Das Mögliche, Das Wirkliche Und Das Unmögliche:
Three Concepts Of Poetics

by

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This thesis is dedicated to:

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a historical analysis of literature through the intriguing (but often overlooked) overarching concepts of art –"das Mögliche", "das Wirkliche" and "das Unmögliche"– and the changes in the historical orientations they represent. Each concept is demonstrated through the exploration of three key texts. The first text addressed in this thesis is Aristotle's *Poetics* and the realm of the "Mögliche" he founded within his argument. The second concept, the "Wirkliche", was inspired by the German *Sturm und Drang* writer J.M.R. Lenz and his text *Anmerkungen übers Theater*. Oscar Wilde's dialogue "The Decay of Lying" summarizes the third and final concept discussed within this thesis, the "Unmögliche". His desire for art to be unreal represents the accumulation of German Romantic thought and Oriental influence on Western Art. Through the contexts of these three categories and their texts we can obtain a more accurate understanding of the foundations and possibilities of art.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
(T.S. Eliot, "Four Quartets: First Quartet" 46-48)

This thesis is intended to act as a guide for the reader to gain a historical understanding of Western art.[1] There is a general desire in academia to analyze and distinguish every slight change in art. Yet in spite of the many changes there are certain constants. They define the relation of art to reality. Some people think that art is based on reality. Historically this is not correct. The theoretical foundation of art did not undergo any major changes for two thousand years. The theories on the objective of art, which were first argued by ancient Greek philosophers, dominated Western thought for centuries. The religious ideals may have changed from Greek/Roman gods to Christianity, but the principles of embracing God above man in art never truly changed until the late 1700's. On studying the theories of art historically the reader will find three distinct concepts: *Das Mögliche*, *das Wirkliche* and *das Unmögliche*.[2] These three concepts define art periods. From the Greeks to the 17th century prevailed *das Mögliche*. Modernity starts with *das Wirkliche* in Dutch painting and the theories of the *Sturm und Drang*. The reception of the Orient and German Romanticism laid the foundation for the *Unmögliche*. They represent not only changes in art and our understanding of art, but also a shift in art's influence on man, his vision and relationship with life. In modern society we are extremely aware of the present and the future, but we often overlook the historical progression that has led us to where we are today. Nevertheless, it is through understanding the past that we can embrace a new future for art different from anything that came before.

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[1] Art comprises all forms of creative endeavor.
[2] These three sections are often understood in English as "the Possible, the Real and the Impossible" however; much of the meaning and depth behind each title is lost in its translation. Thus the reader should use each chapter to develop an understanding of the German word in context of this work rather than looking to the English translation for clarification.

The desire to present art in a trinity is not a new endeavor. Aristotle, Hegel, and Heidegger all chose three units to structure their aesthetic analysis of art and literature. However, the means these philosophers use are vastly different. Aristotle's *Poetics* concentrates on the justification of what classifies a work belonging to literary arts. He claims there are only three genres of literary art: *Komödie*, *Tragödie* and *Epos*. For Aristotle, all other forms of writing should not be considered art. In his *Ästhetik*, Hegel assumes a historical perspective on art, divided into three categories: the "Symbolic", the "Ideal" and the "Self-Reflective". His second concept the "Ideal" is concerned with the identity of *Gestalt* and *Gehalt*[3] in ancient Greek sculpture. The "Symbolic" represents the early Orient where *Gestalt* and *Gehalt* are not identical; therefore a clear meaning cannot be established. Finally, the majority of our modern artistic endeavors are a result of the "Self-Reflective" attitude of modern man. This is represented by literature that is characterized by personal thought and subjectivity. Heidegger manifests an a-historical stance on art in his essay *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*. He addresses the broader view of art through his deliberation of the *Seiende*. Heidegger is not interested in historical development, but differentiates between Greek, Christian and modern thought. Art is a means to find truth. The three sections of *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* are: *Das Ding und das Werk*, *Das Werk und die Wahrheit* and finally *Wahrheit und die Kunst*[4]. There is an undeniable power behind this pattern of three.

The triadic structures of these works are also an allusion to God and the Holy Trinity. Though the choice to have three primary concepts in this study of art was not and cannot be based on the other aforementioned works, the coincidence of the divine number three should not be overlooked. It demonstrates the importance of the relationship of a trinity in thought. Like Hegel's aesthetics, this thesis also provides a historical perspective on art. However, Hegel's historical analysis is also a product of his third concept of "Self-Reflexive" as he contemplates his own understanding of history.

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[3] *Gestalt* and *Gehalt* are the approximate English equivalents to 'form' and 'substance'.
[4] "Thing and Work, Work and Truth and Truth and Art".

Rather than interpreting the historical connection of art and literature, this thesis intends to explore our understanding of art and literature through the historical analysis of three texts by three writers. Each chapter represents an era of thought in the development of art and a representative text. The aim of such an approach is to establish a historical understanding of art through these texts

The source of the first chapter, *das Mögliche*, is Aristotle's *Poetics*. His writing on art is a key to ancient Greek thought that shaped all Western art for centuries. It is important to note that within the first chapter, two German translations of Aristotle's *Poetics* have been used as opposed to an English equivalent. For example, the manner in which a word such as mimesis, "imitation", is translated from ancient Greek without taking the historical context into consideration drastically changes Aristotle's intent. This makes it impossible to find a modern definition that gives us all of the meanings that exist in the original Greek. We are bound to be misled by our modern frame of reference. The Greek word for "imitate" has little to do with physical replication. Today's focus on science has taught us that even the smallest piece of the puzzle is extremely significant. The Greeks, however, would not comprehend the modern man's fixation on the individual and particular in the same way we do because for them the individual does not hold the same value. The German translation of "imitation" as "Nachahmung", is the imitation of what exists, but not of an ideal or something whole. By trying to do justice through the interpretation of a translation without iterating these conflicts, as most translators have done, too much meaning is lost[5]. German renditions tend to provide more accurate translations from the original ancient Greek work than any common English edition. Thus, two different German translations of the *Poetics* will be used in this thesis so that the reader can obtain a greater understanding of the *Poetics* and the beginning of *das Mögliche*.

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[5] Walter Pater addresses this dilemma in his Winckelmann essay: "Again, individual genius works ever under conditions of time and place: its products are coloured by the varying aspects of nature, and type of human form and outward manners of life. There is thus an element of change in art: criticism must never for a moment forget that 'the artist is the child of his time'" (Pater 165).

Das Wirkliche is the start of the German *Sