very successfully indeed.

If one turns one's attention to all that was above Schopenhauer's belt then one gets a very different story indeed. All that was above Schopenhauer's waistline was 'good', potentially speaking (presuming, of course, it had not already fallen under the baleful influence, as was more than often the case, of the will's power base, the genitals); his top half 'contained', if one turns to the first volume of 'The World as Will and Representation', the 'knowing individual' (p. 332), the 'good conscience' (p. 373), the 'pure subject' and all of the other 'particular' attributes that can be said to have emanated from one's intellectual faculties, the brain (p. 330). And these attributes aspired to 'liberate' man from the will's delusional ways. 'Morally good persons', once again turning to David Cartwright, 'penetrate the veil of maya, the delusion of the *principium individuationis*, via an intuitive insight into the unity of being'.<sup>443</sup>

Only the 'top half' had any hope of seeing through the individuating principle (also, you may remember, said to be objectified in one's brain) that had chopped up the will into so many illusory forms and engendered the 'delusional' belief in such things as 'individuality', 'egoism', 'patriotism' and the like. All of which were not only exerted in the most violent, selfish and factious of ways but defended a wholly erroneous position. They were all founded on the superficial assumption, so Schopenhauer argued, that one manifestation of nature's will was completely distinct

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<sup>443</sup> David E. Cartwright, 'Schopenhauerian Optimism and an Alternative to Resignation' (1985 p. 159).



and unrelated to any other of its other manifest forms.

It was purely a question of appearances and appearances, as we have established, were, in Schopenhauer's opinion, of the most deceptive order. 'They are all undoubtedly guided by a delusion', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'that conceals the service of the species under the mask of an egotistical end'.<sup>444</sup> In the case of man's individuality, to take the most topical example, it was 'merely' an affirmative expression of a universal, age old and, by all accounts, senile will that no longer recognised its own reflection.

'Schopenhauer maintains', Christopher Janaway wrote, 'that the "will of species" (*Wille der Gattung*) directs the behavior of individuals whilst deluding them that they pursue by choice their own individual preferences and purposes'.<sup>445</sup> To 'exert' one's individuality, then, was not, as one might ordinarily expect, to exert oneself at all but to exert, in the most affirmative sense, one's inborn enemy, the will. 'Fundamentally', as Schopenhauer said, 'it is the will that is spoken of whenever "I" occurs in judgment. Therefore the will is the true and ultimate point of unity of consciousness, and the bond of all its functions and acts'.<sup>446</sup> To affirm oneself, whether one knew it or not, was tantamount to an act of collusion; one gave one's assent, not to oneself (if indeed one had anything that faintly resembled a 'self'), but to the will's autophagous illusion (of which one was

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<sup>444</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 541).

<sup>445</sup> Christopher Janaway, 'The real essence of human beings: Schopenhauer and the unconscious will' collected in 'Thinking the Unconscious. Nineteenth-Century German Thought' (2010 p. 154).

<sup>446</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 140).

intrinsically a part). But, as Carl A. Raschke made a point of saying, 'The immediate intuition of an infinite Will to Live which objectifies itself will-nilly in the velleities and drives of organisms struggling for existence undercuts all presumptions about human beings having independent claims on the resources of nature'.<sup>447</sup> 'Our rôle', as the Russian novelist, Artzibashev, also suspected, 'is a passive, and auxiliary one'.<sup>448</sup>

If one wished to exert oneself one had better not express anything that resembled the will's express and fervent desire to live. So one, presumably, expressed one's desire *not* to live and Schopenhauer's 'Stirnerian twist', as I called it in an earlier chapter, can be regarded, as we will see in the proceeding passages, as a decisive 'last stand' against nothing other than one's wretched self. 'Instead, of affirmation of the will, we can also say', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'affirmation of the body'.<sup>449</sup>

An individual arrived at this particular insight, if we turn to Schopenhauer, by 'simply', as he put it, 'turning inward'. 'By looking inwards', the philosopher wrote, 'every individual recognises in his inner being, which is his will... that which alone is everywhere real'.<sup>450</sup> There was, I should immediately add, nothing particularly 'simple' about this whole question of 'turning inward'. Schopenhauer was uncharacteristically vague on this matter: the *will* arrives at self-knowledge through its

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<sup>447</sup> Carl A. Raschke, 'Schopenhauer on the Delusion of Progress' (1977 p. 81).

<sup>448</sup> Michael Artzibashev, 'Sanine. A Russian Love Novel' (1907 / 1932 p. 101). Translated from the Russian by Percy Pinkerton. Three Sirens Press, NYC.

<sup>449</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 327).

<sup>450</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 600).

objectification, however this may come about, whereby its abolition, conversion, and salvation become possible'.<sup>451</sup> Turning a blind eye, for the time being, to his apparent uncertainty, if one did as Schopenhauer commanded and 'looked inwards' one would come to recognise the 'real' universal basis of life and the 'real' basis of life was its inner-principle, the deliquescent and repellent will-to-live.

Having turned his attention in upon himself, whatever that might have actually meant in practice, the subject would eventually come to regard himself, Schopenhauer believed, as indistinguishable from that which displayed itself in every other creature. If Schopenhauer's subject continued in this vein, his attitude towards all phenomenal forms, even the most objectionable among them, may begin, albeit briefly, to soften; going one step further, he may even begin to 'empathise' with them as he would see in their struggle to keep their nostrils above the water a reflection of his own struggle to do just the same. In doing so, he was well on the way to recognise the fallacy of his former position; all the sharp distinctions he mistakenly assumed distinguished one thing from another were neither as sharp nor as pressing as he formerly thought. As a result, the illusion of his own individuality, his own bodily state would be made acutely clear to him. And with that sudden realisation, Schopenhauer's subject would suddenly recognise that he was not an individual at all but an impostor, just another manifest affirmation of nature's diabolical will-to-live. 'He is really worthy of reverence only when his glance has been raised', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'from the

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<sup>451</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 643).

particular to the universal, and when he regards his own suffering merely as an example of the whole'.<sup>452</sup>

As a direct result of this 'intuitive' knowledge, the 'top half' of Schopenhauer's subject sought to deny all of the things the 'lower half' affirmed (most glaringly of all, by the procreative organs). 'The will itself', as Schopenhauer claimed, 'cannot be abolished by anything except *knowledge*. Therefore the only path to salvation is that the will should appear freely and without hindrance, in order that it can *recognize or know* its own inner nature in the phenomenon'.<sup>453</sup> One became aware, then, of the universality of things by virtue of one's intellect, the particular. It was a mixed blessing.

On the one hand, it represented a truly extraordinary intellectual achievement (one had, after all, apparently discerned the very nature of the world). More extraordinary still, were the means, 'however this may come about' as Schopenhauer described them, by which one was able to arrive at that point in the first place.<sup>454</sup>

The intellect, as Schopenhauer had led us to believe, was a purely 'secondary' phenomenon. The intellect, as it had previously been portrayed, played second fiddle to the will; at one point, Schopenhauer even saw fit to describe 'knowledge' as an 'accident of matter'.<sup>455</sup> It emanated, like everything else, from 'its root, origin and

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<sup>452</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 396).

<sup>453</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 400).

<sup>454</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 643).

<sup>455</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 88).

controller', the will.<sup>456</sup>

'Schopenhauer sees the human mind and its capacities', if one turns to Bryan Magee, 'as pitifully limited, and as inherently both subsidiary and subservient'.<sup>457</sup> 'Neither rationality, nor intentional action, nor consciousness', Christopher Janaway also pointed out, 'is primary or foundational in human beings. The true core of the personality is not the self-conscious "I" or subject of knowledge, but rather the will, which is fundamentally blind and without knowledge, but which interacts with the intellect almost as an agent distinct from it'.<sup>458</sup> But, rather bewilderingly, that was no longer the case. Suffice to say the most questionable point of Schopenhauer's doctrine was its epistemology which can only be described as capricious at the best of times. The actual relationship between knowledge, a phenomenal manifestation, and the will was not the least bit certain or clear.

Leaving that matter to one side for the time being, some critics, Francis Hueffer for example, might even have been tempted to believe that Schopenhauer valued, in the most supreme way, not only one's fortitude but one's intellectual faculties. Schopenhauer's 'subject', one presumes, was compelled to draw on such 'resources' if he wished to expose the will for the fraudulent despot it was and 'gain', as a result, a bizarre notion of 'positive happiness'.<sup>459</sup> But as Hjalmar Söderberg, turning

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<sup>456</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 140).

<sup>457</sup> Bryan Magee, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' (1983 p. 157).

<sup>458</sup> Christopher Janaway, 'The real essence of human beings: Schopenhauer and the unconscious will' collected in 'Thinking the Unconscious. Nineteenth-Century German Thought' (2010 p. 140).

<sup>459</sup> Francis Hueffer, 'The Literary Aspects of Schopenhauer's Work'

to his novel for the very last time, warned his readers: 'The dream of happiness does not exist that does not bite its own tail'.<sup>460</sup> And with that warning firmly and quite literally in mind, let me now turn your attention to the consequences of Schopenhauer's 'triumphant' self-conquest.

On the other hand, the 'achievement' in question exacted an enormous cost. The will may well have arrived, by whatever means, at 'self-knowledge through its objectification', but the knowledge it had to impart proved calamitous to the 'objectification' in whom it suddenly and unexpectedly appeared.

Since an individual was 'merely' 'an example of the whole', Schopenhauer's subject no longer wished to affirm himself as he did not wish to give his assent to the will at large. As his own bodily form, intellect, and ego were little more than a manifest image of the loathed thing itself, Schopenhauer's 'knowing subject' actively sought to abolish them all in one foul swoop. But it was not simply a question of abolishing the will, one had first to abolish oneself in whom it appeared.

If one conspired against oneself, one conspired against the will and had, within one's sights, the prospect of one's own 'liberation'. But if one had successfully toppled the will, one had presumably toppled oneself and little, if a thing would remain to apprehend one's 'triumph' over it. Schopenhauer did not appear to value the very powers (neither one's 'fortitude' nor 'intellect') by which he arrived at his 'revelatory'

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(1874 p. 376).

<sup>460</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, 'Doctor Glas' (1905 / 1963 p. 58).

insights. 'So, as you proceed in your examination of these doctrines', to remind you of Wyndham Lewis' observation, 'it becomes more and more evident that, although it is by no means clear that you gain anything (except a great many fine phrases and exalted, mystical assurances of "cosmic" advantages), it is very clear what you lose... you lose not only the clearness of outline, the static beauty, of the things you commonly apprehended; you lose also the clearness of outline of your own individuality which apprehends them'.<sup>461</sup>

Schopenhauer aspired to 'abolish individuality' and, consequently, the intellectual powers that were responsible, in his opinion, for the dubious 'achievement' at hand.<sup>462</sup> But if one no longer willed to will, one no longer wished to live and conspired against oneself and actively sought one's own end.

'The whole body is the visible expression of the will-to-live', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'yet the motives corresponding to this will no longer act; indeed the dissolution of the body, the end of the individual, and thus the greatest suppression of the natural will, is welcomed and desired'.<sup>463</sup> Schopenhauer desired to abolish 'the essential nature at the root of the phenomenon' but if one had successfully abolished 'the essential nature at the root of the phenomenon' one had presumably, following a rapid chain of events abolished the phenomenon too.<sup>464</sup> 'No will: no representation, no world',

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<sup>461</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 175).

<sup>462</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 169).

<sup>463</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 403).

<sup>464</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 288).

as Schopenhauer described them.<sup>465</sup>

The 'particular', then, no longer wished to exert his particularity; in other words, Schopenhauer's subject no longer wished to exert himself as he did not want to continue to pander to the affirmative desires of a grotesque will. If one did not wish to be strung along by the feverish entity and pander to its desires any more, one must not affirm it in any way whatsoever but vehemently deny it.

'True salvation, deliverance from life and suffering, cannot', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'even be imagined without complete denial of the will'.<sup>466</sup> In exceptional circumstances, very exceptional circumstances indeed, the will was brought to one side and informed of its lunacy by a particularly sharp intellect that had the measure of the testicular force. It was the intellect and the intellect alone that had any 'hope' of silencing, if not completely destroying the will.

The subject in whom knowledge had reached its 'apogee' refused to take life on the measly terms it was given to him and turned his back on it. The will had, at least in this uncommon manifestation, recognised the fool it had made of itself and saw, all too clearly, the fatuity of its desires and, consequently, no longer wished to affirm them. The phenomena, if Schopenhauer was to be believed, was no longer at the beck and call of its tormentor, the will, but had finally got the better of it and scored an unlikely and astonishing victory.

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<sup>465</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 411).

<sup>466</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 397).



All that was finite, intelligent and virtuous about the individual subject, his definitive 'top half', had now started to plot and conspire, at considerable risk, one presumes, against the general, insensible and 'unsavoury' powers at play down below. Schopenhauer, needless to say, did not share that opinion.

One could not possibly renounce the will by voicing one's objections to it, intellectual or otherwise. 'In order to see that a purely objective, and therefore correct, apprehension of things', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'is possible only when we consider them without any personal participation in them'.<sup>467</sup> The knowledge Schopenhauer had to impart was, again, far more profound and lofty than that; it did not conform to customary rules and was certainly not motivated by personal ends. It was an extremely mysterious process.

Nevertheless, having successfully reasoned with it, if indeed one can possibly begin to reason, let alone successfully reason with an insensate life force, the 'top half', the intellect, gained an unlikely 'victory' over the 'bottom half' and, if one can bring oneself to believe Schopenhauer's implausible account, the will removed itself, with its tail between its legs, entirely of its own accord. It withdrew not only from the head but also from its citadel, the testicles, into complete bodily exile. Having broken countless others, the will, we are led to believe, made one final promise. Having reached this 'self-realisation', the will promised to finally appease all of its desires by putting an end to

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<sup>467</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 373).

them for good. In turn, it flapped its wings and, as Schopenhauer rather hopefully imagined, flew away from itself for good.<sup>468</sup> Having said that, it was something of a rarity in itself; the intellect seldom gained the upper hand of its adversary, the will.

#### IX. THE AFTERMATH

Allow me to turn your brief attention to one such example in an effort to consider the aftermath, the lifeless calm, of Schopenhauer's 'difficult and painful self-conquest'.<sup>469</sup>

Take Henri-Frédéric Amiel, for example. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, 1869, Amiel wrote the following entry in his 'Journal': 'I have been thinking over Schopenhauer. - It has struck me and almost terrified me to see how well I represent Schopenhauer's typical man'.<sup>470</sup> A couple of days earlier, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, Amiel gave us a clue not only as to what constituted, in his estimation, Schopenhauer's 'typical man' but also the grounds of his alarm.

Amiel's contribution can be said, I believe, to perfectly illustrate the decidedly ambivalent and, for that matter, questionable nature of Schopenhauer's 'self-conquest'. 'My personality', as Amiel admitted, 'has the least possible admixture of individuality. I am to the great majority of men what the circle is to rectilinear figures; I am everywhere at home, because I have no

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<sup>468</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 606).

<sup>469</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 334).

<sup>470</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 159).

particular and nominative self. - Perhaps, on the whole, this defect has good in it. Though I am less of a man, I am perhaps nearer to *the* man; perhaps rather more *man*. There is less of the individual, but more of the species, in me'.<sup>471</sup>

On the one hand, Amiel can be said to have scored something akin to Schopenhauer's intellectual 'triumph'; the 'triumph', in other words, of the enlightened, universally attuned subject, the 'particular' figure of Amiel in this case, over the fractured 'universal' life force that lurked about, according to Schopenhauer, somewhere in his trousers. Amiel certainly appeared to have developed an expansive, purely objective and detached view of the world and it was perfectly in keeping with Schopenhauer's 'heightened' and somewhat inhuman 'victory'.

'The man who sees through the *principium individuationis*, and recognises the true nature of things-in-themselves, and thus the whole... ', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'sees himself in all places simultaneously, and withdraws. His will turns about; it no longer affirms its own inner nature, mirrored in the phenomenon, but denies it... He therefore renounces precisely this inner nature, which appears in him and is expressed already by his body, and his actions gives lie to his phenomenon, and appears in open contradiction thereto. Essentially nothing but phenomenon of the will, he ceases to will anything, guards against attaching his will to anything, tries to establish firmly in himself the greatest indifference to

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<sup>471</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 158).

all things'.<sup>472</sup>

Amiel certainly exemplified Schopenhauer's 'ideal' and rather robotic subject, bereft as he was, in his estimation, of anything that constituted a 'particular' or 'nominative self', but one must question whether Amiel could truly count himself among Schopenhauer's 'typical' run of men. In identifying himself, not with his own individuality, as one might ordinarily expect, but with that of the species as a whole - the eternal, 'universal' idea of man, Amiel proved to be something of an exception to the common rule.

Amiel had taken, in this particular respect, a significant, if calamitous stride 'out of himself', as it were; he was 'merely' an example of the whole and as an example of the whole Amiel had left the definitive part of himself behind. But only in leaving the definitive part of himself behind had Amiel have any 'hope' of leaving behind the feverish will that apparently clung to that side of his personality. 'It is through awareness of the effects of the Will', as Carl A. Raschke wrote in an essay, 'Schopenhauer on the Delusion of Progress' (1977), 'in one's own personality that the individual can deny the Will altogether by no longer affirming the self through which the Will operates'.<sup>473</sup> However, if one no longer affirmed 'the self through which the Will operates', as Raschke worded it, what can be said to be left of 'the self' or 'personality' in question? The will was, as we have heard, the wellspring from which *all* things arose, including man's 'intellect', 'ego', 'body'

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<sup>472</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 380).

<sup>473</sup> Carl A. Raschke, 'Schopenhauer on the Delusion of Progress' (1977 p. 78).

and 'personality'.

Nonetheless, in shedding himself of himself, Amiel had also, Schopenhauer would doubtlessly have maintained, 'liberated' himself, albeit in the costliest possible way, from the will's delirious influence. 'Every individual at once represents its species', as Schopenhauer wrote. 'Accordingly', he added, 'we now apprehend the universal in beings. What we know in such a way are the Ideas of things; but from these there now speaks a higher wisdom than that which knows of mere relations. We ourselves have also stepped put of relations, and have thereby become the pure subject of knowing... This state is conditioned from outside by our remaining wholly foreign to, and detached from, the scene to be contemplated, and not being at all actively involved in it'.<sup>474</sup> Amiel's reaction to Schopenhauer's doctrine was hardly 'typical' as he was well on his way, as the philosopher would no doubt have thought, to absolving himself from nature's will as well as his own.

Amiel, to put it very simply indeed, had successfully hounded himself out of himself; he was no longer Henri-Frédéric Amiel *per se* but, in Schopenhauer's words, a 'pure subject of knowing' and as a 'pure subject of knowing' he no longer, one imagines, had to endure the trials and tribulations, whatever they may have been, of being Henri-Frédéric Amiel.

Having abolished one side of his personality, arguably the most definitive, and assumed another, the addled and deadened state of Schopenhauer's 'ideal', Amiel had not

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<sup>474</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 372 - 373).

only abolished the falsehood of his own individuality, but liberated himself from that which tormented it, nature's will-to-live. 'He is free', as Schopenhauer might have said of Amiel, 'from the perversity with which the will-to-live, failing to recognize itself, here in one individual enjoys fleeting and delusive pleasures, and there in another individual suffers and starves in return for these'.<sup>475</sup>

On the other hand, one must ask oneself whether Amiel could legitimately be said to have gained anything at all, least of all anything that was 'good', as he phrased it, from the somewhat, to put it mildly, 'defective' triumph in question. Amiel may well have gained a detached, sweeping, and wholly 'presbyopic' viewpoint, apparently 'free' of the will's emotive influence (detached, as he appeared to be, from all its phenomenal 'delusions') but, in gaining that state, he dramatically lost out on another, far more immediate front: he no longer had any apparent sense of himself, his own individuality.

Amiel may well have been well on his way to the end point of Schopenhauer's doctrine, but what he gained in scope, he rather lost out in actual bodily presence (his 'particular' state, his 'nominative self'). What he gained in quantity he sacrificed in quality. 'It seems to me', as Amiel wrote some years later, in the Autumn of 1880, 'that with the decline of my active force I am becoming more purely spirit; everything is growing transparent to me. I see the types, the foundations of

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<sup>475</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 373).

beings, the sense of things'.<sup>476</sup>

Amiel, then, was now the most generalised and thoroughly whitewashed 'idea' of man, the universal 'subject', and having reached that point Amiel had, one fears, achieved Schopenhauer's thoroughly dispersonating goal. Amiel was not Schopenhauer's 'typical' man at all but Schopenhauer's 'ideal' man, his robotic 'subject of knowledge'. Amiel now resembled an automaton that registered everything and felt absolutely nothing.

If one turns one's attention to the immediate aftermath of Schopenhauer's 'civil war' to see what would have been left of him (had he actually had the nerve to see his doctrine through to its logical conclusion), one would see that the two warring factions of his 'personality', the intellect and will, had as good as wiped each other out. Not so, if one listens to Schopenhauer.

'Only knowledge remains', he enthused, 'the will has vanished'.<sup>477</sup> But the 'knowledge' of which he glowingly spoke was barren in the extreme; it certainly did not appear to possess a single attribute that was recognisably human or the least bit alive.

'My brain began to grow, my heart to shrink', as Michael Artzibashef wrote in another of his novels, the gratuitously, if not comically pessimistic 'Breaking-Point' (1915). 'And now I have a large brain and no heart. I feel nothing...'.<sup>478</sup> 'Such behaviour', if one

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<sup>476</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 279).

<sup>477</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 411).

<sup>478</sup> Michael Artzibashef, 'Breaking-Point' (1915 p. 262 - 263). B. W. Huebsch, NY.

turns to Barbara Hannan's study, 'is apparently self-defeating. How does one extinguish suffering by making oneself suffer more?'.<sup>479</sup> But Hannan need not have worried herself over such concerns; if one had successfully abolished one's will-to-live one had surely put oneself out of one's misery and completely beyond such cares. One surely felt, as Artzibashef said, 'nothing' at all.

The 'top half' may well have inflicted a fatal wound upon the 'bottom half', but the 'bottom half' was the seat of life itself. The 'mind', as Lucretius might have warned Schopenhauer, 'cannot arise alone without body or apart from sinews and blood'.<sup>480</sup> 'For the two', as the Epicurean maintained, 'are interlocked by common roots and cannot be torn apart without manifest disaster'.<sup>481</sup>

Without wishing to suggest, even for a moment, that Schopenhauer was oblivious to that fact (quite the opposite, one fears), it still appeared to afford him an inordinate amount of masochistic pleasure. 'For the most part', as Schopenhauer said of the 'individual consciousness', 'often in fact entirely, its content is nothing but a stream of paltry, earthly, poor ideas, and endless worries and anxieties; let these then be finally silenced!'.<sup>482</sup> Schopenhauer's reaction was telling in the extreme. It revealed, not only the true intent of his murderous 'self-conquest', but the derisory 'value' he accorded to the very powers by which he had secured it.

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<sup>479</sup> Barbara Hannan, 'The Riddle of the World: A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer's Philosophy' (2009 p. 139).

<sup>480</sup> Lucretius, 'On the Nature of the Universe' (55 BC / 1951 p. 86). Translated by R. E. Latham, Penguin Books.

<sup>481</sup> Lucretius, 'On the Nature of the Universe' (55 BC / 1951 p. 75). Translated by R. E. Latham, Penguin Books.

<sup>482</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 492).



Schopenhauer's tone was not only gleeful and dispassionate, but also betrayed a puerile delight in destruction. If one turns to the source of Schopenhauer's 'delight' it was nothing other than the morbid spectacle that confronted the myrmecologist who had taken it upon himself to dissect the rather unlucky Bulldog-Ant in two: it was man's complete downfall and collapse.

'We are built', as Michel de Montaigne wrote, echoing Lucretius' warning, in 'An Apology for Raymond Sebond' (15\*\*), 'of two principle parts, which together form our being; to separate them is death and the collapse of our being'.<sup>483</sup> And just as the two dissected halves of the Bulldog-Ant collapsed in a lifeless heap after their brief and violent skirmish, both sides of the 'knowing subject's' personality had, as both Montaigne and Lucretius forewarned, collapsed in a similar heap after their own private and no less violent encounter.

'With this knowledge', as Schopenhauer imagined, 'individuality, and therefore intelligence, as being merely a tool of individual nature, of animal nature, cease'.<sup>484</sup> But, quite unlike the example of the Bulldog-Ant, man's collapse heralded an 'achievement'; in collapsing in a lifeless heap, Schopenhauer's 'subject' had finally reached his goal. If he was no longer alive, it was no longer possible to be tormented by the will-to-live, by life itself, and that, we are asked to believe, was a 'glorious' accomplishment and, if one can bring oneself to believe it, came as an enormous relief, not necessarily to you or I, but to whatever remained of

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<sup>483</sup> Michel de Montaigne, 'An Apology for Raymond Sebond' (15\*\* / 19\*\* , p. 90).

<sup>484</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 610).

Schopenhauer's 'subject'. 'Nothing can distress or alarm him any more', Schopenhauer calmly reassured his readers, 'nothing can any longer move him'.<sup>485</sup>

'In mankind', as Hans Fallada maintained in his novel, 'The Drinker' (1950), 'hope is indestructible, I believe the last thing that runs through the brain of a dying man is hope'.<sup>486</sup> And, presumably, a dim sense of 'hope' was the very last thing to run through the brow beaten and, by now, completely addled brain of Schopenhauer's subject. In abolishing himself, he had also, he hoped, abolished the will, but the enormous sigh of relief Schopenhauer's subject exhaled may well have proved to be his very last. 'I believe that, at the moment of dying', as Schopenhauer imagined, 'we become aware that a mere illusion has limited our existence to our person'.<sup>487</sup>

The celebrations, then, were disappointingly cut short. Before it rolled lifelessly to one side, the 'head half' apparently had just enough time to admire, one imagines, the serene, if rather uncustomary 'calm' of its freshly detached state. 'He now looks back calmly and with a smile on the phantasmagoria of this world', as the felonious philosopher wrote, 'which was once able to move and agonize even his mind, but now stands before him as indifferently as chess-men at the end of a game'.<sup>488</sup>

Finally, Schopenhauer's subject was happy!

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<sup>485</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 390).

<sup>486</sup> Hans Fallada, 'The Drinker' (1950 / 1952 p. 259). Translated from the German by Charlotte and A. L. Lloyd. Putnam & Co. Ltd. London.

<sup>487</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 601).

<sup>488</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 390).

He was free of will. But the smile did not grace the face of anyone in particular, but a crumpled and mutilated corpse. 'Hence, as far as we can see', as Frederick Copleston similarly observed, 'liberation from the servitude to the Will can be achieved only through entry into nothingness, the total extinction of the personality'.<sup>489</sup>

Schopenhauer's 'solution', to say the very least, was extremely crude. He may well have talked, in heightened tones, of 'salvation' and the like but it was not man's salvation he sought but his complete and utter annihilation. Schopenhauer may well have been quite intent upon waging a civil war with himself but, given its outcome, one is never quite sure who or what was fighting whom and to what end. Nor is it particularly clear where exactly Schopenhauer's allegiance could be said to have resided. It was surely not, as he claimed, with the 'top half' (the intellect saw fit to annul itself, all too readily, to gain higher, if purely expectant rewards) and it was certainly not with the 'bottom half' (that was the seat of the dreaded thing itself).

One could very well be forgiven for asking who or what actually experienced the revered state of 'salvation' of which the philosopher spoke. It was surely not Schopenhauer's subject; his individuality, after all, had been abolished in the procurement of the said 'state'. 'With the disappearance of willing from consciousness', as Schopenhauer affirmed, 'the individual is really

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<sup>489</sup> Frederick Copleston, 'Arthur Schopenhauer. Philosopher of Pessimism' (1975 p. xv).

abolished also, and with it its suffering and sorrow'.<sup>490</sup>

If Schopenhauer's desolate 'ideal' could possibly be visualised, it would, I rather suspect, resemble a passage taken, once again, from Artzibashev's, 'Sanine' (1907): 'He saw an endless grey stripe that stretched aimlessly away into space, as though swept onward from one wave to another. All conception of colour, sound and emotion was blurred and dimmed, being merged and fused in one grey turbid stream that flowed on placidly, eternally. This was not life, but everlasting death. The thought of it horrified him'.<sup>491</sup> The 'turbid' prospect did not, as it did *Sanine*, 'horrify' Schopenhauer at all; on the contrary, it appeared to galvanise the philosopher and encourage him to make his way to his doctrine's catastrophic end.

It could well be argued that Schopenhauer was so entirely caught up and swept away with the *mêlée* that he lost all sense of loyalty; he simply cheered both sides on, the 'top' and the 'bottom', in the virulent hope that both sides fell lifelessly to the floor. Then, and only then, as Schopenhauer rather crudely imagined, was one able to 'boast' (if, indeed, that was at all possible) of being entirely free from the will and rid of the burdensome business of life altogether.

Schopenhauer's 'victory' over the will came at such an enormous cost to the so called 'victor' that one must question the grounds of the victory itself. The

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<sup>490</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 371).

<sup>491</sup> Michael Artzibashev, 'Sanine. A Russian Love Novel' (1907 / 1932 p. 100). Translated from the Russian by Percy Pinkerton. Three Sirens Press, NYC.

'victorious' subject may well have dealt a death blow to the will but, in administering it, he had clearly sustained something of a chronic, if not completely fatal head injury. 'When the subject ceases to be will', as Rüdiger Safranski thought, 'it has the chance of seeing the patent secret of the world, the omnipresence of the will'.<sup>492</sup> But that evidently was not true. One cannot reach the end of Schopenhauer's doctrine, the point where one is able to 'appreciate', in the most detached, robotic manner the stark and abstruse spectacle of universal 'forms' and 'ideas' (the 'species' and the like) without having first inflicted a horrific, if not completely catastrophic degree of violence on one's bodily person. It almost certainly discounted even the slimmest possibility of 'seeing the patent secret of the world'. A secret of that sort would, one suspects, surely remain undisclosed.

Schopenhauer's intellectual 'triumph' was of the most destructive order (as the example, I hope, of the Bulldog-Ant illustrated) and, as Wyndham Lewis quite rightly observed: 'The proceedings of these insects is a blow to the human personality as well as to their own'.<sup>493</sup> Having reached the end of the first anecdote, let me turn your attention to the second.

#### X. A RECONCILIATORY INVITATION TO DINNER

If one turns to the bottom of page 358 of Schopenhauer's 'The World as Will and Representation', one will find, in

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<sup>492</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, 'Schopenhauer and The Wild Years of Philosophy' (1989 p. 268).

<sup>493</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 338). Lewis was not talking about, specifically, about the Australian Bulldog-Ant; he had, what can only be described, as a fetish for hard-shelled insects. They symbolised his fanaticism for the 'outer' rather than the 'inner'.

the footnote, mention of the Spanish Bishop. The example was given even less prominence than that of the Bulldog-ant but that is not to say it was any less illustrative of the philosopher's destructive 'self-conquest'.

According to Schopenhauer, the Bishop in question - we do not learn his name, invited an esteemed collection of French generals to dine with him. The two countries were at war at the time; the Bishop's invitation, one presumes, represented something of an olive branch, a symbolic gesture, born of higher religious conviction, that anticipated reconciliation and peace between the two countries. It was, however, a particularly uncustomary sort of invitation as the Bishop was reluctant to entertain his guests for any longer than was strictly necessary.

If truth be known, he did not wish to entertain them at all; the Bishop's extended his hospitality to the collection of French generals for a rather different reason. It hardly proved to be the reconciliatory occasion the assemblage of dignitaries no doubt imagined it to be. Schopenhauer kept the details to himself, but if one jumped to the end of the evening one would find, possibly no longer to one's astonishment, that all of the guests, including the host, had been poisoned. And the culprit in question was none other than the ornately dressed figure slumped at the head of the table: it was the Spanish Bishop himself.

The Spanish Bishop's example was something that appeared to strike a particularly resonant chord with Schopenhauer. The anecdote can also be said to reflect the 'Stirnerian twist', as I described it, that

Schopenhauer appeared to take towards the end of his doctrine. 'Affirming this will', as Schopenhauer wrote of the Bishop's example, 'he nevertheless desires that in the drama that presents its inner nature no such monstrous outrage shall ever appear again; and he wishes to frighten every future evildoer by the example of a revenge against which there is no wall of defence, as the fear of death does not deter the avenger. The will-to-live, though it still affirms itself here, no longer depends on the individual phenomenon, on the individual person, but embraces the Idea of man. It desires to keep the phenomenon of this Idea pure from such a monstrous and revolting outrage. It is a rare, significant, and even sublime trait of character by which the individual sacrifices himself, in that he strives to make himself the arm of eternal justice, whose true inner nature he still fails to recognize'.<sup>494</sup>

Schopenhauer had similarly set his sights on murder, but on a far grander scale than the Spanish Bishop (his 'merely' concerned the abolition of bodily forms, not the universal force that lurked about beneath their uniforms). Even so, the Bishop's example can be said to reflect, in spirit, the stance Schopenhauer took with nature's will. If the Bishop wished to eliminate the chief source of his woe (the French, not the will in this instance), he was compelled to commit a wholly sacrificial act and it was a sacrificial act that was not, by too far a stretch of the imagination, dissimilar to the one Schopenhauer envisaged.

Neither the Spanish Bishop nor Schopenhauer were the

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<sup>494</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 359).

least bit happy, to put it mildly, with the company they kept; it was, as I have said, the primary source of their respective woe and, not too unsurprisingly, both figures actively sought to put an end to it. In the Bishop's case, the solution may well have been drastic, but not so very complicated. If he wished to poison his guests he first had to win their confidence even if it meant poisoning himself to secure it.

The Bishop's plan, radical as it was, did not, as Schopenhauer argued, touch let alone harm the real culprit in question, the will; the Bishop 'merely' poisoned a number of its phenomenal manifestations, a handful of French 'illusions'. Schopenhauer may well have admired the Bishop's 'sublime trait of character' but his actions, in Schopenhauer's estimation, fell well short of the mark. 'The suicide', as Schopenhauer maintained, 'denies merely the individual, not the species'.<sup>495</sup>

If one turns immediately to the source of Schopenhauer's woe and the company he no longer wished to keep, the solution was not nearly as straightforward as the opportunity that presented itself to the Spanish Bishop.

Arthur Schopenhauer, to put it very simply indeed, not only disliked his own company, but objected to it in the most vehement way; however, his own company was not strictly his own company at all but belonged, in equal measure, to the Spanish Bishop, the collection of French generals, to Amiel, the Bulldog-Ant, Patrick, Tom and Jerry, Friedrich Schlegel, Wyndham Lewis and, as I have said, every other phenomenal form one can possibly think

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<sup>495</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 399).



of. Schopenhauer's 'inner-being' had become an anathema to him and he resorted to the most drastic and self-destructive of measures to abolish it. And just as the Bishop's vengeful desires got the better of his religious convictions, Schopenhauer's empathy, limited as it was, had also run its course and reached an end.

'In other words', as Schopenhauer explained, 'it is no longer enough for him to love others like himself, and to do as much for them as for himself, but there arises in him a strong aversion to the inner nature whose expression is his own phenomenon, to the will-to-live, the kernel and essence of that world recognized as full of misery. He therefore renounces precisely this inner nature, which appears in him and is expressed already by his body, and his actions gives lie to his phenomenon, and appears in open contradiction thereto'.<sup>496</sup> And perfectly in keeping with those highly charged sentiments, Schopenhauer, just as the Spanish Bishop had done, poisoned himself, so to speak, in order to poison his loathsome counterpart, the will-to-live. There was so little to lose, after all.

Schopenhauer's own bodily form was a manifestation of the abhorred thing in question. 'Properly speaking', as he explained, 'the body is *only* the will itself spatially exhibiting itself in the perception of the intellect'.<sup>497</sup> But in this particular and rather recalcitrant, defiant manifestation, Schopenhauer's 'subject', it was no longer a will-to-live but a self-loathing and antithetical will not to live. 'Accordingly', as Schopenhauer pointed out,

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<sup>496</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 380).

<sup>497</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 500).

'such a denial of one's own body exhibits itself as a contradiction by the will of its own phenomenon'.<sup>498</sup> And wishing to fly in the face of adversity, Schopenhauer aspired to rid himself of himself to free the world of his own inner-being, the universal will. It was an act of supreme negation that, on paper at least, could wipe out the will, the 'root-point of existence', in its entirety.<sup>499</sup> It was a desire to end all desires. A symbolic act that sought to eliminate, in Schopenhauer's words, 'the delusion that holds us chained to the bonds of this world' once and for all.<sup>500</sup>

The conflict in question was not any old conflict, but a *monumental* conflict that could be said, in a theoretical sense, to put an end to *all* conflicts. If the will was present in its entirety 'within' each of its phenomenal forms, as indeed Schopenhauer maintained, then there was no absolutely reason why it could not be completely destroyed by Amiel, by the Spanish Bishop (if he was not so rash and had recognised his true enemy), by Schopenhauer's 'subject', or, for that matter, any other figure who similarly sought its abolition. 'The inner being itself', as Schopenhauer said, 'is present whole and undivided in everything in nature, in every living being'.<sup>501</sup>

If Amiel, to take an earlier example, managed, by whatever means, to renounce the will in himself there was nothing to stop one from assuming that Amiel could not

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<sup>498</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 334).

<sup>499</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 325).

<sup>500</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 639).

<sup>501</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 129).

also, as a result, have liberated the whole world from its stranglehold. Schopenhauer drew little distinction between its presence in the 'microcosm' (Amiel in this instance) and the 'macrocosm' (the world and its manifest forms). What was in one was entirely of the other. 'Thus everyone in this twofold regard', Schopenhauer said, 'is the whole world itself, the microcosm; he finds its two sides whole and complete within himself. And what he thus recognizes as his own inner being also exhausts the inner being of the whole world, of the macrocosm'.<sup>502</sup> Amiel's attempt, evidently, fell way short of the mark. One need only turn on a television set, pick up a local newspaper or stare out of a window long enough to confirm that conclusion. But that is not to say that the subject did not have, if only on paper, a truly triumphant, if not majestic position in Schopenhauer's doctrine, even if it came at an almighty cost to the anomalous figure at the dead centre of it. Given the purely theoretical nature of Schopenhauer's 'victory' over the will, it cannot be said to have had a particularly sound theoretical basis. Let me now begin to turn your attention to a number of theoretical problems that arise from the concluding phase of Schopenhauer's doctrine.

#### **XI. THE EAGERLY ANTICIPATED DEPARTURE**

One must entertain a number of serious reservations about the nature of Schopenhauer's 'denial' and resultant 'abolition' of nature's will. It remained, whether Schopenhauer was willing to acknowledge it or not, an egocentric, emotive and, to use one of Max Stirner's favourite words, 'unique' act of volition. It expressed

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<sup>502</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 162).

not only the desires of a rogue will that had unaccountably broken off from its wider cause (it was, as we had been led to believe an indivisible 'united front'), but, at the 'mere' intervention of an individual's command, *opposed* it. It now shared, with its aberrant, if instructive manifestation the expectant belief that it no longer had to affirm itself to gain *complete* satisfaction.

It may well have been a renunciative act, but it was a renunciative act that sought the *attainment* of a previously inconceivable level of satiety. 'Now it is in keeping with this that, when my teaching reaches its highest point', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'it assumes a *negative* character, and so ends with a negation'.<sup>503</sup> Without wishing to dispute the 'negative character' of his renunciative philosophy, Schopenhauer still apparently harboured the rather opportunistic belief, if not hope, that he would be far 'better served' if he denied his will rather than continue to affirm it. 'If he turned his gaze to his own life as he lived it from day to day', as Hjalmar Söderberg wrote in another of his novels, 'Martin Birck's Youth' (1901), 'he could not escape the thought that in itself it was miserable and empty and that its only worth lay in the uncertain hope that it would not remain as it was'.<sup>504</sup> By denying its basis, Schopenhauer hoped, as a measure of last resort, to transmogrify his relation to life's will; it was by no means 'certain', but, in doing so, he aspired to liberate himself from its misery and monotony. It certainly brought him closer, perilously closer, to the realisation

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<sup>503</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 612).

<sup>504</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, 'Martin Birck's Youth' (1901 / 1930 p. 114).  
Translated from the Swedish by \*\*\*\*\*

of his own private and calamitous ideal.

It was certainly a schismatic and jeopardous plan to have hatched in the first place, but if one ignores, momentarily, the questionable logic that informed Schopenhauer's *coup de grâce*, his gambit certainly appeared to afford *him* the belief that it constituted an advantageous means through which he hoped to *gain* 'higher' rewards. If one turns to Schopenhauer one reads: 'We see him know himself and the world, change his whole nature, rise above himself and above all suffering, as if purified and sanctified by it, in inviolable peace, bliss, and sublimity, willingly renounce everything he formerly desired with the greatest vehemence, and gladly welcome death. It is the gleam of silver that suddenly appears from the purifying flame of suffering, the gleam of the denial of the will-to-live, of salvation'.<sup>505</sup> If one turns a page or two of the same work, 'The World as Will and Representation', one comes across similar sentiments: 'when this penetration occurs in all its force, it produces perfect sanctification and salvation, the phenomenon of which are the state of resignation previously described, the unshakeable peace accompanying this, and the highest joy and delight in death'.<sup>506</sup>

The prospect may not be one I happen to readily share, but it certainly seemed to appeal to Schopenhauer. The glorious, if frustratingly brief moments of repose that only Rossini and Mozart had been able to provide would be meagre compared to the permanent state of 'peace', 'joy', and 'bliss', no less, that Schopenhauer hoped to *gain* by

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<sup>505</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 392 - 393).

<sup>506</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 398).

'denying' nature's pestilent life force. There was an unmistakable *personal* incentive at stake. If he no longer willed, Schopenhauer would no longer be tantalised by his own desires and little would remain to impede or disturb his indulgent and voluptuous 'heavenly' stupor.

In 'denying' one's will, one still aspired to fulfill a desire and took appropriate measures, contrary as they may be, to gratify what was, in all practical likelihood, one's ultimate, if final wish. The 'world', if one turns to Francis Hueffer, was 'destroyed not by the extinction of the intellect in which it is reflected, but by the free action of conscious will'.<sup>507</sup> Overlooking the questionable end to which it worked, it remained, as Hueffer said, a *deliberate* and *affirmative* act of one's will. It pursued a very definite, if quite literal end. Schopenhauer, however, regarded it as an *auspicious* end; it did not simply quell one of his desires, but promised to quell them *all*. Schopenhauer was motivated by the prospect of *gaining*, in his estimation, the most *definitive* and *supreme* form of *personal* satisfaction imaginable. 'Yet we find here', as Bertram M. Laing similarly observed, 'really as definite an act of Will as in the satisfaction of hunger'.<sup>508</sup>

Schopenhauer may well have aspired to 'abolish' the will, but he was motivated, quite contrary to his claims, by the anticipative prospect of *his* liberty and 'salvation'. 'Still, one must ask whether Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the Will to Live does not in itself constitute a metaphysical opinion, an ideology camouflaging brute

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<sup>507</sup> Francis Hueffer, 'The Literary Aspects of Schopenhauer's Work' (1874 p. 378).

<sup>508</sup> Bertram M. Laing, 'Schopenhauer and Individuality' (1917 p. 184).

self-interest'.<sup>509</sup> I am in partial agreement with Raschke on this point. Schopenhauer certainly 'camouflaged' the will's true intentions as, indeed, he 'camouflaged' his own, but Raschke failed to draw any sort of distinction between the two warring factions that comprised Schopenhauer's philosophy. Consequently, it is not entirely clear whether Raschke was referring to the will's affirmation or its denial.

If Raschke was referring to the former, Schopenhauer's doctrine did not camouflage 'brute self-interest' at all; it was rather a case that 'brute self-interest' was a surreptitious means through which nature's will affirmed itself in its countless phenomenal forms. 'They are all undoubtedly guided by a delusion', as we heard Schopenhauer say earlier, 'that conceals the service of the species under the mask of an egotistical end'.<sup>510</sup>

If, on the other hand, Raschke was referring to the abnegation of nature's will then I concur that it was a thoroughly furtive gesture on Schopenhauer's part that acted to obscure his true interests. For all of its billing as a heightened, impassive, and renunciative act, it remained an instrumental and self-serving affirmation of Schopenhauer's egocentric desires.

Schopenhauer's 'denial' of the will not only represented a desire in itself, but it was also a desire that singularised the desiderative 'subject' in question. In willfully expressing a desire *not* to live (extricating oneself, in no uncertain terms, from the 'misery' of life

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<sup>509</sup> Carl A. Raschke, 'Schopenhauer on the Delusion of Progress' (1977 p. 81).

<sup>510</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 541).

etc.), one proved oneself to be a notable exception to the common rule. His 'subject' was certainly not at one, as Schopenhauer imagined, with, a now 'will-less' world, but an anomaly running in sharp opposition to it. If one opposed the will, one opposed the 'whole world' and its 'phenomena' and found oneself at odds with 'the one' and apparently 'indivisible will' itself.<sup>511</sup> 'To utter a comprehensive No in regard to reality', if one turns to Frederick Copleston, 'and to look on extinction and nothingness as constituting a desirable goal is a procedure which appeals to a much fewer number of people'.<sup>512</sup> It was, given Schopenhauer's 'pure' universal ideal - 'free', as he claimed it was, from all 'delusions' of individuality, an extremely singular and antagonistic position for him not only to have envisaged but also to have *coveted*. 'He was an expert on denial', as Rüdiger Safranski legitimately suspected of Schopenhauer, 'so long as it did not affect his own will'.<sup>513</sup>

Be that as it may, Schopenhauer did not share that opinion at all. 'This individuality', he claimed, 'is inherent in the will only in its affirmation, not in its denial'.<sup>514</sup> 'True salvation, deliverance from life and suffering, cannot', as Schopenhauer wrote elsewhere, 'even be imagined without complete denial of the will'.<sup>515</sup> Not wishing to express anything that could be said to reflect an affirmative desire (for fear of appearing to

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<sup>511</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 158).

<sup>512</sup> Frederick Copleston, 'Arthur Schopenhauer. Philosopher of Pessimism' ((1975 p. xviii).

<sup>513</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, 'Schopenhauer and The Wild Years of Philosophy' (1989 p. 236).

<sup>514</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 609).

<sup>515</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 397).



acquiesce to the will), Schopenhauer did not express his own covetous will *not* to will in such optative tones; instead, he referred to his perverse desire, as a 'denial'. In turn, Schopenhauer distanced himself, rather craftily indeed, from the will's desirous influence. It did not, in other words, express a desire at all, Schopenhauer argued, but an act of abnegation. 'It may be asked', Schopenhauer thought aloud, 'how deeply in the being-it-self of the world do the roots of individuality go. In any case, the answer to this might be that they go as deeply as the affirmation of the will-to-live; where the denial of the will occurs, they cease, for with the affirmation they sprang into existence.'<sup>516</sup> It was not, then, the least bit motivated by the gratification of one's personal interests.

However artfully it was put and no matter the angle from which it was viewed, it remained, I believe, a purposive, defiant and egocentric act born, in equal measure, of profound disgust and expectant desire. But if one wished to *deny* the will, one dare not allow oneself to be motivated by such invested interests. There was absolutely no room in the renunciative process for those. They belonged, as we have heard, to one's libidinal 'lower half', to 'bad characters' and the like.<sup>517</sup> Only those that had fallen under the will's heterogeneous, life-affirming spell - the 'principle of sufficient reason' - sought to defend and affirm its delusional beliefs. 'Affirmation of the will-to-live, the phenomenal world, diversity of all beings, individuality, egoism, hatred, wickedness', as Schopenhauer had said, 'all

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<sup>516</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 641).

<sup>517</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 363).

spring from *one root*'.<sup>518</sup> And that 'one root' was nature's will that sought to affirm itself indiscriminately and at every given opportunity.

As Schopenhauer's 'teachings' reached their 'heightened' and disingenuous end, one was no longer allured by anything that might resemble egocentric desire.<sup>519</sup> It was crude and bestial. 'In the animal as in man this egoism is most intimately connected with their innermost core and essence; in fact, it is really identical with essence'.<sup>520</sup> It was the most elemental expression of the will's malefic influence. It 'merely' expressed individual desire and individual desire was an erroneous, divisive concept. 'Egoism' constituted, in Schopenhauer's derogatory estimation, 'the starting-point of all conflict'.<sup>521</sup> But it had little to do, so one is led to believe, with the disastrous dispute Schopenhauer had with himself. He had apparently 'risen' above its influence.

Having 'turned inward', the universality of one's 'inner-nature' had suddenly been made apparent. In turn, one had seen through the 'principle of sufficient reason' and was neither subordinated to it nor acted in accordance with it. Nature's will was one's own and it was no longer deemed appropriate to exert it. Consequently, one had shed, like Amiel, one's personality and was not motivated to further its particular interests.<sup>522</sup> The 'person who is

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<sup>518</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 610).

<sup>519</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 612).

<sup>520</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Basis of Morality' (1840 / 1965 p. 131).

<sup>521</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 331).

<sup>522</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of

involved in this perception', as Schopenhauer said, 'is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is *pure will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge*'.<sup>523</sup> 'Such a subject of knowledge', he said, 'no longer follows relations in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason'.<sup>524</sup> As a 'will-less subject of knowing' one was neither an individual nor 'blighted' by anything so carnal as 'emotion' for that was nothing more than a fervid expression of nature's will.

Schopenhauer's 'subject' now acted in defiance of his former drives; they no longer exerted an influence over him. 'Raised up by the power of the mind', Schopenhauer affirmed, 'we relinquish the ordinary way of considering things, and cease to follow under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason merely their relations to one another, whose final goal is always the relation to our own will'.<sup>525</sup>

One, then, had miraculously 'transformed' oneself beyond all recognition. It was an extraordinary transformation. One was now a transcendent, impassive, and robotic 'will-less subject of knowledge' resolutely detached from all earthly matters. They were no longer a cause for concern. The will had been vanquished and one no longer, we are told, felt the pangs of its incessant appetite. 'He ceases to will anything', as Schopenhauer said of the listless 'subject' in question, 'guards against attaching

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Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 158).

<sup>523</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 179).

<sup>524</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 178).

<sup>525</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 178).

his will to anything, tries to establish firmly in himself the greatest indifference to all things'.<sup>526</sup>

Schopenhauer anticipated, with quite literal 'breathless expectation', the imminent descent of a glorious and imperturbable white cloud. And with that 'blissful' prospect in sight, Schopenhauer would be 'liberated' from himself. He would not, he imagined, be ruffled or disturbed by his own desires as he had abandoned the very thing, his individual person, that was prone to such disturbances. Schopenhauer had left, all too willingly, his bodily cares behind. As for the little that remained of him, that would be subsumed within an addled state of oblivion.

Having gone through the mill of his own philosophical system, Schopenhauer had 'successfully' come out the other side. But, it must be said, there was considerably less of the philosopher on the last page of 'The World and Will and Representation' than there was on the first. He had lost, along the way, all sense of his 'nominative self' and personality. Nevertheless, the philosopher, rather whatever remained of him, had finally attained his supreme goal: ataraxia. 'To those in whom', as Schopenhauer concluded, 'the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is - nothing'.<sup>527</sup> I need only remind you of Artzibashev's earlier contribution for you to visualise the completely barren, lifeless nature of Schopenhauer's 'imperturbable' ideal.

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<sup>526</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 380).

<sup>527</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 411 - 412).

It is possible to identify a number of fundamental characteristics concerning the renunciative process according to Schopenhauer. Firstly, it did not further one's 'particular' needs; the whole question of one's individuality simply did not enter into the equation. Secondly, it was entirely free of emotive influence. Thirdly, it did not adhere, in any way, to the 'principle of sufficient reason'.

I am in complete disagreement on all three fronts.

Having 'disabused' himself from the 'delusion' of his own individuality, Schopenhauer nevertheless worked towards an end that all too conveniently matched his 'particular' interests and ambitions.

Schopenhauer's *disgust* was directed primarily at nature's will, but its focus centred entirely upon *himself*. 'He addresses the single individual', as Arthur Hübscher said of Schopenhauer's doctrine.<sup>528</sup> And one could well conclude that that was the ultimate end it served: the 'liberation' of the 'single individual', namely himself. If Schopenhauer was to abolish, as indeed he hoped, the will at large he was compelled, first of all, to procure his own *exclusive* relief from that which had done little more than badger and torment him. If we turn to Schopenhauer we read: 'he may more and more break down and kill the will that he recognises and abhors as the source of his own suffering existence and of the world's'.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Arthur Hübscher, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context: Thinker Against the Tide' (1989 p. i).

<sup>529</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 382).

Schopenhauer aspired, *principally*, to abolish the will in his own manifest form and secure, as a matter of urgency, his own salvation. As for the far larger matter concerning the salvation of the world, it was entirely a secondary issue that would, presumably, follow in due course. 'We are listening to the subject', as Paul Gottfried said, 'who gropingly unravels the enigma of existence - first, in himself and, then, in the world around him'.<sup>530</sup> It was not, quite contrary to Schopenhauer's claims, the least bit free from the incentive of personal 'gain'. In denying the will, Schopenhauer worked towards a very particular and egocentric end: his own fetishistic, if rather bizarre conception of personal 'liberty'.

If one turns to 'The Ego and its Own', Max Stirner perfectly expressed the egocentric line Schopenhauer took with nature's will when he wrote: 'I am not this spirit: it is mine, not I its'.<sup>531</sup> Stirner, I should add, arrived at that point by a completely different set of means; he affirmed rather than denied life's calling. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer was no less eager to demonstrate the tables had similarly turned; he too had gained the upper hand of his ghoulish, inborn enemy. Nature's will no longer had the claims it once had over him and was now, in a reversal of fortune, compelled to abide to Schopenhauer's own particular wishes.

The will-to-live certainly 'paled', if indeed Schopenhauer was to be believed, at the all too simple behest of *his* command. Schopenhauer was *empowered* to an unprecedented and, previously unimaginable degree. 'In

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<sup>530</sup> Paul Gottfried, 'Arthur Schopenhauer and the Heritage of Pessimism' (1975 p. 26).

<sup>531</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 157).

Schopenhauer's case', as Carl A. Raschke wrote, 'to be conscious of the impersonal Will to Live as the sufficient reason for all willing empowers the individual to root out the self that performs acts of volition and thus to cease being tormented by his own wants'.<sup>532</sup>

'The egoist', if one turns to Schopenhauer, 'feels himself surrounded by strange and hostile phenomena, and all his hope rests on his own well-being'.<sup>533</sup> 'Therefore', he wrote in disparaging tones on an earlier page of the same work, 'everyone wants everything for himself, wants to possess, or at least control, everything, and would like to destroy whatever opposes him'.<sup>534</sup> But that was, if one is not completely mistaken, precisely what Schopenhauer *desired* to do! He wished to 'destroy', in no uncertain terms, the fundamentally 'strange', 'hostile' power that 'opposed' him and, having 'destroyed' it, Schopenhauer hoped to procure an end that complimented his notion, uncustomary as it may have been, of 'well-being'.

It was, in any case, highly emotive and charged language for an apparently 'indifferent' subject to have used. Clearly, Schopenhauer was not the least bit 'indifferent' to nature's will. 'There arises in him', as we have already heard him say, 'a strong aversion to the inner nature whose expression is his own phenomenon'.<sup>535</sup> Schopenhauer was *appalled* by the will-to-live, by his own 'inner nature', and sought to extricate himself, in no

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<sup>532</sup> Carl A. Raschke, 'Schopenhauer on the Delusion of Progress' (1977 p. 78).

<sup>533</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 374).

<sup>534</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 332).

<sup>535</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 380).

uncertain terms, from its oppressive and imbecilic company. Schopenhauer's denial of will was not, as he claimed, as motiveless, as 'pure', or free of emotion as he purported it to be. It was inspired, fundamentally, by disgust and, with its abolition, ended in 'delight'; it encompassed the complete spectrum of invested emotion.

'Schopenhauer', it has been said, 'never wants to cut a figure: for he writes for himself and no one wants to be deceived, least of all a philosopher who has made it a rule for himself: deceive no one, not even yourself!'.<sup>536</sup> Again, I disagree. Schopenhauer was not the least bit honest, contrary to Nietzsche's all too laudatory appraisal, about the nature of his motivations. They were, I firmly believe, far more egocentric than he dared or could possibly let on.

Given the purely secondary and subordinate position he attributed to individuality, Schopenhauer could not be seen to openly acknowledge its *fundamental* role in the abolition of nature's will. Had he done so, the philosopher would have run the very real risk of undermining his evaluation of the will and an individual's submissive relation to it. In turn, the necessity to 'liberate' oneself from its despotic influence would not have presented itself as such. Furthermore, had Schopenhauer revealed his invested interest in the will's abolition, he would have flagrantly contradicted his own estimation of the renunciative process; a process that did not, as he claimed, seek the appeasement of individual desire as it did not act in accordance with the 'principle of

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<sup>536</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator' collected in 'Untimely Meditations' (1874 / 1983 p. 134).



sufficient reason'.

As it remained, Schopenhauer was not the least bit honest with either himself or his readers as his doctrine reached its 'heightened' end. Ultimately, he found himself unable to satisfactorily account for a number of glaring inconsistencies associated with the will's abolition.

'Like so many others', if one, once again, turns to Schopenhauer, 'this question rests on the confusion of the thing-in-itself with the phenomenon. The principle of sufficient reason, of which the law of motivation is also a form, extends only to the phenomenon, not the thing-in-itself'.<sup>537</sup> Schopenhauer was, in one sense, quite correct. The relationship between the 'will' and 'phenomenon' was certainly confusing, if not entirely unfathomable, but his assertion that the 'law of motivation' was restricted to the 'phenomenon' was evidently untrue.

As he reached the end of his doctrine Schopenhauer may well have regarded himself as a 'will-less subject of knowledge', but he aspired, nevertheless, to 'liberate' the very thing he claimed to have shed (his beleaguered individual state). And if one turns to the means through which Schopenhauer aspired to destroy his inborn enemy it was nothing other than an entirely subordinate, illusory, and incidental phenomenal form, the intellect.

Having identified the 'root-point of existence', the will, as the scourge of his own person and turned his attention to its abolition, Schopenhauer extended the

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<sup>537</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 163).

'principle of sufficient reason', an allegedly finite principle, well beyond the parameters of its jurisdiction to the 'thing-in-itself'.<sup>538</sup> 'The will itself cannot be abolished', as Schopenhauer claimed, 'by anything except *knowledge*'.<sup>539</sup> On another page of the same work, still a greater part of the way in, Schopenhauer again emphasised the domineering position of a formerly subordinate phenomenal form: 'knowledge becomes for it a *quieter*, silencing and suppressing all willing'.<sup>540</sup> But as he maintained on an earlier page of the same work: 'No finite measure can exhaust that infinite source'.<sup>541</sup>

It may well have suited Schopenhauer's pretences as he reached the conclusion of his doctrine, but it remained far from clear *how* or, for that matter, *why* the will transformed itself from a will-to-live to, what in effect, was a will-to-die at the 'mere' behest of a purely derivative 'function', the intellect. 'Knowledge', as he previously maintained, 'remains subordinate to the service of the will, as indeed it came into being for this service'.<sup>542</sup> If one turns to another page of the same work, 'The World as Will and Representation', one reads a similar remark: 'knowledge is completely the servant of the will'.<sup>543</sup> Turning one's attention to another work, Schopenhauer wrote: 'But as a mere slave and bondman of the will, the intellect is not... active from its own

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<sup>538</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 325).

<sup>539</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 400).

<sup>540</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 308).

<sup>541</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 184).

<sup>542</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 177).

<sup>543</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 176).

power and its own impulse. It is therefore easily pushed aside by the will, and brought to silence by a nod therefrom; whereas on its own part it is hardly able, even with the greatest effort, to bring the will even to a brief pause, in order to get a word in edgewise'.<sup>544</sup>

## XII. REASONING WITH AN IMBECILE

Given the elaborate lengths the will had gone to to cover its tracks and conceal its true identity, it did not necessarily follow that the intellect was in any position at all, given its 'apparitional', submissive and 'finite' state, to disabuse the will of its delusions when it, no less, was counted among them. 'My philosophy alone', as Schopenhauer had said, '... puts man's real inner nature not in consciousness, but in the will'.<sup>545</sup> The 'real self', as he reiterated on another page of the same work, 'is the will-to-live'.<sup>546</sup> Once again, one is compelled to ask how indeed it was possible for the subject's 'real inner nature' to be renounced by something that was not simply, in Schopenhauer estimation, marginally less 'real' but fundamentally 'unreal'? If that indeed proved to be the case, as unlikely as it seemed, the will was not exempt from the 'principle of sufficient reason' at all but, ultimately, at its mercy.

One could very well be forgiven for thinking more of the will-to-live; it had, after all, proved itself more than capable of pulling off the most deceitful and duplicitous of acts without ever stopping to think twice about its

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<sup>544</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 212).

<sup>545</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 199).

<sup>546</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 606).

conduct. If the will-to-live purely desired one thing and that one thing was to live at all costs it was not the least bit certain why it would have left any door unlocked, however small, that might have imperiled not simply its most pressing desire, but its *only* desire - least of all a door that might have jeopardised the very grounds of its existence not only in Schopenhauer's 'knowing subject' but in the world at large. As it stood, the will proved to be something of a wet blanket.

Nor could one appeal, on moral grounds, to its 'better nature'. One could not possibly demand that it come to its senses and see the error of its ways as the will was completely devoid of sense and reason; it was not, given its infra-mundane status, the least bit receptive to anything the intellect had to impart. One need only remember what Lewis had to say: 'His god (or Will, as he prefers to call it) is a vast, undirected, purposeless impulse: not, like us, conscious: but blind, powerful, restless and unconscious'.<sup>547</sup> The will was an unprincipled and amoral force and, if Schopenhauer was to be believed, inclined towards all that was evil. Quite why it should suddenly have regarded itself as something so vile that it was better for all concerned if it did not exist at all remained entirely inexplicable. 'It is inconceivable', as Bryan Magee also observed, 'that a will which is inherently evil would choose, in the light of insight, to suppress itself'.<sup>548</sup> Why? Because it was taken to one side, like a naughty child, and informed of its 'bad' behaviour by the virtuous and reflective voice of reason? An appeal of that sort would simply fall on deaf ears. 'Against the mighty voice of nature', as even

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<sup>547</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 332).

<sup>548</sup> Bryan Magee, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' (1983 p. 242).

Schopenhauer said, 'reflection can do little'.<sup>549</sup> Once again, the philosopher appeared to extend a purely phenomenal principle, that of morality, to the 'thing-in-itself' which was not only facile but, by his own standards, completely untenable.

Schopenhauer's purported transfiguration from a 'mere' individual to an impassive 'subject' was the most nominal and spurious of transfigurations. The philosopher had clearly not relinquished any of the qualities associated with his 'former' state; instead, he attempted to pass them off as something they were not. Schopenhauer disavowed every trace of individuality that was fundamentally responsible for the will's alleged 'abolition'. The 'victorious' figure slumped at the end of Schopenhauer's doctrine was not, as he claimed, the 'will-less subject of knowledge', but the egocentric and, by this point, washed up and mutilated *individual* subject. It may well have been an unheralded 'victory', but it was no less credible.

The will-to-live would vehemently repel all efforts for it to be renounced and conjure up, in the process, some other means for it to continue existing, including the comparatively small matter of enticing Schopenhauer with a string of expectant and empty promises. One could well imagine that the will sensed, however dimly, a defective manifestation in its midst (Schopenhauer's 'knowing subject') and, hoping to rid itself of an ineffectual, incomplicant and unhealthy influence, afforded him the mistaken belief that his own demise would reap untold rewards. 'Man's essence', as Dennis Rasmussen wrote in

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<sup>549</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 281).

'Immortality: Revolt Against Being' (1975), 'consists in his insatiable desire or will which can never in time reach a final goal'.<sup>550</sup> 'Possession', Rasmussen added, 'destroys the charm of the thing desired'.<sup>551</sup> And given the purely anticipative nature of Schopenhauer's imperturbable white cloud, free as it was from his individual presence, it was rather by the bye whether his ideal was realised or not. In either event, the philosopher would have been left none the wiser.

Schopenhauer's ultimate desire, to abolish nature's will-to-live, remained a desire that could never, in practice, be 'possessed'; its attainment heralded the end of the percipient faculties that had been captivated by it. Schopenhauer's ideal remained unblemished from the dissatisfaction that ordinarily accompanies the realisation of one's goal. It perfectly suited the philosopher's uncustomary tastes as its 'charm', as Rasmussen phrased it, was inextinguishable. But whether he had not, in fact, been duped, in the most stupendous way, remained a distinct and highly likely possibility. Given both the outcome of Schopenhauer's philosophy and the apparent complicity of a, by now, unrecognisable will, I am inclined to believe that that was far more probable.

Schopenhauer's ideal was mutually beneficial; it afforded the philosopher a 'heightened' and rather pretentious pretext to take leave of life on his own terms rather than those dictated to him by the enormous oaf in tow, the will, and, at the same time, it relieved the will,

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<sup>550</sup> Dennis Rasmussen, 'Immortality: Revolt Against Being' (1975 p. 68).

<sup>551</sup> Dennis Rasmussen, 'Immortality: Revolt Against Being' (1975 p. 68).

rather conveniently, of an unavailing and antagonistic manifestation.

If one turns to page 398 of 'The World as Will and Representation', Schopenhauer expressed a similar opinion, but it was not directed at the ascetic but the suicide. 'The will-to-live', the philosopher said, 'finds itself so hampered in this particular manifestation, that it cannot develop and display its efforts'.<sup>552</sup> Of the two figures, the ascetic and the suicide, the former posed a far greater threat to the will, aspiring as he did to abolish it, than the latter. The ascetic certainly did not wish to 'develop' or 'display its efforts' as he claimed to have renounced them. But the knowing subject's desire to abolish himself, his individual presence, played, rather more advantageously, into the hands of the will rather than his own.

Given its enterprising nature, the will would actively encourage the 'knowing subject' to seek his immediate end in a determined effort to stop his unwelcome intrusion into its affairs. In seeking to impede its only desire, the will, not too unsurprisingly, turned all of its attention to the 'knowing subject's' dissolution and demise.

Schopenhauer referred to 'knowledge' as an 'accident of matter'.<sup>553</sup> And if one turns to another page of 'On the Will in Nature' one is told: 'matter is the mere visibility of the will'.<sup>554</sup> If knowledge, then, was merely an manifest image of nature's will, then all that one

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<sup>552</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 398).

<sup>553</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 88).

<sup>554</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 65).

willed was surely nothing more than an expression of *its* raving desires. 'So', as Barbara Hannan asked, 'how is it possible for the intellect of the genius to achieve "will-less knowing"? It would seem that intellect cannot detach itself from the will!'.<sup>555</sup> One was not, as Schopenhauer led us to believe, an individual at all but a 'phantom' of a wholly delusional will and if one was little more than a second-string phantom of a wholly delusional will then one's desires conformed, not to one's own, but to those emanating from nature's insuperable force of life. Not only did Schopenhauer's desire to abolish the will hang far too heavily on the assent of the conniving entity he sought to abolish, but he utilised, to that end, the 'lowly' principle he claimed to have transcended.

'Our character', as Schopenhauer wrote, 'is to be regarded as the temporal unfolding of an extra-temporal, and so indivisible and unalterable, act of will'.<sup>556</sup> 'It is *the will* alone', as Schopenhauer previously maintained, 'that is permanent and unchangeable in consciousness. It is the will that holds all ideas and representations together as means to its ends, tinges them with the colour of its character, its mood, and its interest, commands the attention, and holds the thread of motives in hand'.<sup>557</sup>

Taking into account its elemental presence, Schopenhauer was never likely, in spite of his desperate attempt to do so, to rid himself or the world of will when it

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<sup>555</sup> Barbara Hannan, 'The Riddle of the World: A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer's Philosophy' (2009 p. 13).

<sup>556</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 301).

<sup>557</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 140).



constituted its basis. Its desirous influence extended to Schopenhauer's ascetic subject whose desire *not* to live was far more beneficial, given his matricidal intent, to the continued endurance of nature's will rather than his own. The will had, quite feasibly, cajoled Schopenhauer into believing his desire to alleviate, first and foremost, *his* woe and want did not, in fact, serve its best interests. Given the actual outcome of Schopenhauer's 'painful self conquest' it can hardly be said to have served his 'knowing subject' particularly well.

There was absolutely nothing to stop one from assuming that the will was not simply expressing its own peculiar culinary habits. 'At bottom', as indeed we have heard, 'this springs from the fact that the will must live on itself, since nothing exists besides it, and it is a hungry will'.<sup>558</sup> The will may not have been the brightest of life forces Schopenhauer could have come up with but it was, as I have said a number of times, an extremely mendacious one. Schopenhauer would have been better advised, one suspects, not to have put all of his faith and trust in a will that never once kept its word. There was ultimately and literally no knowing the extraordinary lengths it would go to preserve itself. 'There is', as Schopenhauer warned his readers, 'no shape so grotesque that the will-to-live will not appear in order to attain its end'.<sup>559</sup> And that, presumably, included going along with Schopenhauer's hostile 'subject of knowledge', nodding in agreement to something it could not possibly understand, simply, for all we know, to make a gift of him to one of its hungrier and, for that matter,

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<sup>558</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 154).

<sup>559</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Will in Nature' (1836 / 1992 p. 57).

considerably more grateful manifestations. 'For only through these is the object *interesting* to the individual, in other words, has a relation to the will', as Schopenhauer wrote.<sup>560</sup> And in this rather sorry state of his, in this state of not willing to live, Schopenhauer's 'subject' would have aroused little more than the will's appetite.

Schopenhauer's account was barely credible and, in many ways, beggared belief; given, I should add, the inviolable nature he had attributed to the will and the subordinate position he gave to the intellect. The 'intellect', as he had made clear, 'does not penetrate into the secret workshop of the will's decisions'.<sup>561</sup> 'Its inner character', if one turns to Arthur Hübscher for a second opinion, 'is inaccessible to the intellect'.<sup>562</sup> It remained unclear how exactly the intellect, a 'feeble' and 'paltry' phenomenal form, could possibly begin to comprehend, let alone extricate itself from its origin and source, the will, whatever form it may have assumed. 'It is unable to determine the will itself', Schopenhauer had said, 'for the will is wholly inaccessible to it, and, as we have seen, is for it inscrutable and impenetrable'.<sup>563</sup> Yet if one simply 'looked inwards' the individuating 'principle of sufficient reason' all too easily slipped away to reveal the 'true' unitary nature of things.

The will appeared to reveal its secret, presumably its

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<sup>560</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 177).

<sup>561</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 210).

<sup>562</sup> Arthur Hübscher, 'The philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context' (1989 p. 214).

<sup>563</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 291).

most closely held secret, far too cheaply indeed. More especially, if one considers just how high the stakes were reputed to be for its very hold on life. All the same, Schopenhauer claimed to have successfully informed it of its gross misconduct and the fatuity of its ways and the will withdrew entirely of its own accord and in the most whimpering of ways. Schopenhauer had either betrayed himself as being extremely naive or unimaginably complacent. It was more a case that Schopenhauer had grossly underestimated the guile of the very power in whose affairs he not only meddled but aspired to subvert.

On the one hand, Schopenhauer was at pains to point out that the will could not be known, and, on the other, he maintained that it could be known if one, all too mysteriously, 'looked inwards'. Schopenhauer was keen to depict the will as the mightiest of powers yet, for all its might, it could be relinquished, if we consider his thoroughly condescending appraisal of the subject's finite state, by the most 'feeble' of means, the intellect.

Schopenhauer would appear to have wanted it both ways and only called upon the service of knowledge when it suited his *particular* theoretical needs. The intellect not only worked but triumphed in a place where it was not the least bit able to exert its influence. One must harbour grave doubts as to how it was possible for something that was not endowed with an intellect to suddenly and inexplicably be ruled by it. 'Given the rest of his philosophy', as Bryan Magee argued, 'there is no way in which this could happen. First, his denial that any of our actions or choices are free means that it is not an option for us. Second, he is insistent throughout that

for all motivated action the medium of motives is the mind, whether conscious or unconscious, and that mind is the creature of will in the literal sense that it was brought into being by the will and exists to serve it. Admittedly, in his theory of art he asserts that there are brief periods when the mind frees itself from this servitude; but that is a far cry from any talk of the mind *directing* the will. That would run counter to his whole system.<sup>564</sup> If one turns to another critic, Arthur Hübscher, he even expressed doubts as to whether the will, if it was so easily comprehended, was actually the 'thing-in-itself', the very thing that bungled about 'within' the philosopher and nature itself. 'If the will is the thing-in-itself, so people said, it cannot be the object of cognition. For knowledge is representing; the will, however, is outside the sphere of all representation... if the will can be known, it cannot possibly be the thing-in-itself'.<sup>565</sup>

It was a question that also troubled Paul Gottfried. 'Why does the will, however, acquiesce in its own nullification?', Gottfried asked. 'It is', he continued, 'because, lacking another content, it allows itself to be guided by human consciousness which is its own creation. What results is that man, moved by the pointlessness of his own yearning, incites the will to put an end to itself. The sovereignty of volition must yield to the rebellion of the intellect. Unfortunately, the philosopher cannot plot this redemptive process in its entirety'.<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Bryan Magee, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' (1983 p. 242).

<sup>565</sup> Arthur Hübscher, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context: Thinker Against the Tide' (1989 p. 382).

<sup>566</sup> Paul Gottfried, 'Arthur Schopenhauer and the Heritage of Pessimism' (1975 p. 29).

If one turns to Schopenhauer in the hope of hearing a clear and straightforward answer, one reads, to one's dismay: 'the principle of the world's existence is expressly a groundless one, namely a blind will-to-live, which, as thing in itself, cannot be subject to the principle of sufficient reason or ground; for this principle is merely the form of phenomena, and through it alone every why is justified'.<sup>567</sup> On another page, Schopenhauer peddled out the same excuse: 'where we are speaking of the will as thing-in-itself, the principle of sufficient reason, as the mere form of the phenomenon, no longer finds any application, but with this principle all why and whence vanish'.<sup>568</sup> Having placed the will, ultimately, beyond one's comprehension, Schopenhauer extricated himself, all too conveniently, from the necessity of having to satisfactorily explain its abolition; it allowed him to shrug his shoulders, beg the pardon of his own idea and 'gracefully' bow out of his doctrine under a completely false pretext. 'Every why', as he said, 'is justified'.<sup>569</sup>

If the renunciative process happened to strike one as uncertain, if not completely mystifying it was because one was not privy to the will's ways. Nor was one simply precluded from the manner of its abolition; its affirmation was no less unfathomable. The will was a law unto itself and its nature, having been established, somewhat opportunely, as 'groundless' from the very beginning, was ultimately beyond one's ken. It was an

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<sup>567</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 579).

<sup>568</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 530).

<sup>569</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 579).

extremely shrewd move on Schopenhauer's part. It permitted him to run into the shadowy embrace of the very thing he claimed to have abolished in his failure to sufficiently account for its abolition. 'True, the individuality has its roots in the thing-in-itself', but, as he added, 'how deep these roots go, that is a question, which defies any answer'.<sup>570</sup> That he was unable to provide an adequate account could not be helped. The fault was not with Schopenhauer but lay squarely with the will; its nature, all too conveniently, exceeded the customary rule of knowledge.

And just as Schopenhauer called on the service of knowledge as and when he pleased, he also capitalised, when it suited him, on the will's inherent unintelligibility. The all too flighty philosopher ran from one to the other to justify whatever turn his doctrine happened to take. The will was dominant *here* but subordinate *there*; the same was equally true of knowledge. The two vied for dominance and both gained, at various stages of his doctrine, a significant edge over the other, but neither the will nor intellect were able to claim total and absolute sovereignty over the other. Ending as it did in man's complete downfall and collapse, one is left puzzled and perplexed, as I have said, by who or what did what to what. 'Should I try to resolve this tension and somehow reveal Schopenhauer's philosophy to be consistent?', asked Barbara Hannan. 'I cannot. Schopenhauer's philosophy is not consistent', as she astutely concluded.<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer quoted by Arthur Hübscher, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context: Thinker Against the Tide' (1989 p. 385).

<sup>571</sup> Barbara Hannan, 'The Riddle of the World: A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer's Philosophy' (2009 p. 15).

### XIII. DEPTHS, OBSCURITIES AND INTRICACIES

What makes Schopenhauer's doctrine so difficult to contest or dispute, so impossible to iron out, is the will, in the most fundamental sense, is unknowable. Schopenhauer's doctrine had, at its centre, an indelible question mark, an insoluble riddle. 'Whatever torch we kindle, and whatever space it may illuminate', as he conceded, 'our horizon will always remain encircled by the depth of night.'<sup>572</sup> The 'actual, positive solution to the riddle of the world must', as Schopenhauer said, 'be something that the human intellect is wholly incapable of grasping and conceiving'.<sup>573</sup> But if the will was unknowable then all things, given the thoroughly deterministic, if not predictable line of his philosophy, were also, at heart, unknowable. 'For it is indeed', as we have heard, 'one and the same will that objectifies itself in the whole world'.<sup>574</sup>

Turning to the question of individuality, Schopenhauer again found himself, not too unsurprisingly, at a similar loss. 'Human nature has depths, obscurities, and intricacies', as he wrote, 'whose elucidation and unfolding are of the very greatest difficulty'.<sup>575</sup>

Elsewhere, he said: 'the "I" is an unknown quantity, in other words, it is itself a mystery and a secret'.<sup>576</sup>

Schopenhauer was unable to account for it in its entirety

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<sup>572</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 185).

<sup>573</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 185).

<sup>574</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 159).

<sup>575</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 402).

<sup>576</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 139).

as man was, like everything else in nature, a manifest image of an insensate, enigmatic and wholly incomprehensible will.

'Schopenhauer's philosophy, he repeatedly tells us', turning once again to Barbara Hannan, 'is a sustained attempt to communicate a "single thought". When one finally understands Schopenhauer, one realizes that the "single thought" cannot be expressed'.<sup>577</sup> If one turns to an essay written by Jerry S. Clegg one reads: 'The knowledge it produces is therefore indemonstrable and uncommunicable. Its insights cannot be conveyed to others'.<sup>578</sup> Everything, then, both big and small remained abstruse and unintelligible. And, with its emphasis on will, Schopenhauer's doctrine was by no means an exception. It too was coloured and, ultimately, compromised by the will's daunting and mystifying presence. In the end, all reservations, questions and doubts one may have regarding Schopenhauer's doctrine are left, in the most frustrating way, hanging in the air without the remotest hope of an answer.

Schopenhauer's philosophy marked, as I said at the beginning of the chapter, a dramatic change of heart. Unlike Schlegel, the philosopher *vehemently* objected to his affiliation with nature; he wished to rid himself of its will and successfully, if only very briefly, stepped out of its shadow. Schopenhauer was loathed to admit it but his desire to abolish nature's will was an extremely defiant and egocentric desire to liberate himself from

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<sup>577</sup> Barbara Hannan, 'The Riddle of the World: A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer's Philosophy' (2009 p. 141).

<sup>578</sup> Jerry S. Clegg, 'Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein on Lonely Languages and Criterialess Claims' collected in Eric von der Luft (ed), 'Schopenhauer. New Essays in Honor of His 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday' (1988 p. 86).



its jurisdiction. He did not simply aspire to distance himself, but *distinguish* himself, in the most singular way, from its imbecilic influence. He was the exception to the rule: an unwilling participant in its scheming ways. That he resorted to the most dishonest of means to qualify his rebellion was nothing more than heightened bluster; it remained not only a 'rebellion of the intellect', as Gottfried described it, but a rebellion of one's volition, ego, and independence.<sup>579</sup>

It was certainly counterproductive, but the matter of one's independence now lay entirely in the hands of Schopenhauer's 'knowing subject'. Given the will's sovereignty, it was not the least bit certain whether he had any rightful claim to that state or was entitled to feel empowered to any degree whatsoever. Nor can one entirely discount the possibility, in light of the will's reputed abolition, that he did indeed have a legitimate claim to both his volitional state and independence. As it stood, Schopenhauer's doctrine was riddled with inconsistencies, largely of an epistemological variety, that ultimately defied comprehension. The 'relationship between appearance and the thing-in-itself is', as Hübscher concluded, 'irresoluble'.<sup>580</sup>

The value accorded to individuality in Schopenhauer's doctrine ultimately rested on the symbolic act of exerting it even if, in exerting it, the 'knowing subject' brought his individuality to an abrupt end. Moving, as we have, from Schlegel's 'theory' to Schopenhauer's philosophy we finally see something, if

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<sup>579</sup> Paul Gottfried, 'Arthur Schopenhauer and the Heritage of Pessimism' (1975 p. 29).

<sup>580</sup> Arthur Hübscher, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context: Thinker Against the Tide' (1989 p. 383).

only a glimpse, of an individual's desire to break free and liberate himself from a totalising, universal theory; something that was not the least bit apparent in Schlegel's 'romantic' vision.

Schopenhauer may well have remained hidden, albeit sheepishly, behind the heavy curtain of his doctrine, but, unlike Schlegel's theory, the tips of the philosopher's shoes were left, tellingly, poking out at the bottom. His doctrine was certainly condescending in its evaluation of the finite, somatic individual but, ultimately, it was at his hands that he managed to avail himself of himself, of his own ghoulish inner-nature. Schopenhauer's egocentric desire to distinguish himself from nature's will remained, contrary to the philosopher's claims, clearly visible. He may well have plunged his 'individual' subject back to the murky and unfathomable depths of his own theory but, the fact remained - he came to light, if briefly, as a defiant, singular figure not wishing to pander to the imbecilic demands of a totalising theory.

The subject triumphed but his triumph, admittedly, was not only unheralded but ultimately compromised by the enduring presence of an aphonic and insensate will.

Schopenhauer's 'concerns' were, as we will see in the following chapter, remarkably similar to Max Stirner's. Both figures sought to secure, primarily, their own 'freedom' from tyrannical concepts. But, quite unlike Stirner, Schopenhauer refused to openly acknowledge his egocentric motivations as they conflicted with his deterministic doctrine. One dare not affirm oneself as affirming oneself meant affirming the will, the very

thing that one aspired to abolish. One could not freely draw upon one's phenomenal or individual qualities as they were determined by will itself. Schopenhauer, in turn, resorted to the most sophistic and dishonest of means to qualify his own instrumental and egocentric objectives. Max Stirner, on the other hand, sought to affirm his will, his will-to-live, and refute all intellectual constraints that impeded his egocentric desire.

The conclusion of Schopenhauer's doctrine spells the end of the subject's affiliation with nature as far as the present thesis goes. It can be said to have been a problem that came to some sort of head with Schopenhauer. By the time one gets to Max Stirner it was apparently no longer an issue; he was not the least bit blighted by any such association. Stirner had cut the connection between himself and any sort of totalising theory and his subject, the 'un-man', emerged from the shadow of theoretical conjecture on something resembling his own two feet.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REBELLING AGAINST THE HURRICANE: MAX STIRNER AND THE UNIVERSAL WILL.

'I saw myself like a grain of sand rebelling against the hurricane that carries it away. It was too funny: a grain of sand and a hurricane!... I had to find support within myself, to believe in the magnitude of my individuality so that I could oppose it to the whole universe, to the universal will'.<sup>581</sup>

Michael Artzibashef, 'Breaking-Point'

'In contrast to the jelly-fish that floats in the centre of the subterranean stream of the "dark" Unconscious, I much prefer, for my part, the shield of the tortoise, or the rigid stylistic articulations of the grasshopper'.<sup>582</sup>

Wyndham Lewis, 'Satire and Fiction'

'Incidentally, a count of the word "ich" in Stirner showed that nearly 25% of the text consists of "ich" (if you count all the derivatives). Keep that up, and the whole text will soon be one continuous "I". Yet if one searches life: is there much "I" in it?'.<sup>583</sup>

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, 'Autobiography of a Corpse'

#### I. A JOHN SMITH

There are two biographical facts that stand out in the

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<sup>581</sup> Michael Artzibashef, 'Breaking-Point' (1915 p. 260 - 261). B. W. Huebsch, NY.

<sup>582</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Satire and Fiction' (1930 p. 47).

<sup>583</sup> Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky (1887 - 1950), 'Autobiography of a Corpse' collected in '7 Stories' (2006 p. 92). Translated by Joanne Turnbull. Glas New Russian Writing, Vol. 39.

relatively short life of Max Stirner (1806 / 1856). In the first place, one learns Max Stirner was not Max Stirner at all, but Johan Casper Schmidt. Secondly, the writer, who, in the course of his book, 'The Ego and Its Own', made a great deal of celebratory fuss, some of it extremely histrionic, about his individual 'might' met with a bitterly ironic end when, in the Spring of 1856, he was stung by an insect and learnt, in the costliest possible fashion, that his 'might' was not quite as mighty as he imagined it to be. Stirner failed to recover and, due to further complications, died some weeks later.

Let me begin the present chapter by offering for consideration the symbolic significance of the first of these facts as the second rather speaks for itself.

One can, in all likelihood, hazard any number of guesses as to why Max Stirner thought better of appearing before the reading public as Johann Schmidt, but one in particular was not, I dare say, the least bit lost on him.

Schmidt's pen name harked back to his childhood days. He came by the name, it is said, on account of his forehead; it was apparently so pronounced that his schoolmates saw fit to name him after it.<sup>584</sup> What, then, compelled Johann Schmidt to reassume his childhood nickname?

If one has any degree of familiarity with the 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844) one will, no doubt, be acutely aware that the book, of *all* books, is possibly among the least suited to be credited to a 'John Smith' whether he

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<sup>584</sup> 'Stirn', it is worth mentioning at this point, is the German for forehead. An impression of which is certainly confirmed if one looks at the sketch Friedrich Engels drew of him.

happened to be a German John Smith or not.

Stirner did his utmost to disassociate himself from all manner of common pools and groupish associations. The 'individual', as we heard Stirner say, 'is the irreconcilable enemy of *generality*, every *tie*, every *fetter*'.<sup>585</sup> If we turn to a critic for a corroboration, we hear Lawrence Stepelevich say: 'Stirner considered himself to be not only a Mann but also a unique man'.<sup>586</sup>

We can only begin to imagine the deep dismay he must surely have felt in finding himself just another Schmidt among a countless number of other Schmidts.

Given his hostility to common pots, Schmidt was hardly blessed from birth with the most favourable of surnames. He entertained ideas that were so utterly at odds with it that it hardly comes as much of a surprise that it proved impossible for him to continue using it. Something, quite clearly, had to be done about the Schmidt.

In 'de-Schmidting' himself, as it were, Stirner found an appropriate means to express a little of the singularity he so keenly felt. 'Stirners' are far thinner on the ground, after all.

Having, firstly, stepped out of the crowded shadow of his fellow Schmidts, Stirner went about the business of distancing himself from every imaginable 'concern' that was not solely his own. He wished, above all else, to be considered entirely on his own terms; to stand on his own

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<sup>585</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 192).

<sup>586</sup> Lawrence S. Stepelevich, 'Ein Menschenleben. Hegel and Stirner' collected in 'The New Hegelians. Politics and Philosophy the Hegelian School' (2006 p. 171).

two feet and, if necessary, topple over just so long as he toppled over of his own accord which, of course, he did, excusing the smallest of insectile nudges.

## II. THE CONTRIVED PERSONALITY

'The Case of the Individual against Authority' is the subtitle of 'The Ego and Its Own'. It has, if you happen to agree, a ring of youthful recalcitrance about it. There was something about Max Stirner, besides his name, that was, I hesitate to use the word 'childish', but certainly, as I suggested in the opening chapter, 'adolescent'. Eduard Von Hartmann described it, perhaps most appropriately of all (in light of Stirner's macrocephalic appendage), as his 'over-balanced egoism'<sup>587</sup>, while Peter McCormick, referred to it as Stirner's 'triumphal vigor'<sup>588</sup>, and David Leopold, a more recent critic, saw fit to attribute it to his 'characteristically provocative conceit'.<sup>589</sup>

'The Ego and Its Own' is predominated by a vociferant and boisterous presence that brings to mind the most unmanageable of teenagers. If, by means of an example, we turn to page 63 of the said work we hear Stirner say: 'It is possible that I can make very little out of myself; but this little is everything, and is better than what I allow to be made out of me by the might of others, by the training of custom, religion, the laws, the state. Better - if the talk is to be of better at all - better an

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<sup>587</sup> Eduard Von Hartmann, 'Philosophy of the Unconscious', Book III (1868 / 1931 p. 98).

<sup>588</sup> Peter McCormick, 'The Concept of the Self in Political Thought' (1979 p. 707).

<sup>589</sup> David Leopold, 'The State and I: Max Stirner's Anarchism' collected in 'The New Hegelians. Politics and Philosophy the Hegelian School' (2006 p. 184).

unmannerly child than old head on young shoulders, better a mulish man than a man compliant in everything. The unmannerly and mulish fellow is still on the way to form himself according to his own will'.<sup>590</sup>

If, to substantiate the impression, we turn to another page, we hear Stirner tell us in no uncertain terms: 'I am owner of my might and I am so when I know myself as *unique*. In the *unique one* the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, of which he is born. Every higher essence above me, be it God, be it man, weakens the feeling of my uniqueness, and pales only before the sun of this consciousness. If I concern myself for myself, the unique one, then my concern rests on its transitory, mortal creator, who consumes himself'.<sup>591</sup>

The preceding excerpts are quite typical of 'The Ego and Its Own'. It was certainly, as Leopold said, 'provocative' in the extreme. After all, even God himself 'paled' before the piercing light of Stirner's singular 'consciousness'.

There was no central principle in Stirner's philosophy other than the 'Stirner personality' itself and it presided over his book, indeed all things, like a capricious youngster whom imagined himself an almighty and unruly king. 'If it is right for me', as Stirner decreed, 'it is right'.<sup>592</sup> 'Stirner has in effect taken the omnipotence fantasy of the child', as John Carroll astutely said, 'who believes that he has unlimited power in choice and action, and made it accessible to the

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<sup>590</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 163 - 164).

<sup>591</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 324).

<sup>592</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 170).



adult, who is soberly conscious of the ideological traps inherent in ideals fantasies'.<sup>593</sup>

Stirner did his utmost to encourage the impression, to put it very simply indeed, that he was far more authoritative and commandeering than necessarily proved the case in point. As for his 'might' it is tempting to picture it, thinking of the insect that ultimately got the better of him, as little more than a large, feathery pillow stuffed, somewhat unconvincingly, up his jumper. But that is not to say that Stirner's pillowy bluster was entirely ineffectual or uncalled for; it was, in a certain sense, absolute necessary, as indeed I intend to explain.

Firstly, one must remind oneself that 'The Ego and Its Own' was not the work of somebody who wished to *appear* to be at the mercy of a theoretical system, indeed *any* system; on the contrary, it was the work of an 'arbitrary personality' at pains to affirm his *presence*, not only in its pages but in the face of systematic thought *in toto*. Not that it was any old 'personality' but a 'one off', as it were. And the 'unique one', as Stirner brazenly referred to himself, was not the least bit obliged to adhere to the tenets of any system, even his own, if it got in the way of his immediate needs.<sup>594</sup>

If, for example, a bright idea struck Stirner, out of the blue, on Sunday afternoon as being particularly expedient, but come the evening it proved less opportune then he was perfectly entitled, he believed, to

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<sup>593</sup> John Carroll, 'Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky' ((1974 p. 41).

<sup>594</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 324).

repudiate, no less ardently, the very thing he championed earlier in the day. 'Why should different ways of looking at a thing be more surprising in the same man at different ages - sometimes even at that the same moment - than in different men'.<sup>595</sup> Stirner would have wholeheartedly agreed with Sénancour on this particular point. After all, he could not possibly be expected to anticipate his needs from one moment, let alone from one day to the next. And Stirner was certainly not willing nor duty bound to lug the same 'bright idea' around all week, let alone a lifetime, for fear of appearing skittish or contradictory. Quite the opposite, in fact. Schmidt went out of his way to create an extremely playful and unpredictable persona - the 'Stirner role' and the part called for a certain vivacious and, if needs be, erratic presence if he was to successfully convince the reader of his, rather *its* veracity.

To blindly jump to the defence of an idea, let alone an entire theoretical system, come what may, is tantamount to undermining the grounds of one's free choice not to mention the presence of one's personality. And Stirner had absolutely no intention to undermine himself in any shape or form, least of all find himself at the sharp end of the stick and answerable to an inflexible idea. 'What is it, then', Stirner asked, 'that is called a "fixed idea"? An idea that has subjected the man to itself'.<sup>596</sup>

Stirner, in stark contrast, presided over ideas. They were *his* to entertain, not vice versa. He was at perfect liberty, so he liked to imagine, to do and say exactly as he pleased. 'But I, as I, swallow up again what is mine,

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<sup>595</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. I. Translated by Barnes. (1803 / 1910 p. xxxv)

<sup>596</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 43).

am its master', Stirner crowed, 'it is only my *opinion*, which I can at any moment *change*, annihilate, take back into myself, and consume'.<sup>597</sup> Stirner did not suffer anything gladly if it impeded his apparently wanton 'self'.

Taking Schlegel or Schopenhauer's respective schemes to hand, the subject was little more to either of them than an elemental 'essence' of nature which found itself inhibited and frustrated by its 'host's' somatic and individual form. The larger 'essence' inside them *had* to be appeased. Consequently, *its* needs took precedence over the subject in whom it was 'confined' and he, the subject, duly gave way to the 'universal' power 'within' him. And, just as Schopenhauer went to enormous lengths to illustrate, *its* desires were not necessarily in line with the 'host's' best interests; if anything, they ran, more often than not, in stark contrast to them. 'The will calls the tune', as Janaway said, 'never leaves us in peace'.<sup>598</sup>

The general atmosphere of Schlegel and Schopenhauer's schemes would have appalled Stirner. Neither of them were particularly interested in the subject *per se*, not in an individual sense at any rate; they were captivated, in stark contrast, by an atramental 'principle', universal in scope, which reputedly resided 'within' the individual person. It was the wellspring of all things. The person hardly mattered. "What does the loss of this individuality matter to me?", as Schopenhauer asked himself, 'for I carry within myself the possibility of

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<sup>597</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 300).

<sup>598</sup> Christopher Janaway, 'The real essence of human beings: Schopenhauer and the unconscious will' collected in 'Thinking the Unconscious. Nineteenth-Century German Thought' (2010 p. 155).

innumerable individualities"'.<sup>599</sup>

While they talked, in heightened tones, of the subject's 'inmost' essence, Schlegel and Schopenhauer were rather less well disposed to his definitive, singular state. It was an all out 'illusion', if Schopenhauer was to be believed. But, in Stirner's opinion, the so called 'illusion' was nothing other than the subject *himself* - the central figure around which Schopenhauer's scheme was said to revolve. Their 'concern' for man, as Stirner would have indubitably concluded, was nothing more than a general 'theoretical' concern for 'man the idea', not 'man the person'.

True, Schopenhauer's subject 'intervened' but his intervention, catastrophic as it was, worked to the further advantage of nature's will, as indeed I argued, rather than his own (it all too conveniently, if you remember, purged the will of an antagonistic and dangerous influence). Whether Schopenhauer's subject affirmed the will or refuted it, he found himself, either way, at a loss; he was, ultimately, subordinate to 'it'. He lost out, as it were, on both counts. 'The individual in humanist thought', as John Welsh wrote, 'is a mere vessel that carries the universal in a physical, particular form. The person, in his or her particularity, does not matter to humanism or modern thought. The individual, the particular, is subordinate to the essence'.<sup>600</sup>

Stirner, on the other hand, was not the least bit

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<sup>599</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation' Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 491).

<sup>600</sup> John F. Welsh, 'Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation' (2010 p. 65).

interested in, nor 'subordinate' to any sort of visceral 'essence', elemental or not, as it pertained to the common stock of mankind, its root basis, rather than *the* man himself. Needless to say, Stirner did not consider himself, to paraphrase Welsh, a 'mere vessel' within whom a far greater force was at play. Rather it was the 'vessel' itself which took precedence in 'The Ego and Its Own'; it appertained, after all, to the subject's *intrinsic* state rather than an *extrinsic* 'idea'.

Stirner took it upon himself, as a matter of necessity, to counteract the torpid 'idea' of the subject's 'essence' with a lively, if exaggerated depiction of the his multifaceted 'personality'. The 'un-man', as Stirner declared, 'rejects everything outside himself'.<sup>601</sup> He 'recognizes nothing but himself', Stirner said, and 'rates nothing higher, because, in short, he starts from himself'.<sup>602</sup> And faithfully reflecting Stirner's intentions, the reader is confronted with an obdurate, arbitrary and egocentric 'personality' whom one cannot simply ignore or, for that matter, put neatly and tidily into a pigeonhole. 'To be a man', as Stirner maintained, 'is not to realize the ideal of man, but to present oneself, the individual. It is not how I realize the generally human that needs to be my task, but how I satisfy myself. I am my species, am without norm, without law, without model, and the like'.<sup>603</sup>

Granted, there may well have been a certain 'staginess' to 'The Ego and its Own', but given the focus of Stirner's argument, talking, as condemningly as he did,

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<sup>601</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 149).

<sup>602</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 149).

<sup>603</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 163 - 164).

about the 'dispersonating' and dehumanising character of abstract thought, he no doubt felt obliged to make a *conspicuous* effort to prove to the reader he was not similarly culpable. It was absolutely necessary, given the point he wished to make, for Stirner to 'overcompensate', as it were. A certain amount of extra 'hot air' was needed which Stirner more than duly supplied. That Stirner recognised the potential 'pitfall' and 'moved in' to his work to enliven it with his presence, for better or worse, was, to repeat the point, to his enormous credit.

'In Max Stirner', as Nikolai Berdyaev wrote in 'Slavery and Freedom' (1939), 'in spite of the falsity of his philosophy, true personalism is to be found, but in a distorted form'.<sup>604</sup> Putting aside, for the mean time, Berdyaev's opinion of his philosophy, the Russian critic was almost certainly correct in identifying a fundamentally important characteristic of Stirner's work: its 'distorted personalism', as he astutely described it. 'One consequence of this anarchist indifference towards systematic theory', if one turns once again to John Carroll, 'is that *Der Einzige* gains from a gaiety and buoyancy of style, which in itself adds a dimension to its thesis'.<sup>605</sup>

'The Ego and Its Own' does not, as a consequence, conform to all the customary rules or expectations of a standard theoretical work. It exceeds those bounds, if only in intention. The 'Max Stirner personality' was the quintessential idea itself. And it was, in two words,

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<sup>604</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, 'Slavery and Freedom' (1939 / 1943 p. 34).

<sup>605</sup> John Carroll, 'Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky' ((1974 p. 27).

unclassifiable and ineffable. 'No *concept* expresses me', as Stirner argued, 'nothing that is designated as my essence exhausts me; they are only names'.<sup>606</sup>

Stirner's chief 'trick', so to speak, consisted of softening up the sharp lines that, in some instances, seem to separate certain books from their authors. One need only remember the horribly disingenuous concluding passages of Schopenhauer's doctrine; it was, as it staggered limply towards its end, simply bereft of Schopenhauer. In fact, it did away with him, quite literally, to reach its conclusion. The philosopher's doctrine, to put it another way, took Schopenhauer roughly by the hand in order to reach *its* conclusion and, as a matter of due course, *his* ultimate end.

Stirner, by contrast, was not the least bit inclined to follow suit and let the same thing happen to him. He did not wish to relinquish his grasp of himself so readily. Stirner was answerable, he firmly believed, to himself and himself alone.

Stirner aspired to extend himself, for want of a better expression, to the pages of 'The Ego and Its Own' and, if nothing else, put himself beyond the sharp end of his own tongue. Whether Stirner, to put it bluntly, 'pulled it off' or not remains, for the time being, a matter for later consideration, but it was certainly a novel and comparatively inventive way of going about things.

'Stirner', turning to Saul Newman, 'gives us, then, a new way of thinking about the subject - the subject is no longer defined by essential properties and characteristics that are said to mirror broader humanity,

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<sup>606</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 324).

but rather should be thought of as a mode of subjectivation that is open, indefinable and freely determined by the egoist'.<sup>607</sup>

Stirner capitalised on the greater number of opportunities that came his way to 'reveal his personality' and its manifold moods. The reader is constantly reminded that he or she has 'living and breathing' character on their hands rather than a rigid and formal set of theoretical ideas. Stirner was extremely eager, if not more than a little desperate at times, to 'make an impression'. He had absolutely no shame.

Stirner even saw it 'fair game' to say the most ridiculous of things purely and simply for the thrill of shocking the reader in a determined bid to appear awkward and contrary. 'Even if I foresaw that these thoughts would deprive you of your rest and your peace', as Stirner goaded us, 'even if I saw the bloodiest wars and the fall of many generations springing up from this seed of thought - I would nevertheless scatter it. Do with it what you will and can, that is your affair and does not trouble me'.<sup>608</sup>

Stirner's intentions are transparently clear. He explicitly set out to unsettle the reader, to jar and knock them off balance and, apparently, took an enormous amount of pleasure in doing just that. Stirner aspired to soften, if not blur the boundaries between 'the theoretical' and 'the ontological' in a determined bid to elude classification. It made it a rather more difficult

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<sup>607</sup> Saul Newman, 'Introduction: Re-encountering Stirner's Ghosts' collected in 'Max Stirner' (2011 p. 8).

<sup>608</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 263).



than it might otherwise have been to evaluate Stirner's 'ideas' along strictly theoretical lines. After all, the reader or would be critic is not confronted with a straightforward doctrine, but an aberrant and unpredictable 'personality'. It is one thing, resorting to an extremely simplistic explanation, to criticise ideas as either being 'right' or 'wrong'; in the most basic sense, they either conform to the theoretical system one has set out or not, but it is quite another to pass judgement on an apparent 'personality', more especially when it is said to be unprecedented and entirely 'unique' and not the least bit inclined to advocate anything but passing whims and fancies.

One must be mindful of Stirner's 'intentions' and take them, as I have already warned, with a healthy pinch of salt. He had an elaborate bag of tricks by his side and dipped in and out of it with such expertise that it is extremely difficult to appreciate the full extent of his trickery. One must first recognise the point Stirner wished to prove to the reader and the means by which he sought to achieve it. In other words, one must recognise the 'personalism' of Stirner's 'work' and the great lengths he went to to convince the reader of his so called 'reality'.

At its very worst, the 'Stirner personality' bordered on the unbearable; so much so that one may even empathise, *to an indescribable degree*, with *Arghol*, a character in Wyndham Lewis' play, 'The Enemy of the Stars' (1914), who, presumably out of sheer exasperation, hurled 'The Ego and Its Own' out of his bedroom window.<sup>609</sup> That is not to say, by any means, that Stirner's approach was not

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<sup>609</sup> See Wyndham Lewis, 'Blast', No. 1 (1914 / 1981).

without its merits, but it did give 'The Ego and Its Own' a decidedly playful, if rather contrived and tiresome air.

It is sorely tempting to level something D. H. Lawrence wrote in Stirner's direction: 'A good actor', Lawrence said, 'can assume a personality: he can never assume an individuality'.<sup>610</sup> And Stirner's effusive display did little more than concoct a 'personality' but it fell well short of convincing the reader of his individuality.

'The Ego and Its Own' is an extremely exhausting work. It is alluring as it is repelling and just as Arghol's copy was immediately returned to him, having thrown it out of his window, the fundamental gist of 'The Ego and Its Own' is not so easily dismissed or forgotten.

Stirner actively encouraged individuals to 'find' whatever they were looking for in themselves rather than an adventitious idea. It amounted, I believe, to Stirner's greatest accomplishment. His affected manner was brash, even insufferable, but it served a noble aim. Stirner was determined to disabuse the intellectual world of its fanciful and outlandish ideas. Especially dualistic notions which, in his opinion, set an unearthly 'spirit' against the person in whom it resided. The 'spirit' as such can only be outside of men, beyond the human world, not earthly', as Stirner complained.<sup>611</sup> All of the turgid ideas bandied round regarding the subject's very being were counterproductive, if not severely injurious, Stirner believed. Ultimately, they did little but undermine the person himself for the fulfillment of

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<sup>610</sup> D. H. Lawrence, 'Reflections of the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays' (1925 p. 75).

<sup>611</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 33).

some 'greater' theoretical objective which had, in a personal capacity, little to do with him or anyone else in particular. The 'earthly' invariably gave way to the 'unearthly'. 'Just recognize yourselves again', as Stirner demanded of us, 'just recognize what you really are, and let go your hypocritical endeavours, your foolish mania to be something else than you are'.<sup>612</sup>

### III. THE INVERTED SNOB

We are, at this stage, more than familiar with the condescending air of both Schlegel and Schopenhauer's schemes. 'Only through the relationship to the infinite', as we have heard Schlegel say on numerous occasions, 'do content and utility arise; that which is not related to it is merely void and useless'.<sup>613</sup> Schopenhauer's tone was no less supercilious: 'the will alone is real, while its objects, on the other hand, as conditioned by knowledge, are only phenomena, mere froth and vapour'.<sup>614</sup> Given their shared predilection for the 'universal', the individual subject came a poor second best to his 'inmost essence'. He was put alongside an infinite measure and Schlegel and Schopenhauer's inherent bias towards all that was 'big' and 'immutable' worked to his further disadvantage.

The logical conclusion of these upshot of events? The individual was obviously 'insignificant', but Schlegel and Schopenhauer's assessment took nothing of the subject's *personal* qualities into account. He was 'insignificant' not because he happened to be a

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<sup>612</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 149).

<sup>613</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 149).

<sup>614</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Parerga and Paralipomena', Vol. II (1851 / 1974 p. 270). 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 500).

particularly daft person, but, in the simplest of terms, he was infinitesimal compared to the far larger and more durable 'essence' within him. What he was like as a person did not even enter the fray, it hardly mattered. 'But, as he takes', as Stirner wrote, 'little heed of what you are *privatim* - indeed, in a strict following out of his principle sets no value at all on it - he sees in you only what you are *generatim*'.<sup>615</sup>

'Nothing is serious', if you happen to remember something S nancour said in an earlier chapter, 'if it be not lasting'.<sup>616</sup> 'Let us value lightly', he said, 'that which perishes quickly'.<sup>617</sup> This was exactly the sort of attitude that Stirner found so very objectionable. And, like S nancour, neither Schlegel nor Schopenhauer displayed much in the way of patience for all that was singular, personal and earthly. Their shared enthusiasm for all that was 'eternal', 'universal' and 'far reaching' had neglected, in Stirner's opinion, the very things that were, so to speak, 'under their nose'. 'This foreign standpoint', as Stirner tried to explain, 'is the *world of mind*, of ideas, thoughts, concepts, essences; it is *heaven*. Heaven is the "standpoint" from which the earth is moved, earthly doings surveyed and - despised'.<sup>618</sup>

Stirner did not regard himself in spiritual terms, not that he disavowed his spiritual essence, but he was simply at a loss to explain why 'it', of all his qualities, should be singled out as his most definitive

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<sup>615</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 155).

<sup>616</sup>  tienne Pivert de S nancour, 'Obermann', Vol. II (1804 / 1901 p. 185).

<sup>617</sup>  tienne Pivert de S nancour, 'Obermann', Vol. II (1804 / 1901 p. 187).

<sup>618</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 59).

when it reflected so very little of him. It was, by comparison, the least expressive of them all. 'Stirner does not deny the existence of external causes', as John Welsh also said. 'He denies', he continued to say, 'their legitimacy. He rejects the claim that external causes are the absolute source of meaning and allegiance. He rejects the claim that external causes are everything and that the person is nothing'.<sup>619</sup>

The 'world spirit' belonged as much to Schopenhauer as it did to you, me or anyone else for that matter. It hardly reflected Stirner's standing as an individual figure. 'The spirit', as Stirner made explicitly clear, 'is something other than myself'.<sup>620</sup> "'I" and "spirit"', he wrote elsewhere, 'are not names for one and the same thing, but different names for completely different things'.<sup>621</sup> The 'spirit' was nothing more than a crude groupish notion and, as we know, Stirner abhorred *all* forms of collectivism. And the 'spirit', in Stirner's opinion, was up there with the worst of them all.

If one raised some objections and complained of the contempt Schlegel and Schopenhauer displayed towards their respective subjects they would have wholeheartedly agreed with Amiel when he wrote: 'It is rather the sense of the absolute and the infinite reducing to their proper value and relegating to their proper place the finite and the relative'.<sup>622</sup> While Amiel accurately describes the reasoning behind Schlegel and Schopenhauer's lowly estimation of the subject's 'finite' and 'relative'

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<sup>619</sup> John F. Welsh, 'Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation' (2010 p. 48).

<sup>620</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 35).

<sup>621</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 33).

<sup>622</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 159).

position compared to his inestimable 'essence', it hardly begins to reflect Stirner's opinion. In his particular example, the very opposite was true. It was rather a case, if one rearranges a few of Amiel's words, of the 'the finite and the relative reducing to their proper value and relegating to the proper place the absolute and the infinite'. A similar point was made by John P. Clark in his slim but no less observant study, 'Max Stirner's Egoism' (1976). Clark wrote, 'instead of the absorption of the individual into the Absolute, he proposes a total reabsorption of the Absolute (or Spirit in any form) into the individual ego, its original creator'.<sup>623</sup>

In the preceding chapter, you may remember the language Schopenhauer employed when he spoke of the finite subject; it was extremely dismissive. It was littered with 'merelys' and 'onlys': the individual was 'merely' *this* or 'only' *that*. Schlegel was, as we know, no less condescending. 'Everyone's view of poetry is true and good as far as that view itself is poetry', as Schlegel wrote. 'But since one's poetry', as he went on to say, 'is limited, just because it is one's own, so one's view of poetry must of necessity be limited. The mind cannot bear this; no doubt because, without knowing it, it nevertheless does know that no man is merely man, but that at the same time he can and should be genuinely and truly all mankind'.<sup>624</sup>

Not that Stirner was any less 'guilty', as it were, but his 'snobbishness' was of a completely different order. Stirner spoke of the 'infinite' and 'universal' in more or less the same supercilious, disdainful tones which

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<sup>623</sup> John P. Clark, 'Max Stirner's Egoism' (1976 p. 11).

<sup>624</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms' (1797 - 1800 / 1968 p. 54).

Schlegel and Schopenhauer had used to describe the subject's singular state.

We hear, for instance, Stirner complain: "'man" is only a thought, a generality'.<sup>625</sup> Elsewhere we read: 'Man is something only as *my quality* like masculinity or femininity'.<sup>626</sup> Again, to cite another example, we come across: 'Man with a capital M is only an ideal, the species only something thought of'.<sup>627</sup> We read on another page: 'The long and short of it is this: that we are men is the slightest thing about us, and has significance only in so far as it is one of our *qualities*, our property'.<sup>628</sup> And, finally, to round off the rapid succession of quotations, we hear Stirner say: 'I am the ego of this my mere quality'.<sup>629</sup>

The case of the individual *against* his inimical 'essence' had to be made and a place for him *firmly* secured. Not on the terms dictated to him by a deliquescent 'power', but, purely and simply, those of his own making. Stirner's express intention was to bring the subject's 'essence' down a peg or two; to evaluate 'it' in accordance with the egocentric needs and peculiarities of the individual subject. 'It is', as Stirner wrote, 'egoistic to ascribe to no thing a value of its own, an "absolute" value, but to seek its value in me'.<sup>630</sup> However grandiose his 'inmost nature' was said to be, Stirner refused to let *it* dominate *him*. 'I am not this spirit: it is mine, not I its', as we have heard him say.<sup>631</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 275).

<sup>626</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 163).

<sup>627</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 163 - 164).

<sup>628</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 156 - 157).

<sup>629</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 159).

<sup>630</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 152).

<sup>631</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 157).

Stirner saw no better way to redress the balance than come up with a 'counter man' whom he called the 'un-man'. He was, to jog your memory, the complete opposite of both Schlegel's 'poet' and Schopenhauer's 'knowing subject'. 'To say in blunt words what an un-man is', as Stirner explained, 'is not particularly hard: it is a man who does not correspond to the *concept* man'.<sup>632</sup> In stark contrast to Schlegel and Schopenhauer, Stirner extolled the very virtues they dismissed and belittled in a determined effort to square up the account. The subject's ephemeral, singular bodily state was not so readily dismissed and his 'essence' not nearly as 'monumental' or definitive as one had been led to believe, not compared to the 'might' of Stirner's 'ego'.

Stirner went on the offensive. He took immediate 'possession' of whatever 'universal' essence that was said to lurk about inside him and relegated 'it' - for it was nothing but an impersonal 'it', to its 'proper' place (even if he stood on an upturned and rather unsteady box to do so). Having gained a few 'extra inches', as it were, Stirner 'peered down' on the 'universal' and the like just as Schlegel and Schopenhauer had done with the 'finite' and 'singular'.

'But do I still remain an un-man', as Stirner asked with his tongue firmly in his cheek, 'even if I bring man (who towered above me and remained other-worldly to me only as my ideal, my task, my essence or concept) down to be my quality, my own and inherent in me; so that man is nothing else than my humanity, my human existence, and everything that I do is human precisely because I do it,

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<sup>632</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 159).



but not because it corresponds to the concept "man"?'.<sup>633</sup>  
The answer was, of course, in the affirmative. The 'un-  
man' did not allow himself to be possessed by his  
'essence'; instead, he brought 'it' down to *his* level -  
the ground floor, in order to 'possess' it and exert his  
dominance over it.

The tables had turned.

Stirner referred to himself, rather antagonistically, as  
'the transitory, individual ego'; I say  
'antagonistically' as he knew full well it was not  
customary to prize the individual in and of himself, let  
alone go about the business of actively celebrating his  
singularity. More especially, when the 'virtues' of the  
'eternal' and 'universal' had not simply been ignored but  
considered and flatly rejected in favour of all that was  
egocentric, ephemeral and singular. It was an extremely  
antagonistic and contrary position to adopt.

Schopenhauer, for one, would have taken the bait and  
retaliated. The individual was little more in the grand  
scheme of things, as the philosopher would have pointed  
out to Stirner, than 'mere foam and froth' as he put it.  
It was certainly no cause for celebration. Stirner would  
not have necessarily disagreed with Schopenhauer, but he  
took, as one might expect, quite another line of  
argument.<sup>634</sup>

If Stirner amounted to little more than 'foam and froth'  
then so be it. It would, in that case, be his *defining*  
'foam and froth', just so long as Schopenhauer's gibe

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<sup>633</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 159).

<sup>634</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 163).

pertained *solely* to him. It would, at the very least, reflect his own 'deficient might', his own '*impotence*' and not one 'limited by the might *outside*' of him.<sup>635</sup> Stirner made a great deal of his weaknesses and deficiencies; they were all good and well, but only on the strict proviso they faithfully reflected his own 'foibles' and not those imposed on him by anything or anyone other than himself. 'My human act', as he said, 'is diverse from every other human act', as Stirner affirmed, 'and only by this diversity is it a real act belonging to me'. Stirner was certainly not going to be made to feel inadequate or diminutive by the sharp and unsavoury methods practiced by the likes of Schopenhauer, Schlegel and Amiel, all of whom employed, as we have heard, an 'infinite measure' to crudely assess an individual's comparative worth.

'It is possible that I can make very little out of myself', as Stirner admitted, 'but this little is everything, and is better than what I allow to be made out of me by the might of others'.<sup>636</sup> Even Stirner's 'beggarly' state was *significantly greater* than anything 'imparted' to him by a third party. 'What is imparted', as Stirner made quite clear, 'is *alien* to us, is not our own'.<sup>637</sup> Even the 'universal' and the 'infinite' paled by comparison. They did not, after all, appertain to the subject's determinate, individual person but his 'essence' which was something else entirely. 'For me', as Stirner maintained, 'there is no truth, for nothing is more than I! Not even my essence, not even the essence of man, is more than I, above me, this "drop in the bucket",

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<sup>635</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 189).

<sup>636</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 163 - 164).

<sup>637</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 62).

this "insignificant man"!'.<sup>638</sup> If Stirner was 'insignificant', he would be 'insignificant' on *his* own terms; he would 'form himself according to his own will' not one prescribed to him by a hospitable or inhospitable force of nature as Schlegel and Schopenhauer had done.<sup>639</sup>

#### IV. THE MISCONSTRUED PERFORMANCE

Stirner's uncustomary 'technique' has received, as one might expect, a mixed reception. In certain instances, it has been unfair, whilst in others, it has been extremely unkind. Stirner's 'performance' has almost certainly been misunderstood.

Take R. W. K. Paterson's 'The Nihilistic Egoist' (1971), for example. '*Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum* is arguably', as Peterson imagined, 'the most complete and uncompromising of all nihilist manifestos. Seldom if ever have the world-view of nihilism and the existential posture of the nihilistic individual been depicted in such convincing detail and with such disturbing candour'.<sup>640</sup> Paterson argued that 'The Ego and Its Own' was a 'private play', a work of 'autobiographical fiction'.<sup>641</sup> Stirner was playing a 'role', Paterson suggested, namely that of the 'nihilistic egoist' and largely invalidated any claims to validity 'The Ego and Its Own' might otherwise have had.

It was an entirely indulgent and 'nihilistic' project, Patterson continued. 'Perhaps indeed the answer', as he pontificated, 'is that we are not intended to take

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<sup>638</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 313).

<sup>639</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 163 - 164).

<sup>640</sup> R. W. K. Paterson, 'The Nihilistic Egoist' (1971 p. 252).

<sup>641</sup> R. W. K. Paterson, 'The Nihilistic Egoist' (1971 p. 302).

Stirner's philosophy "seriously". In *Der Einzige* Stirner celebrates frivolity, irresponsibility, scepticism, and irreverence towards all things, and he does not seek to exempt himself from the eruption of absurdity over which he presides. Perhaps The Unique One implicitly acknowledges that, since all things are absurd, his own philosophy of the Absurd is equally an absurdity'.<sup>642</sup>

Paterson was by no means an unobservant critic. He was astute enough to recognise 'The Ego and Its Own' as a 'private play', as he called it, but he was clearly left more than a little confused by Stirner's 'performance'. Not that Paterson was alone. Stirner was evidently playing some sort of a 'role', but certainly not the one Paterson earmarked for him. Needless to say, I do not share his assessment of Max Stirner as a 'nihilist', 'absurd' or otherwise. Nothing could be further from the truth, as I intend to explain.

Paterson was the not only critic who held a derogatory opinion of 'The Ego and Its Own'. If we turn to Stephen Lukes, his estimation of Stirner's work was no less disparaging and, again, it hinged, to some extent, on a misinterpretation of Stirner's 'performance'. 'The German idea of individuality', Lukes wrote, 'has had a remarkable history. Having begun as a cult of individual genius and originality, especially as applied to the artist, stressing the conflict between individual and society and the supreme value of subjectivity, solitude, and introspection, it developed along various lines. In one direction, it led to an uninhibited quest for eccentricity and to the purest egoism and social nihilism. This development found perhaps its most extreme

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<sup>642</sup> R. W. K. Paterson, 'The Nihilistic Egoist' (1971 p. 298).

expression in the thought of Max Stirner, whose "individualism" amounted to an amoral and anti-intellectualistic vision'.<sup>643</sup>

Lukes was, in certain respects, quite correct. Stirner's 'ego' was, if nothing else, unquestionably 'uninhibited'; it knew no bounds and transgressed all conventions, as Stirner was keen to remind us, but rather than address it here, I prefer to cut myself short and return to the troublesome matter of Stirner's 'ego' at a subsequent stage of the chapter.

Stirner's 'quest', to return your attention to Lukes' contribution, was, in all likelihood, an 'eccentric' one (even if his 'eccentricity' was somewhat forced). Not that it was entirely unwarranted, as I previously explained. A point, nonetheless, apparently lost on both Lukes and Paterson, neither of whom, I believe, fully appreciated, indeed misconstrued the very point of Stirner's vagarious 'display'. Lukes was no less justified than Paterson to think of Stirner as an 'anti-intellectual' who advocated, of all things, 'social nihilism'. Once again, nothing could be further from the truth.

Stirner was neither a 'nihilist' nor an 'anti-intellectual'. These were, I believe, the very tendencies Stirner sought to extirpate in 'The Ego and Its Own'. Let me begin by addressing the first point of contention: Stirner's so called 'nihilism'.

Rather than being a 'nihilist' as Paterson, in particular, seemed at pains to point out, among other

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<sup>643</sup> Steven Lukes, 'The Meanings of "Individualism"' (1971 p. 55).

outrageous things, in his decidedly prejudicial study, Stirner strikes me as being anything but 'nihilistic'. The opposite, seems to me, to have been much closer to the truth. 'The dark pessimism, the hesitancy of Will, and the disaffection with life symptomatic of the nihilist are not', as John Carroll quite rightly said, 'to be found in Stirner - rather the contrary'.<sup>644</sup> 'The Ego and Its Own' was characterised by a spirit of *affirmation* rather than anything else.

Schopenhauer's scheme, if truth be told, had a far more 'nihilistic' feel to it. After all, the philosopher vehemently objected to nothing other than the very grounds of life itself, the will-to-live and, as we know, saw better, regardless of *the* capital drawback, not to affirm it but extricate himself from its despotic influence once and for all.

Schopenhauer's renunciative doctrine constitutes a perfect foil to the affirmative tones of 'The Ego and Its Own'. In the most fundamental sense, Schopenhauer was inimical to life whereas Stirner was its advocate and staunchly rebuked all that opposed it. Stirner would not have been the least bit sympathetic to the measures, fatal as they were, Schopenhauer took to 'liberate' himself, theoretically speaking, from nature's will. It was tantamount to submission and, regardless of the philosopher's insistence to the contrary, his doctrine eventually got the better of him. Schopenhauer's idea triumphed, not the 'subject of knowledge'; he forsook, after all, his very hold on life, to gain his reputed 'triumph'. What, then, was left of Schopenhauer's

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<sup>644</sup> John Carroll, 'Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky' ((1974 p. 108).

subject? A naught, a plain and stark zero.

That Schopenhauer found no other solution than deny his very existence to escape his own theoretical system was not a method Stirner would have even considered, let alone advocated. Schopenhauer's example illustrated precisely the sort of perversion of values - 'nihilism' if you will, of which Stirner reproved. The fact that Schopenhauer brought it all on himself would have provoked Stirner's further castigation and ridicule.

We are faced with something of an odd position. Schopenhauer objected to nature's will just as Stirner would indubitably have done, but the two objected to it for an entirely different set of reasons. Schopenhauer saw the world as a seething, deterministic expression of will. It was an incontestable truth. The resultant turn of events meant the philosopher dismissed all that was palpable, demonstrable and earthly as an insubstantial, nightmarish illusion. It was all the doing of an invisible, malevolent and incomprehensible force of nature, but a great deal of damage had been done along the way.

The senses had been warped, standard values amounted to nothing, as did one's volition and the world had been turned upside down and inside out. The 'real' was transformed into the 'unreal' and vice versa. It heralded, as I believe Stirner would have said of Schopenhauer's doctrine, a 'reversing and deranging of the world, a busying with the essence of the world, therefore a madness'.<sup>645</sup> One was not even sure of oneself in the ensuing 'madness'. In fact, if Schopenhauer was to

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<sup>645</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 299 - 300).

be believed, one was nothing more than one's own inborn enemy. Given the situation, one was best advised to hatch one's escape and take evasive action as quickly as possible. To vacate, in other words, the contested grounds of self for the 'safe haven' of non-self where one would assuredly feel 'nothing'.

Stirner, on the other hand, would have objected to Schopenhauer's doctrine of will on the grounds that it was little more than a suppositious *idea* and a decidedly pernicious one at that. Stirner, as I previously explained, recognised the folly of defending ideas if they did not suit or reflect *his* immediate needs. 'Stirner begins', as Welsh said, 'with the assertion that the person's values, perspectives, and interests are more important than the assertions and demands by the external agents or "causes". He vows to fight external demands and redefine his life as his own cause'.<sup>646</sup> And Stirner could have easily done without a world will on his shoulders, rather down below, plaguing him with the sum total of its desires if they were not strictly attuned to his own.

Stirner implored people to think for themselves; it was, by far, the most pressing demand he made of them, as I have maintained. It may well have been, I readily admit, of the 'make what you will with it' variety but, like almost anything, Stirner's advice could and can be put to *destructive* as well as *constructive* ends. It all depends, of course, on one's particular egocentric wishes - the very thing Stirner encouraged the reader to prioritise in the first place. 'This radical denial, the final demonic Nay-saying', as Stepelevich similarly observed, 'can

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<sup>646</sup> John F. Welsh, 'Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation' (2010 p. 46).



stand as either a beginning or an end'.<sup>647</sup> I certainly prefer to regard Stirner's 'nay-saying' in a positive light, as a 'beginning' in other words, rather than representing anything so gloomy or 'nihilistic', for want of a better expression, as an 'end'.

Stirner attempted to *confront* the 'nihilistic' tendencies that appeared to characterise his times. None more so, I believe, than those promoted by the likes of Arthur Schopenhauer.

Let us, for example, compare the beginning of 'The Ego and Its Own' with the very last words of Arthur Schopenhauer's definitive work, 'The World as Will and Representation'.

1). Stirner begins: 'all things are nothing to me'.<sup>648</sup> His opening words were, by the way, taken from the first line of Goethe's poem, 'Vanitas! Vanitatum vanitas!'

2). Schopenhauer ends: 'to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is - nothing'.<sup>649</sup>

Both writers, it seems, had a 'nothing' on their hands, so to speak. But Stirner's 'nothing' was considerably more affirmative than Schopenhauer's 'nothing'. Stirner started off with a 'nothing' and ended up with a 'something', himself. Whereas Schopenhauer started off with a 'something', himself, and ended up with a

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<sup>647</sup> Lawrence S. Stepelevich, 'The Revival of Max Stirner' (1974 p. 328).

<sup>648</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 5).

<sup>649</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 412).

'nothing' at all.

Stirner immediately came to his 'nothing' by adjudging the world, from the very beginning, according to his own sensibilities and ended up *affirming* them in spite of every trial and tribulation that conspired to thwart him. Schopenhauer, in stark contrast, eventually arrived at his 'nothing', on the four hundred and twelfth page of his philosophical work, by giving in to all that impeded *his* needs, futile as they were, for the sake of peace and quiet - a release, in other words, from nothing other than life and, ultimately, himself.

The fruition of the later, compared to that of former, was considerably more affirmative. Rather than provoking a fight with himself and sacrificing his own head to reach his objective, as Schopenhauer was clearly intent on doing, Stirner came to the same conclusion by openly affirming, rather than claiming to 'deny' himself, his bodily self. Stirner wished to embrace life as well as himself whereas Schopenhauer longed to rid himself of the dratted two, baneful as they were. 'Stirner's reference to Goethe's poem is not', as John Welsh corroborated, 'a capitulation to nihilistic despair, but an affirmation that individual fulfillment cannot be found in external causes where meaning, values, and ideals are imposed on the person'.<sup>650</sup>

'Well, the world is "empty", is "naught"', as Stirner complained, 'is only dazzling "semblance"'.<sup>651</sup> But rather than celebrate the grim state of affairs, Stirner fiercely opposed it. The 'naught', on this occasion, was

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<sup>650</sup> John F. Welsh, 'Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation' (2010 p. 47).

<sup>651</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 36).

not worthy of celebration; it described the wholly reductive influence of the world spirit (nature's will) on nothing other than the world itself. The spirit or will, whatever one prefers to call 'it', had 'degraded' the world to little more than a manifest image of something infinitely more important, namely itself (just as Schopenhauer had done). And *its* needs inexplicably supplanted people's own; they were 'trivial' by comparison and not to be encouraged, let alone pursued in and of themselves. The advantage lay with the universal concept.

'The outer world of things', referring to a particularly perceptive passage by Bertram M. Laing, 'is degraded by comparing it with the inner real world of will. Why the will should have this superior significance attached to it is left unjustified... The fact that the will is one and undivided or that unity alone is applicable to it while multiplicity is found in the world of things does not testify to any superiority of the will... And, further, if the relation between the thing-in-itself and the external world is what is expressed as objectification, the difficulty is to see why the "inner" should be real and its objectification an illusion'.<sup>652</sup>

This, I believe, was precisely the point Stirner wished to make. Why, as Laing asked, should the world's essence, the 'inner' as he called it, be 'real' while its 'objectification', life itself, written off as a mere 'illusion'? If the world was nothing but a reflection of will why was it any less veracious? On what grounds? What actual credence did the world spirit have in any case? Why should *it* take precedence over him? Everything about

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<sup>652</sup> Bertram M. Laing, 'Schopenhauer and Individuality' (1917 p. 182).

it, after all, was counterintuitive and, ultimately, did untold harm. Was it really worth 'deranging' the world, emptying it of all its apparent value, to suit *its* needs? Ultimately, it was a ruinous way to think, Stirner believed. 'By bringing the essence into prominence', as Stirner warned, 'one degrades the hitherto misapprehended appearance to a bare *semblance*, a deception'.<sup>653</sup> And Stirner, quite rightly, rebuked such notions for they did little more than reduce the individual, indeed everything, to an 'illusion'. Man, in turn, had been transformed into little more than a 'spook'.<sup>654</sup>

Stirner's attempt to liberate 'man the person' from 'man the generic concept' runs quite contrary to anything remotely resembling, to use Paterson's expression, a 'nihilist manifesto'.<sup>655</sup> Stirner aspired to deliver his subject, the 'un-man', from 'all wrappings' and all 'cramping shells' by encouraging him to think for himself and value things according to his *own* sensibilities rather than those imposed on him by a largely suppositious power that was said to menace about 'within' him. It was, to reiterate the point, the most insistent drive of 'The Ego and Its Own'. 'Therefore', as Stirner implored, 'turn to yourselves rather than to your gods or idols. Bring out from yourselves what is in you, bring it to the light, bring yourselves to revelation'.<sup>656</sup> It can hardly be described, by any stretch of the imagination, as being the least bit 'nihilistic'. '*Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum*', as Scott Klein corroborated, 'asserts the truth of the self, and attempts to establish its

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<sup>653</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 40).

<sup>654</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 247).

<sup>655</sup> R. W. K. Paterson, 'The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner' (1971 p. 252).

<sup>656</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 146).

independence from society's falsehoods and the limitations of the real by declaring that the self is all-sufficient, its own master and owner'.<sup>657</sup>

Let us now turn to the second point of contention, Stirner's reputed 'anti-intellectualism'.

True, Stirner objected to the 'world of mind', as he derisively referred to it, but his antipathy towards the said 'world' was not that of the willful idiot or unprincipled degenerate, far from it.<sup>658</sup> The 'world of mind' had, in Stirner's eyes, been transmogrified. It no longer pertained to that which was 'real' or meaningful but that which was 'unreal' and meaningless.

The intellectual world exerted a pernicious influence over life itself; so much so, it ran in stark opposition to it. 'Only this inverted world, the world of essences, truly exists now', as Stirner complained.<sup>659</sup> Had Stirner been familiar with 'The World as Will and Representation', he would, without question I believe, have considered Schopenhauer's doctrine among the most demeaning of them all. 'Everything that appears to you is only the phantasm of an indwelling spirit, is a ghostly "apparition"', Stirner may well have said, 'the world is to you only a "world of appearances", behind which the spirit walks'.<sup>660</sup>

It comes as little surprise that Stirner lampooned the notion of 'essences', wills and 'what-ever-nots' to the

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<sup>657</sup> Scott Klein, 'The Experiment of Vorticist Drama: Wyndham Lewis and "Enemy of the Stars"' (1991 p. 230).

<sup>658</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 59).

<sup>659</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 41).

<sup>660</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 36).

extent he did; the very suggestion that he was little more, with Schopenhauer in mind, than a spectral image of nature's will ran in absolute contradiction to intellectual sensibilities, senses and egocentric instincts. It demeaned that which was terrene, singular and demonstrable - everything Stirner considered his 'own' in favour of all that was ghoulish, invisible, mysterious and, ultimately, unknowable. 'We are surface-creatures', as Wyndham Lewis might have consoled Stirner, 'and the "truths" from beneath the surface contradict our values'.<sup>661</sup>

And in tune with Lewis' sentiments, Stirner actively set out to 'displace the authority of essences and stress the primacy of the *I*'.<sup>662</sup> He exposed, as best he could, the 'world of mind' for the thoroughly fraudulent, specious and deprivative 'world' it was, in the hope that something more personal, meaningful and celebratory might arise out of 'its' inky black shadow. '"Egoism"', as Stirner affirmed, 'calls you to joy over yourselves, to self-enjoyment'.<sup>663</sup> And Stirner set out to undermine all that inhibited an individual's ability to do just that.

'The Ego and Its Own' was certainly not the project, as Paterson and Lukes maintained, of a 'nihilistic' or 'anti-intellectual' figure; it was, rather, a tirade against the *misappropriation* of ideas. Stirner objected, not without good reason, to the grave dangers of *philosophising*. He was not inimical to the 'intellect' but sharply attuned to the destructive ends to which, if

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<sup>661</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Time and Western Man' (1927 p. 402).

<sup>662</sup> John Carroll, 'Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky' ((1974 p. 39).

<sup>663</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 148).

one was not careful, it could be directed.

The intellectual world, Stirner feared, was in the grip of abstract thought and it had done little but distort and falsify everything. With, above all else, the immediate effect of estranging himself from himself, as it were. His *essence* presided over his *presence*. That was what he had been asked to believe. Stirner, for one, was certainly not willing to entertain the prospect for a single second. It undermined his person to the advantage of an idea.

Stirner led by example. He had liberated himself, so he claimed, from theoretical conjecture - 'exorcised the so called spook' and implored others to follow suit, in the hope that ideas, once again, served people rather than plot and conspire against them. Only when individuals, fellow 'egoists', followed his example and realised for themselves the 'alien' nature of the ends they served as well as the sheer hostility and contempt with which they were treated in return, would they be able to say, along with him, that all of these derisory and meagerly 'ideas' were 'nothing to them'.

I would like, returning your attention to 'The Nihilistic Egoist', to take the opportunity to bring Paterson to task on another issue. He said, as we will hear on the following page or so, some very unkind and unwarranted things about Max Stirner. His grounds for doing so were entirely unjustified as he failed to appreciate, completely misunderstood even, Stirner's basic intentions. Paterson made Stirner something of a scapegoat to cover up his own shortcomings.

'It might well seem', Paterson said of Stirner, 'that, in his perverse insistence on utter privacy, his explicit repudiation of objective rational procedures, and his arrogant indifference to the standard meanings of the concepts he employs, he has in effect destroyed any claims to general validity, or even to general interest, which his metaphysical system might otherwise have enjoyed'.

Paterson repeatedly missed the point on several counts. In the first place, I doubt very much whether one can consider 'The Ego and Its Own' as representing anything as cohesive as a 'system'. It is far more insightful to regard Stirner's work as a playful and provocatively individualistic critique of 'systematic' constructs. After all, Stirner went to an enormous lengths to present *himself* to the reader rather than a rigid theoretical scheme. Stirner's 'performance' obviously confused and alarmed Paterson in equal measure.

As for Stirner's 'arrogant indifference', as Paterson described it, to 'standard meanings' it was not, as I have explained, entirely unjustified. Not that I would have chosen to describe Stirner's attitude as apathetic; it was, in contrast, *antipathetic*. Stirner objected, by means of an example, to one 'standard' term in popular currency in his times, 'man'. Why? For the following reason: 'man', of all things, should not be regarded as a uniform term; it had no 'standard' meaning, after all. People were not an immutable whole but a collection of conflicting individual egos; the term not only failed to reflect what it purported to represent, but turned against the very individuals who constituted it. It engendered 'a theoretical interest, namely, an interest



not for an individual or individuals ('all'), but for the idea, for man!'.<sup>664</sup> 'Standard' terms, then, had to be questioned, contested if necessary, if they were to remain meaningful. It accounts for Stirner's 'unmanning of man', as I described it elsewhere.

'The Ego and Its Own' certainly was not the work of a metaphysician. Stirner's impatience with all that was abstracted, lofty and spiritual, not to mention the emphatic importance he placed on his own determinate bodily state would suggest otherwise.<sup>665</sup> "'Does not the spirit thirst for freedom?'" , as Stirner asked. 'Alas, not my spirit alone', he replied, 'but my body too thirsts for it hourly'. 'The Ego and Its Own' was anything but a 'metaphysical system'. Although he wished to make an entirely different point, John Carroll made a similar observation. 'Stirner anticipates existentialist philosophy', Carroll said, 'in the emphasis he places on concrete, lived and living, experience, in his sustained critique of religious, moral and metaphysical ideals, and above all in the stress he places upon the *self*'.<sup>666</sup>

In the same breath, I doubt the very last thing Stirner would have been eager to endorse was any sort of claim to 'general validity'. That was precisely the sort of insipid and erroneous 'half-measure' Stirner implored the reader to reject. 'General laws...', if one turns to page 95 of 'The Ego and Its Own', 'puts the individual man in irons by the thought of humanity'.<sup>667</sup> Elsewhere, he

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<sup>664</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 113).

<sup>665</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 141).

<sup>666</sup> John Carroll, 'Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky' ((1974 p. 43).

<sup>667</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 95).

complained: 'Man is man in general'.<sup>668</sup> 'The state', as Stirner wrote on another page, 'always has the sole purpose to limit, tame, subordinate, the individual - to make him subject to some generality or other; it lasts only so long as the individual is not all in all, and it is only the clearly-marked restriction of me, my limitation, my slavery'.<sup>669</sup> To think in 'general terms' was no doubt a convenient thing to do but it did untold harm to all that was anomalous and defied categorisation, namely the Stirner 'personality' itself. It was a lumpish way to think. Stirner's was not a 'general interest', but a very *specific* interest and he was not the least bit willing to receive conventional 'wisdom' if it conflicted with his own.

'The Ego and Its Own' was a critique of *all* generic notions by a writer who sought to singularise himself first in name (the 'de-Schmidting' of Schmidt), then in deed (the ebullient Stirner 'performance'). He was not the least bit concerned with 'common pools', but the 'unique' individual. The 'Stirner role' may well have overblown, contrived, even 'arrogant' as Paterson said, but it was intended, I believe, to serve an admirable and *constructive* purpose. Stirner's objective was not, to belabour the point, the least bit 'nihilistic' nor, for that matter, was he dead set against 'the intellect'; he actively encouraged one to use nothing but one's intellectual faculties to counteract the deadening generalisations abound in philosophical circles.

It is not necessarily 'essential' but certainly helpful, in this respect, to consider 'The Ego and Its Own' in a

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<sup>668</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 162).

<sup>669</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 201).

comparative sense. To familiarise oneself with the likes of Schopenhauer, Schlegel, Amiel *et al* brings out certain qualities in Stirner's work that might otherwise be lost, misconstrued or unappreciated. Those acquainted with the work of the aforementioned figures may well be better placed to appreciate the reasoning behind Stirner's 'performance' and more sympathetic to the point he wished to make.

The 'Stirner personality' was an intentional *counterpoint* to all theoretical schemes which betrayed an alarming *absence* of their 'masters' (the vacant 'The Dialogue on Poetry', to name one). 'The Ego and Its Own' depicted the *presence* of the 'Stirner personality' in all its vicissitudes and it flew in the face of all the dispersonating, immutable and lifeless schemes which preceded his own. 'I write', Stirner declared, 'because I want to procure for *my* thoughts an existence in the world'.<sup>670</sup> And 'The Ego and Its Own' was a means by which Stirner did just that. He was *extant* and *present* between its covers, at least, it was the impression Stirner was eager to create.

One need only cast one's mind back to Friedrich Schlegel to appreciate Stirner's divergence from, for want of a better expression, the 'romantic norm'. Schlegel saw better of 'presence', as it were; his 'gestatory' vision placed unparalleled importance on that which had yet to come into existence. Absence, in Schlegel's opinion, intimated something far grander, incalculably more profound than anything that was immediately present.

All this was, I believe, lost on Paterson, but he had, as

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<sup>670</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 263).

it turns out, quite another agenda on his hands. 'A case might well be made, then', as he imagined, 'that the self-absorption, the destructiveness, and the negativism advocated and practiced in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* represent the conceptual expression of the paranoid schizophrenia suffered by the philosopher who was at once the book's author and its subject'.<sup>671</sup> Wyndham Lewis made a similar, if more general point in 'Paleface' (1929) that may well have appealed to the suppositious clinical practices favoured by Paterson: 'Yet there are still a great number of just the same sort of *physical romantics*, as they might be classified. But usually we find them a little apologetic and uneasy or full of an epileptic movement and borrowing more and more from madness to substantiate their dream'.<sup>672</sup>

Stirner obviously intended, paraphrasing Lewis, to 'substantiate' something, but it was not, in his mind, a 'dream' but a palpable 'reality'. Whether Stirner 'borrowed' anything from 'madness' is anyone's guess and, frankly, barely worthy of speculation. Whether Stirner was 'mad' or not is irrelevant and of absolutely no consequence; it fails to contribute a single insightful or constructive point to the debate concerning 'The Ego and Its Own' other than highlight Paterson's desperation to undermine Stirner by any means. That its author was its subject hardly warrants such severe and mean criticism. If one were to take Paterson's lead, the entire history of European and Russian literature would, in all likelihood, be nothing but a lengthy case study in schizophrenia. One need only think of Dostoevsky's 'The Double' (18\*\*), Lagerkvist's 'The Dwarf' (194\*) or Knut

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<sup>671</sup> R. W. K. Paterson, 'The Nihilistic Egoist' (1971 p. 18).

<sup>672</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Paleface. The Philosophy of the "Melting-Pot"' (1929 p. 151).

Hamsun's 'Mysteries' (189\*), all of which 'tackle' the theme of duplicity and 'doubledom' but that is not to say that any of the authors were necessarily 'schizophrenic'.

'His study', as John Welsh said of Paterson's, 'is founded on a judgment of Stirner's insanity, but seeks to establish the psychological character of Stirner through an analysis of his writings'.<sup>673</sup> But even if one turns to 'The Ego and Its Own' in search of evidence of Stirner's so called 'schizophrenia' one will derive scant return.

Stirner cared little for dualism. His intention was to bring the 'whole man' to light, not set one half of himself (the 'essence') against the other (the bodily person). 'Can we put up with this', turning to Stirner for corroboration, 'that "our essence" is brought into opposition to us, that we are split into an essential and un-essential self? Do we not with that go back into the dreary misery of seeing ourselves banished out of ourselves?'.<sup>674</sup> And, 'it is only when a man hears his flesh along with the rest of him', as Stirner maintained on another page, 'that he hears himself wholly, and it is only when he wholly hears *himself* that he is a hearing or rational being'.<sup>675</sup> Again, Paterson missed the point Stirner intended to demonstrate.

Stirner vehemently objected to the 'splitting in two' of the subject, more especially when the definitive side of him, his 'personality' and the like, lost out to an impersonal idea. The subject had been envisaged in an wholly disproportional way, Stirner believed. The subject

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<sup>673</sup> John F. Welsh, 'Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation' (2010 p. 34).

<sup>674</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 33 - 34).

<sup>675</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 60).

was at odds with himself - his 'inmost' nature, monumental as it was, overshadowed the individual in whom it resided and he, the subject, duly gave way to it, the essence, on account of its universalism at a detrimental cost to himself. The essence, as I have argued, had taken precedence over the man.

Stirner wished to reevaluate the whole question of 'subjecthood' in the hope of bringing the wayward essence back in line with the person. It no longer *opposed* him, but took its rightful lead *from* him, not the other way round. Stirner wished to reconcile the two sides of the subject, his 'inner' and 'outer' self, in the optimistic hope the two could 'get along' and reach a more harmonious agreement to the benefit of the entire person. Stirner may well have been solipsistic - a far stronger case may well be made on that front, but if one searches 'The Ego and Its Own' for further proof of psychiatric disorder, namely that of a 'schizophrenic' nature, one will come up short. Stirner did not care in the least for the 'fragmentary subject', he staunchly opposed such notions; he wished to reconvene the man with the essence, but only on the condition that the man, not the essence, had the ultimate say in his affairs.

And in any case, to jump to Stirner's defence as I feel obliged to do, one thing is almost certainly true: 'The Ego and Its Own' is not nearly as outlandish as some of claims made in the course of 'The World as Will and Representation' or 'The Dialogue on Poetry'. If I happened to be in the business of 'quackery', I would certainly be far more dubious of Schopenhauer and Schlegel's pathological state. Observations of the two, bearing in mind what we have heard in previous chapters,

would certainly suggest they were prone to fantastical beliefs and displayed, from a 'clinical perspective', a number of significant delusional tendencies. The latter, Schopenhauer, believed everything around him was an all out illusion of an elemental force of nature which was out to get him while the former, Schlegel, believed it was simply a reflection his own inestimable beauty.

If one takes Paterson's line of argument one could surmise that Schopenhauer had a pronounced inferiority complex and displayed, along the way, many more schizoid tendencies than Stirner. Schopenhauer had not only 'doubled' but his 'top half' (his brain) battled it out with his occupied 'bottom half' (his blasted testicles) to gain supremacy over the entire war torn philosopher. As for Schlegel, he was nothing more, on the same grounds, than an alarming narcissist.

Without wishing, for a single second, to cast any cheap and nasty aspersions about the state of Stirner's 'mental health', least of all 'diagnose' his 'condition', somewhat miraculously from afar, as Paterson did, his presence in 'The Ego and Its Own', whether you like it or not, is unavoidable.

Paterson would have been better advised not to resort to a purely conjectural form of 'clinical psychiatry', if it merits the term, to substantiate his suspicions, fears and prejudices, more especially when he had evidently misunderstood the basic premise of 'The Ego and Its Own' and Stirner's chief 'role' in the performance piece. It is not possible, if at all prudent or, for that matter, intellectually sound to say something to the effect that Stirner was 'ill', 'illogical' or, more specifically

still, a 'paranoid schizophrenic' simply because one is not in tune with what he had to say or the uncustomary way Stirner went about saying it. Paterson's reaction is, if anything, a testament to the enduring power of 'The Ego and Its Own' to unsettle its readers.

That is not to say, by any stretch of the imagination, that Stirner's 'performance' was entirely glitch free, far from it. Stirner was certainly a fiery critic, but he was prone to lapses of concentration that made him a rather careless thinker. He may well have gone to tremendous lengths to present *himself* as the 'leading light' of his egocentric 'display', but it did not necessarily work to his ultimate advantage. For all its affirmative and meritorious aims, 'The Ego and Its Own' was marked by one significant flaw: Stirner was far too engrossed in his own 'performance' to adequately explain the *basis* of his empowerment. 'I am of myself *empowered*', as Stirner declared, 'and need no other empowering or entitling'.<sup>676</sup>

Having claimed to have liberated himself from all manner of adventitious and murky conceptual powers 'within', Stirner found himself at an equal loss to account for his own 'ego'. Could Stirner's 'ego' be little more than an idea, not so very far removed from all the elemental 'essences' he so vehemently rebuked? Let us now turn to consider the troublesome matter of Stirner's very own autogeneuous riddle, his 'ego'.

#### V. THE AUTOGENEOUS RIDDLE

The bright pool of light that encircled Stirner's

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<sup>676</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 187).



'performance' did not extend to an explanatory account of his 'ego' with the same degree of strength; the light that shone on this particular aspect of his work was considerably weaker. To be fair to Stirner, he did explain what it was *not* and, admittedly, one has a far clearer idea of that. It was neither an 'abstraction', a mere 'idea' nor a monistic 'essence'; it opposed 'general notions', exceeded *all* conceptual categories and Stirner, for one, was not at *its* mercy. Nonetheless, for something that was not said to resemble an oppressive 'idea', it certainly exerted a domineering influence over him.

If one was asked to explain what exactly constituted Stirner's 'ego' it would be quite a different story. The answer would not be so forthcoming. One would simply find oneself back at square one with little choice but to peddle out the same 'what it's nots'. It was neither an 'abstraction' nor a 'concept', it exceeded those reductive categories and was 'something' else entirely. Yet, if one was pressed further, one would have little option, but openly admit that one had little idea what exactly constituted this 'something else entirely' other than it defied explanation, could not be generalised, and Stirner was not acting in favour of a 'mere' idea. It was, as you may well imagine, an extremely tautological explanation. It is all beginning to sound horribly familiar.

The reader is, once again, left completely in the dark.

Stirner's 'ego' was very much open to question; he largely failed to account for it in any significant or meaningful way. All one learns, in an instructive sense, is that it was 'real', all determining and entirely his

own business. Evidently, it was not without some serious issues of its own; Stirner's 'ego' was beset by a series of persistent hiccups and ticks.

If we turn to two critics in hope of hearing something that resembles a clearer explanation we are told much the same thing: 'All that the individual can say with certain knowledge', as, the first of the two, John Carroll said, 'is that he exists and is present, that he exists because he feels or senses the presence of himself'.<sup>677</sup> 'But when it comes to discussing more specifically', as the perceptive Peter McCormick added, 'this unique self, this ego, that is to be set free, the silence is deafening. The most concrete utterance Stirner gives us is the dictum "Realize thyself" and an assertion that the self is not to be acquired but rather to be realized in being squandered, enjoyed, spent, lived out - that is, the self is to reveal itself in action - but this culminates in the rather hollow epigram "What one can become he does become". It is difficult to imagine what this means when it is put into practice; given the details of Stirner's own biography, we might even suggest that this self displays its triumphal vigor in an entirely inner world, a realm of pure subjective freedom - a man who writes daring and shocking books under a pen name while he teaches at a girls school'.<sup>678</sup> Carroll and McCormick hit the nail squarely on the head.

The 'ego' was, it would appear, little more than an expression Stirner used to describe his own willful and

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<sup>677</sup> John Carroll, 'Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky' ((1974 p. 41).

<sup>678</sup> Peter McCormick, 'The Concept of the Self in Political Thought' (1979 p. 707).

obstreperous 'personality'. That he did and said as pleased, we are asked to believe, was explanation enough. If you happen to be familiar with 'Obermann', you will have heard Sénancour express much the same thing forty odd years before Stirner: "I am willing what I ought, and doing what I will".<sup>679</sup> If not, you are more likely to remember Amiel's contribution from the introductory chapter; I said something to the effect that it faithfully characterised the autogeneus and autonomous character of, as it were, Stirner's particular 'cottage industry': 'He is himself principle, motive, and end of his own destiny; he is himself, and that is enough for him'.<sup>680</sup> Stirner's 'explanatory' account had little basis other than that; his 'ego' simply described his unpredictable whims - his efficacious, volitient state and that was more than ample evidence of his, rather *its* veracity.

Stirner appeared to wind himself up by some little known mechanism that simply belonged to him and him alone. The basis of his autogeneus power was, at best, highly uncertain and, at its very worst, a complete and unfathomable riddle. One notable question is left begging to be answered: by what means did Stirner imagine himself 'empowered'? 'I am the powerful one and owner of power', as Stirner claimed.<sup>681</sup> 'Ownness...', as Stirner surmised, 'is my whole being and existence, it is I myself'.<sup>682</sup> 'I too cannot get out of my skin', as he declared elsewhere, 'but have my law in my whole nature, in myself'.<sup>683</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. II (1804 / 1910 p. 265).

<sup>680</sup> Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 'Amiel's Journal. The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel' (1882 / 1901 p. 17).

<sup>681</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 187).

<sup>682</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 143).

<sup>683</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 146).

Had Stirner made any sort of effort to consider the *basis* of the 'law' in his 'whole nature', his 'performance' may well have had a far sounder philosophical footing than it did.<sup>684</sup> As it stands, the reader is left at a complete loss to account for it. Stirner's egocentric 'might' simply rested on his say so alone and, ultimately, in a biographical, if rather petulant sense, at the mercy of an unidentified dipteran.

Let us, in this respect, consider the meaning of the following passage. It was, I should warn you, written in the tongue-tripping sort of way that Stirner far too frequently employed. 'We are', as Stirner maintained, 'equal *only in thoughts*, only when "we" are *thought*, not as we really and bodily are. I am ego, and you are ego: but I am not this thought-of ego; this ego in which we are all equal is only *my thought*. I am man, and you are man: but "man" is only a thought, a generality; neither you and I are speakable, we are *unutterable*, because only *thoughts* are speakable and consist in speaking'.<sup>685</sup>

How might one be able to account for Stirner's uncharacteristic loss of words? His momentary 'aphasia'? Stirner's inability to account for his 'ego' in an explanatory way? Why did words happen to fail the otherwise effusive critic on this particular occasion?

Stirner talked himself, in a turn of phrase, into an impossible position. His antipathy for all general notions extended well beyond conceptual categories to the generally agreed use of language itself. 'But if this is

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<sup>684</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 179).

<sup>685</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 275).

true about doctrines', as Isaiah Berlin said with Stirner in mind, 'it will be equally true of all general propositions; and if it is true of all general propositions, then - and this is the last step of all, which some romantics certainly took - it is true of all words, because all words are general, they all classify'.<sup>686</sup> Explanations, after all, merely relate to words and all words do is elucidate 'thoughts', but as the 'un-man', as Stirner constantly reminded us, was anything but a generally agreed 'thought' words no longer counted, they were of no further use to him.

The penny, then, finally drops: Stirner's innate nature, his 'ego', was simply 'unutterable'. It defied explanation. The 'Stirner personality' was, in a word, ineffable.

The little one can say about Stirner's 'ego' with any degree of certainty was that it was immeasurable and exceeded definitive bounds. Stirner hardly differed, in that respect, from his 'first cousins', the romantics. 'Athirst for infiniteness, or for unbridled freedom', as Henri Peyre said of them, 'romantic temperaments unfurled wings to break away from their cells'.<sup>687</sup> One need only turn to Stirner to recognise the same resounding desire to transgress *all* limitations: 'I, therefore, am the kernel that is to be delivered from all wrappings and - freed from all cramping shells'.<sup>688</sup> 'Stirner', if one turns to an observant remark made by R. B. Fowler, 'wanted a place for his egoism to roam unfettered'.<sup>689</sup> And

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<sup>686</sup> Isaiah Berlin, 'The Roots of Romanticism' (1965 / 1999 p. 144).

<sup>687</sup> Henri Peyre, 'Literature and Sincerity' (1963 p. 120).

<sup>688</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 148).

<sup>689</sup> R. B. Fowler, 'The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought' (1972 p. 748).

that is all one can say, in an explanatory sense, of Stirner's 'ego': that it was, as Fowler said, 'unfettered'.

Stirner may well have considered it an entirely exclusive possession, but his 'ego' was comparable to the arcane and deliquescent powers which informed the universalism of Schlegel and Schopenhauer's schemes. It was no less grandiose or expansive in intent and scope, nor was it any more explicable. Take something Hans Eichner said of Friedrich Schlegel, for instance. 'It was sufficient for his theory', Eichner wrote, 'that there should be the *semblance* of limitations being violated, of untrammelled caprice, and of confusion'.<sup>690</sup> For all intent and purposes, Eichner may well have been mistaken for talking of Stirner. The reader may well be able to detect the very same desires at play in 'The Ego and Its Own'. Stirner also appeared to violate all limitations and obstacles that impeded his wanton 'ego'; words also failed to account for it and Stirner's wildly erratic and impulsive mood swings similarly set out to befuddle, unsettle and confuse the reader in an effort to convince them of his idiosyncratic 'reality'. Stirner's 'performance' was, to repeat something of a common assessment, little more than an elaborate ruse.

That Stirner chose to *enact* the tremendous sense of empowerment he felt rather than satisfactorily explain it hardly substantiates its 'reality'. Stirner certainly did not attempt to account for it beyond his purely tautological and staggeringly crude "'I am willing what I ought, and doing what I will"' line of argument.<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>690</sup> Hans Eichner, 'Friedrich Schlegel' (1970 p. 63).

<sup>691</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sémancour, 'Obermann', Vol. II (1804 / 1910 p.

Stirner clearly did not possess an adequate understanding of his 'ego' and it hardly comes as much of a surprise that he was unable to successfully explain its basis.

Having possibly sensed something of his grave shortcomings in that particular department Stirner tried, as best he could, to make up for it, if not completely overcompensate for it, in another. Stirner's 'explanation', if indeed it amounted to an explanation, veered off, far too readily, into something that more closely resembled a theatrical performance. Stirner's exuberant, if somewhat contrived 'display', to put it more simply, glossed over a number of unanswered questions surrounding his 'ego' in an extremely confrontational way.

Stirner's effort to embody and personify his own ideas exceeded, rather, *attempted* to exceed the customary bounds of a written work, if not of language itself. Stirner was not simply *presenting* the case of the 'unique one' or the 'un-man', he took it several steps further down the line: he *was* the 'un-man', he *was* the 'unique one'. But if one fails to see little more than the *animation* of an idea in Stirner's caricature of the 'un-man', he asks us rather brazenly: 'What am I now to you?'. 'Perhaps', as he immediately suggested, 'this *bodily I* as I walk and stand?'.<sup>692</sup> 'Anything but that', he answered on our behalf. But, frankly, it was, just as Stirner said, 'anything but that'. Having just asked us two absolutely rhetorical questions: 'What am I now to you? Perhaps this *bodily I* as I walk and stand?' and answering them, anticipating our doubts, in the negative,

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<sup>692</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 156).

Stirner attempted to gloss over the weakest point of his 'performance' in a highly confrontational and pompous fashion, in a desperate attempt, I believe, to distract the reader's attention away from the most inflamed sore point of 'The Ego and Its Own', namely the fallacy of the 'un-man's' so called 'reality'.<sup>693</sup>

The reader is not faced with a 'bodily I' at all, but an approximate 'cardboard cut out', so to speak, of Stirner's 'bodily I'. His aggressive attempt to pass off his stagy persona as a 'reality' was little more than a convoluted act of reification. The 'un-man', this 'bodily I' that purportedly 'stands' in front of us, is nothing more than a conceptual 'ghoul' even if it was a 'ghoul' of Stirner's own evocation. That Stirner had the nerve to ask the reader to fall for his no less ghoulish concept, the 'un-man', and accept it as a palpable fact spoke volumes about the extent to which he had fallen under the spell of his own self-spun concept.<sup>694</sup>

Stirner knew very well indeed why one could not possibly accept 'him', the 'un-man', at face value. After all, he spent the greater part of 'The Ego and Its Own' fiercely contesting the spectral nature of abstractions and ideas. Stirner was quick enough to denounce the rest of the intellectual world for acting in favour of doctrines, 'general' ideas and the like but, ultimately, little distinguished Stirner's ontological 'scheme' from those he castigated. "Our celebration of the unique individual", referring to Peter McCormick, 'contrasts with "their" ant-like masses and drab-grey uniformity; "our" advocacy of the self-realization of the individual

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<sup>693</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 156).

<sup>694</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 156).



proudly refutes "their" goose-stepping regimentation. But this is caricature, not analysis, and it obscures more than it clarifies'.<sup>695</sup> Knowing this only too well, Stirner set about berating the reader to divert his or her attention from the ghoulish nature of his own contrived and histrionic persona, the 'un-man'. That Stirner had the nerve to ask us such questions in the first place is one thing, but for him to carry on and subject us to the cheapest form of ridicule in an effort to extricate himself from an extremely sticky position is almost too much to bear.

What makes it all the more annoying, an 'Arghol moment' in fact, is that Stirner made an unrealistic demand of the reader and considering his sensitivity to other falsehoods, ought really to have known better than to ask us to blindly fall for another. There are, as I have repeatedly maintained, many trying moments in 'The Ego and Its Own' that 'even the most patient critic', to repeat a fitting line written by Wyndham Lewis, 'is in revolt'.<sup>696</sup> The nearest window is not, in this particular instance, nearly close enough.

Stirner was eager to present himself, his 'ego', as a 'reality', as an *unquestionable* reality, and, as a result, he could very well be accused of pandering to a weakness that he was so quick to identify and attack in the intellectual world at large. 'With so many a man', as

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<sup>695</sup> Peter McCormick, 'The Concept of Self in Political Thought' (1979 p. 690).

<sup>696</sup> I am referring to Wyndham Lewis' 'The Writer and the Absolute' (1952 p. 178). Lewis is talking of George Orwell's novel - his 'worst' in his opinion, 'Coming up for Air'. 'There is no more I can say about this book', Lewis adds on the following page, 'except that I heartily sympathize with any future student of contemporary literature who has to read it' (1952 p. 179). Lewis describes a very familiar *feeling* to those acquainted with 'The Ego and Its Own'.

Stirner wrote, 'a thought becomes a "maxim", whereby he himself is made prisoner to it, so that it is not he that has the maxim, but rather it that has him'.<sup>697</sup>

One could very well hold Stirner to account by simply repeating back to him the very criticisms he made of other ideas and abstractions. We might refer him to page 247 of 'The Ego and Its Own' and remind him of 'the spook that has become so intimate is taken for our true ego'.<sup>698</sup> We might even recommend he turn to page 43 of his own work: 'Man, your head is haunted; you have wheels in your head!'.<sup>699</sup> Stirner was similarly at the mercy of a theoretical fancy which he mistook for an absolute 'reality'. He was as culpable as the 'intellectual world' he attacked. Stirner's abstraction just so happened to be a rather more exclusive abstraction and little more than that.

I would like, at this particular point, to bring your attention to a passage taken from Eduard Von Hartmann's 'Philosophy of the Unconscious' (1868). It is a rather lengthy passage but I am keen to repeat it to you in its entirety as it brings to light some perceptive observations concerning Stirner's philosophy and its relationship to romanticism, particularly the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer.

Speaking of 'The Ego and Its Own', Von Hartmann wrote: 'This book subjects all ideals having an influence on practice to a destructive criticism, and shows them to be idols that only possess power over the Ego so far as the

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<sup>697</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 59).

<sup>698</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 247).

<sup>699</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 43).

latter concedes such to them in its self-mistaking weakness. It cleverly and piquantly demolishes with forcible reasons the ideal aims of political, social, and humanitarian Liberalism; and shows how the Ego alone can be the smiling heir of all these ideals thus reduced to impotent nothings. If these considerations only had the purpose of confirming the theoretical position that I can as little step out of the frame of my self-hood as out of my skin, nothing need be added; but as Stirner professes to have found in the Idea of the Ego the absolute standpoint for action, he either falls into the same error that he had combated in the case of the other ideals, such as Honour, Freedom, Right, &c., and places himself at the mercy of another enthralling idea, whose absolute sovereignty he recognises, not however for this or that reason, but blindly and instinctively, or he conceives the Ego not as idea but as reality, and with no other result than the perfectly empty and meaningless tautology that I can will only my own will, think only my own thoughts, and that only my own thoughts can become motives of my willing - a fact as undeniable by his opponents as by himself. If, however, and only in that case has his conclusions any sense, he means that we ought to acknowledge the IDEA of the Ego as the only governing one, and to admit all other ideals only so far as they have a value for the former, he should first have examined the idea of the Ego'.<sup>700</sup>

On the following page, Von Hartmann added 'had Stirner approached the direct philosophical investigation of the Idea of the Ego, he would have seen that this idea is just as unsubstantial and brain-created a phantom... as,

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<sup>700</sup> Eduard Von Hartmann, 'Philosophy of the Unconscious', Book III (1868 / 1931 p. 97).

for instance, the Idea of honour or of right, and that the only being which answers to the idea of the inner cause of my activity is something non-individual, the Only Unconscious, which therefore answers just as well to Peter's idea of his ego as Paul's idea of his ego'.<sup>701</sup>

Von Hartmann brings our attention to something I have already alluded to - namely, the alarming crack that appears in Stirner's 'performance' when one begins to inspect it a little more closely. If we trace our fingers along the line of this crack, we will eventually come back to the mysterious 'autogeneous power' at play at the heart of his display, something Von Hartmann described as Stirner's 'absolute standpoint for action', his 'ego' in other words.<sup>702</sup> It is exactly at this point that the stresses and weaknesses at play behind Stirner's performance are felt most keenly.

Stirner would appear to have fallen under the spell of an idea, 'an enthralling idea' as Von Hartmann put it, 'whose absolute sovereignty he recognises, not however for this or that reason, but blindly and instinctively'.<sup>703</sup> Regardless of the enormous amount of energy Stirner expended in his attempt to convince the reader otherwise - that he was not merely 'an unreal thing', a 'concept' but a 'bodily man' that actually 'stood' before us, the horribly sober fact remains: 'The Ego and Its Own' was not a performance piece but a conceptual, if highly stylised written work.

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<sup>701</sup> Eduard Von Hartmann, 'Philosophy of the Unconscious', Book III (1868 / 1931 p. 98 - 99).

<sup>702</sup> Eduard Von Hartmann, 'Philosophy of the Unconscious', Book III (1868 / 1931 p. 98 - 99).

<sup>703</sup> Eduard Von Hartmann, 'Philosophy of the Unconscious', Book III (1868 / 1931 p. 97).

Stirner *attempted* to absolve himself from a range of criticisms that might have been leveled against his work had it been presented as a straightforward theoretical piece, but 'The Ego and Its Own' was a work into which many more livelier colours had run. By presenting his ideas in such a way that they were largely indistinguishable from himself, Stirner was keen to foster the *impression* that his ideas were not ideas at all, but an ontological *state* and, as an ontological state, they were not, opportunely, subject to the same rules that govern concepts. Granted, Stirner's 'ego' was not reputed to be an extraneous 'idea', it expressed, instead, an entirely personal *state*, but for all the differences and subtleties between the two, Stirner's idea of 'ego' was just as abstruse and enigmatic as the 'primordial powers' which Schlegel said were at work within 'mankind' and Schopenhauer's odious conception of nature's collective will.

'The Ego and Its Own', unlike a number of works which preceded it, emphasised the illimitable scope of the *individual* subject on *his* terms alone. In stark contrast to Schlegel and Schopenhauer, Stirner made a compelling case on behalf of the somatic and 'transitory' subject; the 'un-man' was certainly, comparatively speaking, a more readily identifiable figure than Schlegel's 'poet' or Schopenhauer's 'subject of knowledge'. Stirner's subject may well have brimmed with 'personality', exuded physical presence and the like, but, nonetheless, his innate nature - his 'ego', remained, for all its colourful 'personalism', an unknown quantity: an inexpressible riddle.

Stirner may well have manufactured, as best he could, an

*impression* of 'presence' in an effort to persuade the reader of his 'reality', but in the process, he talked himself into an extremely vulnerable position. Stirner was left open to attack from all sides; not least of all from the force of his own invective. Stirner's 'ego' was not the least bit free from exactly the sort of 'nocturnal spookery' he claimed to have shed 'daylight' on.<sup>704</sup> Stirner resorted, if in spite of himself, to more or less the same cloudy scapegoats as Schopenhauer and Schlegel had done in his failure to account for his own 'immeasurable' state. Stirner's 'ego' may well have been entirely his own affair, but like all the ghoulish notions he lampooned and rebuked, it was inexpressible, indefinable and thoroughly incomprehensible. Stirner's 'ego' was no less a mystery.

The 'un-man', the 'unique one' and even 'Max Stirner' himself - what were all of these imaginary things if they were not, as Von Hartmann said, 'brain-created' phantoms? They were little more than ideas parading about, under false pretences, as purportedly 'real' figures. Stirner's objections were, I believe, simply limited to the *form* the subject's ghoulishness assumed. Stirner just so happened to prefer his 'spooks' to be of the more traditional 'sheet-draped' sort rather than the invisible poltergeist variety.

Stirner ended up in a shadowy corner that was not so very far away from the one inhabited by the likes of Schlegel and Schopenhauer. Having taken off in a completely different direction, Stirner was plunged back into the very cloud from which he hoped to escape. 'My heart must have illusions, for it is too great not to yearn for

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<sup>704</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 263).

them, and too weak to dispense with them', as Sénancour confessed in 'Obermann'.<sup>705</sup> And Stirner, similarly, could not bring himself to 'dispense' with any of the totalising, all encompassing 'illusions' one associates with the ontology of Schlegel or Schopenhauer; instead, he tossed a colourful, initialed sheet over the universalising force of nature and claimed it his 'own'. It failed, however, to cover what Stirner wished to conceal, namely, its unfathomable basis. His feet also poked out at the feet of the curtain. Stirner's 'ego' was, one suspects, yet another name for yet another murky deliquescent concept which aggrandised the subject's standing to an equally incalculable and indefinable degree. But, unlike Schlegel or Schopenhauer, it belonged solely to him.

#### VI. HIS MASTER'S MASTER

Stirner's explanatory account of his 'ego', unsatisfactory as it was, leaves one with little choice but to seek an answer elsewhere. Schlegel's inceptive 'theory' certainly does not provide one. His ontology of the romantic subject was willfully abstruse and perfectly reflected, to some degree, Schlegel's wider theoretical objectives. Nonetheless, the critic *did* extend his expansive 'theory', if not nature itself (certainly not in its gory entirety), to the individual subject. Schlegel's poet was, if he was nothing else, infinite in scope. The seeds of Stirner's own illimitable 'ego' had been planted, so to speak. That leaves us, then, with Schopenhauer's doctrine of will.

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<sup>705</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann' Vol, II. Translated by Barnes. (1804 / 1910 p. 173).

The 'ego' may well have found an ideal 'expressive platform', an upturned if unsteady box, in Stirner's playful work, but Schopenhauer was the only one of three who gave it due consideration. Stirner, after all, did little more than vocalise his egocentric 'might' and demonstrate, along the way, the compelling sway it had over him.

Arthur Schopenhauer would have regarded Max Stirner with a mixture of curiosity and alarm in equal measure and, had he been familiar with 'The Ego and Its Own', a great deal of censure. Stirner would certainly have reciprocated Schopenhauer's reservations had he similarly been acquainted with the philosopher's doctrine. Nonetheless, the respective figures would have regarded each other's work, I believe, with more than a fair amount of interest and, at certain points, even been in agreement.

'Egoism', Schopenhauer maintained, 'is colossal; it towers above the world'.<sup>706</sup> On another page of 'On the Basis of Morality', the philosopher wrote: 'Everyone makes himself the center of the world, and refers everything to himself'.<sup>707</sup> 'The chief and fundamental incentive in man', turning to another page of the same work, 'as in the animal is *egoism*, that is, the craving for existence and well-being'.<sup>708</sup> 'Egoism really consists in man's restricting all reality to his own person', as Schopenhauer wrote in the second volume of 'The World as Will and Representation', 'in that he imagines he lives

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<sup>706</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Basis of Morality' (1840 / 1965 p. 132).

<sup>707</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Basis of Morality' (1840 / 1965 p. 132).

<sup>708</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Basis of Morality' (1840 / 1965 p. 131).



in this alone, and not in others'.<sup>709</sup>

Stirner would have whole heartedly agreed with Schopenhauer. 'The unbridled ego - and this we originally are', as Stirner similarly affirmed.<sup>710</sup> 'I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego', as Stirner maintained, 'I am unique. Hence my wants too are unique, and my deeds; in short, everything about me is unique. And it is only as this unique I that I take everything for my own, as I set myself to work, and develop myself, only as this. I do not develop men, nor as man, but, as I, I develop - myself'.<sup>711</sup>

Stirner's 'ego' and Schopenhauer's 'will' have a great many more things in common than might ordinarily be supposed. They both identified the 'ego' as a primary incentive force but one question, namely that of its origination, left them, ultimately, at loggerheads.

Alarm bells, to illustrate the point, would have rung very loudly in Max Stirner's ears had he heard Schopenhauer say: 'Fundamentally it is the will that is spoken of whenever "I" occurs in judgement. Therefore the will is the true and ultimate point of unity of consciousness, and the bond of all its functions and acts. It does not, however, itself belong to the intellect, but is only its root, origin, and controller'.<sup>712</sup> And Stirner would have objected in the strongest possible terms had Schopenhauer suggested to him: 'In the animal as in man this egoism is most

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<sup>709</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 507).

<sup>710</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 179).

<sup>711</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 318 - 319).

<sup>712</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 140).

intimately connected with their innermost core and essence; in fact, it is really identical with essence'.<sup>713</sup>

Stirner's 'ego' was anything but an 'innermost essence'; his 'I' did not belong to anyone or anything other than himself. Stirner's egocentric 'might' was something peculiar to him; he alone was accountable for its manifestation, not vice versa. Stirner was certainly not 'controlled' by an elemental, collective force of nature. He was no ventriloquist's dummy.

That may well be true, but all the same, Stirner's 'ego' and Schopenhauer's 'will' empowered them both to an remarkably similar degree through, one is somewhat loathed to admit, precisely the same means. The difference lay largely in their receptivity of the said 'means'. Stirner's 'ego' came to an immediate halt with himself whereas Schopenhauer saw it as extending well beyond his or any one person. The philosopher regarded it as a force at play *within* him (as well as nature itself) over which Stirner had little say. He was the will's subordinate dummy.

Schopenhauer would have warmly welcomed, in one respect, Stirner's 'performance' as it perfectly demonstrated the persuasive pull of one half of his doctrine, namely the world as 'representation'. 'Every man', as Schopenhauer explained, 'can be considered from two opposite points of view; from the one, he is an individual, beginning and ending in time, fleeting and transitory, the dream of a shadow'.<sup>714</sup> 'From the other', as Schopenhauer continued,

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<sup>713</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Basis of Morality' (1840 / 1965 p. 131).

<sup>714</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Parerga and Paralipomena', Vol. II (1851 / 1974 p. 278).

'he is the indestructible primary being that objectifies itself in every existing thing'.<sup>715</sup> Needless to say, Stirner considered himself along the lines of the former rather than the latter. Stirner, just so happened to have a particular gift that was confined to the egocentric 'phenomenon' rather than the collective will, the 'thing-in-itself'. Schopenhauer's interest, on the other hand, extended to both its appearance and that which determined it, nature's will.

A Schopenhauerian take on Stirner's 'philosophical performance', if indeed one is willing, however reluctantly, to take an interpretive liberty with 'The Ego and Its Own', brings Stirner back a full 360 degree circle. His account of *his* 'ego' was not so very far removed from the 'John Smithish' philosophies - the collective ideas of man, from which Stirner went to such lengths to distance himself. The one and only point of contention was that, unlike Schlegel or Schopenhauer, Stirner was not the least bit willing to surrender the seat of his autocratic regime.

To consider Stirner's philosophical 'display' as the affirmation of Schopenhauer's doctrine certainly explains a number of things about his 'ego' that his own theatrical account largely failed to do. Schopenhauer's doctrine provides an explanation of Stirner's 'ego' on two specific fronts.

Firstly, Schopenhauer explained something about the 'ego' that Stirner was simply at a loss to do. Schopenhauer did not consider the 'ego', as Stirner had done, as the sole

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<sup>715</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Parerga and Paralipomena', Vol. II (1851 / 1974 p. 278).

possession of any one person. To affirm one's 'ego' was not to affirm oneself, as Stirner believed, but to affirm the will's wider interests. Not that it was common knowledge; one, ordinarily, knew little about it. Egoism was the will's ace in the pack - its chief delusional ploy. Schopenhauer talked of egoism as representing, what he called, 'the form of the will-to-live'.<sup>716</sup> Elsewhere, the philosopher described nature's will as being 'absolutely egotistic'.<sup>717</sup> The will, conniving as it was, capitalised on the immediacy of the 'ego' to pass off its interests as one's own. Schopenhauer would have certainly leveled this criticism directly at Stirner.

'Egoism', as Schopenhauer explained, 'is so deep-rooted a quality of all individuality in general that, in order to rouse the activity of an individual being, egotistical ends are the only ones on which we can count with certainty... Therefore in such a case, nature can attain her end only by implanting in the individual a certain *delusion*, and by virtue of this, that which in truth is merely a good thing for the species seems to be a good thing for himself, so that he serves the species, whereas he is under the delusion that he is serving himself... Thus it imagines it is pursuing individual ends, whereas in truth it is pursuing merely general ends'.<sup>718</sup>

The will pandered, in this sense, to Stirner's 'Achilles' heel'. Stirner was so completely assured that his desires were his own that he did not stop to think twice, remote as it was, about any other possibility. Stirner clearly

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<sup>716</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 320).

<sup>717</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 215).

<sup>718</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 538).

felt the desirous influence of nature's will, but did not, given his grounded standpoint, recognise the source from which it sprang. The prospect, understandably, did not even warrant contemplation. It was absolutely inconceivable.

Secondly, Schopenhauer's doctrine also accounts for the wild objections Stirner would indubitably have expressed if one suggested to him that what, in fact, he felt surging through him was not his 'ego' at all but *the* elemental spirit of nature which constituted the basis, not just of his, but *all* egos which sought, in every instance, to be affirmed. Stirner would have vehemently disagreed. 'How you ever seen a spirit?', Stirner asked with his tongue firmly planted in the side of his cheek, 'No, not I, but my grandmother.' Now, you see, it's just so with me too; I myself haven't seen any, but my grandmother had them running between her feet all sorts of ways, and out of confidence in our grandmothers' honesty we believe in the existence of spirits'.<sup>719</sup>

Stirner evidently inherited little from his grandmother and, unlike her, he did not believe in anything he could not see or touch. His dogged belief in the somatic individual, the egocentric personality, the 'here and now' and the like were all absolutely incontrovertible and Schopenhauer would have agreed, up to a point. Had Stirner taken his customary line of argument - the evidence in front of his eyes, he would have failed to say a single thing about nature's will that Schopenhauer did not already know.

Schopenhauer's doctrine of will would have been

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<sup>719</sup> Max Stirner, 'The Ego and Its Own' (1844 / 1995 p. 35).

absolutely impervious to all of Stirner's criticisms and, if anything, openly encouraged and exploited his incredulity for its own ends. Nature's will absolutely relied on the gut reaction of say a Max Stirner to maintain itself. In flatly rejecting the will, as Stirner would no doubt have done, he would have simply betrayed, the philosopher would have thought, his limited knowledge of it, not to mention the extent to which he had been deceived by its 'duplicitous' influence.

Stirner was obviously incapable of appreciating the *true* basis of his 'might' as his interest did not extend beyond the tightly bound circle of his own phenomenal form, itself a manifestation of nature's will. Stirner would have appealed to little more than the veracity of an illusion to substantiate his argument against the very thing which had evoked it in the first place.

Stirner's 'performance' was thoroughly conditioned, Schopenhauer would have concluded, by the 'principle of individuation'. The said principle was, as we know, transmutative; nature's will did not appear as will but an unquantifiable number of images dispersed through time and space, each one of whom, whatever their form and allotted temporal frame, sought to assert and defend themselves along egocentric lines. But nature's will saw better of divulging its 'secret' and, in something akin to a concessionary measure, indulged each one of them with an incontestable belief in their own determinate, singular and volitient state.

Nature's will, the philosopher believed, actively encouraged people to hold an unshakeable belief in their own 'sovereignty'; it led prying eyes and unwelcome

attention away from will's clandestine operations which it could not afford, for its own sake, to disclose. The ego, to take the example at hand, was of paramount importance to will as it secured its dominion. 'It seems', as Schopenhauer wrote in the second volume of 'The World as Will and Representation' (1844), 'that the required penetration of the *principium individuationis* would be present in everyone, if his will were not opposed to it. By virtue of the will's immediate, mysterious, and despotic influence over the intellect, it prevents this penetration from arising'.<sup>720</sup> 'Therefore', as Schopenhauer might well have said with Stirner firmly in mind, 'everyone wants everything for himself, wants to possess, or at least control, everything, and would like to destroy whatever opposes him'.<sup>721</sup> Stirner was clearly under the spell of the nature's will and the delusional sense of grandeur it engendered.

Stirner was not empowered by his 'ego' not, that is, in the way he imagined. The enormous power at his disposal did not emanate from himself, as he believed, but nature's will. Stirner was not, as he liked to think, placed at the head of the table but sat, as Schopenhauer would have confirmed, in a rather lowly place and, indeed, among many more guests than he dared imagine.

Stirner's 'ego' was a very narrow outlet through which unquantifiable gallons of water were channeled. 'The Ego and Its Own' got no further, in an explanatory sense, than the scaturient spout and did not venture to consider the source which supplied it. Stirner was not able to see

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<sup>720</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 601).

<sup>721</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. I (1818 / 1966 p. 332).

beyond his representational form, beyond the spumescent jet of water, as it were, and was incapable of contemplating anything that resembled its wellspring. It is not so much a criticism of Stirner *per se*; it is rather a reflection of the extremely persuasive and beguiling entity that presented Stirner's 'ego' as incontestably his 'own' when, arguably, it was no such thing at all. The tremendous power Stirner felt at his finger tips was not solely his own, Schopenhauer would have pointed out to him, but that of nature itself.

Ordinarily, Stirner did not have to be told twice about the delusory nature of things. He exposed, to his tremendous credit, a great number of seemingly 'decent' and 'noble' ideas (the 'general' concern for man, for example) as bereft of meaning and, ultimately, of the most fraudulent nature. If Stirner had been tricked or 'deluded' then it would have taken an incredibly compelling thing to do so. And with nature's will, his master's master, Stirner had finally met his match.



## CHAPTER 5. THE FEET AT THE FOOT OF THE CURTAIN

### I. CONCLUDING REMARKS

What, then, can one gather from the present thesis? What can one ascertain about the subject's passage through the work of Friedrich Schlegel, Arthur Schopenhauer and Max Stirner? It would appear the subject's 'definitive' nature, whether it was viewed from 'the inside' or 'out', from a 'universal' or 'particular' standpoint ended up in the same atramental, inexpressible state. One could well conclude that Stirner did little more than mystify the subject's finite, singular standing just as Schlegel and Schopenhauer had mystified his universal 'inmost being'.

The whole person was now an absolute riddle.

'The Ego and Its Own', to reiterate the point, was not so very far removed from 'The World as Will and Representation' or Schlegel's 'Dialogue on Poetry'; Stirner simply wished to convey the subject's own immeasurable potential rather than one derived from nature. But Stirner was no more able to explain its illimitable scope or basis than either Schopenhauer or Schlegel.

Stirner felt the same desire for 'infinity', for boundless 'freedom', but unlike Schopenhauer or Schlegel, he obstinately refused to stray into the realms of metaphysics, pantheism or any other form of monistic thought, religious, mystical or otherwise, to explain it. Not to say, that the 'presbyopic' romantics, with the possible exception of Schopenhauer, had a particularly clear or consistent idea themselves when it came to explaining their boundless nature. Even Schopenhauer

stumbled on this particular front; his conception of will was, ultimately, an unfathomable mystery. If, for instance, one turns to page 206 of 'On the Basis of Morality' (1844), we hear Schopenhauer say: 'We see only outward; within it is dark and obscure'.<sup>722</sup> And we have already heard, on an previous page, Schopenhauer admit: 'the "I" is an unknown quantity, in other words, it is itself a mystery and a secret'.<sup>723</sup>

'We cannot know things as they exist', turning your attention to a particularly insightful passage taken from the second volume of 'Obermann'. 'We see relationships', as Sénancour continued, 'not essences; we deal not with things, but with their images. And this nature, which we strive to see outside of us, and which is inscrutable within us, is everywhere shrouded in darkness. "I feel" is the only reality left to the man in search of truth. And that which makes the certainty of my being is also its torment. I feel, I exist, merely to be consumed with ungovernable desires, satiated with the seductions of a fantastic world, and oppressed by its captivating illusions....'.<sup>724</sup> Sénancour, once again, perfectly expressed Stirner's position.

Stirner's account of his own 'nature', his 'ego', was barely an 'account' at all, but a demonstrative *display* of the tremendous sense of empowerment he *felt*. Stirner did not 'deal' with 'essences' but tangible things; he was captivated by his own 'image', but he was no less able to account for it. For all his bold efforts, 'The

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<sup>722</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Basis of Morality' (1840 / 1965 p. 206).

<sup>723</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 139).

<sup>724</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. II (1804 / 1901 p. 74).

Ego and Its Own' illuminated little more than Stirner's energetic 'performance'. His account may well have differed in emphasis from the likes of Schlegel and Schopenhauer but certainly not in its conclusion. "I feel" is the only reality left to the man in search of truth', as Sénancour said.<sup>725</sup> And Stirner's account of his 'ego' was purely *emotive*; words simply failed to satisfactorily explain it. Stirner's 'being', to use Sénancour's expression, remained 'inscrutable'. It lay beyond the expressive capacity and generally agreed use of language to adequately explain.

'The will everywhere retains its identical nature', as Schopenhauer wrote in the second volume of 'The World as Will and Representation', 'and shows itself as a great attachment to life, care for the individual and for the species, egoism and lack of consideration for all others, together with the emotions springing therefrom'.<sup>726</sup> And, following the philosopher's lead, Stirner was certainly in the grip of the 'emotions springing therefrom'.<sup>727</sup>

Stirner's *emotive* depiction of the 'un-man' portrayed a 'personality' rather than an immutable essence, but, nonetheless, he felt the equal force of an immeasurable power at play 'within' him - his egocentric 'might' as he called it, but at the same time, he found himself at a complete loss to account for its basis. Regardless of Stirner's admirable effort to distinguish himself from the likes of Schlegel and Schopenhauer he ended in very much the same position. A position where nothing, in

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<sup>725</sup> Étienne Pivert de Sénancour, 'Obermann', Vol. II (1804 / 1901 p. 74).

<sup>726</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 206).

<sup>727</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. II (1844 / 1966 p. 206).

spite of Stirner's best efforts to clear the clouds, was particularly lucid or sharply drawn; least of all, the ontological state of the individual subject, the 'un-man'.

All three writers found themselves at a loss to articulate, with any degree of clarity or certitude, the basis of their innate nature. It was, regardless of their emphasis, fundamentally inexpressible. The subject's nature remained, in spite of Stirner's best efforts, a complete and unfathomable mystery. 'The anguish of the problem of the hidden self cannot', as Peter McCormick maintained, 'be avoided or answered any more than can the claim of the solipsist; there is no logical point at which the self-critical probe can be stopped, no suggested formulation of the self that might not require further analysis and penetration to a deeper truth. Nor is the question an empty one; if one is to attach importance to the individual, one is committed to making statements about the connected notion of the self, and if the self remains inscrutable or tentative even to its owner, then the premise of individualism simply hangs suspended'.<sup>728</sup>

All three figures expressed a wish to transgress restrictive bounds, to elude categorisation and, ultimately, mystify whatever source of empowerment they derived, in an ontological sense, from their respective theories. But none of them - neither Schlegel, Schopenhauer nor, indeed, Stirner truly relinquished the very things they claimed to have cast aside.

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<sup>728</sup> Peter McCormick, 'The Concept of Self in Political Thought' (1979 p. 705 - 706).

Schlegel thought better of promulgating a theory on the grounds that theories were restrictive and wholly confining; it did not, however, discourage him from concocting a 'theory' and putting in place his own set of discerning restrictions. Schopenhauer claimed to have liberated himself from 'egoism', 'individuality' and similarly delusory 'notions', but it did not stop him from refuting the will in accordance, all too coincidentally, with his own invested interests. And Stirner had absolutely no inclination to express the universalism of the subject's 'inmost' essence, but, nevertheless, went about extolling the 'un-man's' illimitable scope as an egocentric 'personality' without, apparently, any further obligation to account for its basis.

'Most to be pitied', turning your immediate attention to Maurice de Guérin's 'Journal', 'are those who, thrown between these two contraries, stretch out their arms to both'.<sup>729</sup> Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Stirner were not necessarily worthy of pity, but they all found themselves, at one point or another, in a vacillatory position. All three writers wanted the best of both worlds; to express, in other words, a sense of illimitability, but, at the same time, *retain* a determinate basis. As for the subject, whose 'progress' we have charted in the course of the three schemes, he was no more apparent than a pair of feet at the foot of a curtain.

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<sup>729</sup> Maurice de Guérin, 'The Journal of Maurice de Guérin' (1842 / 1891 p. 192).

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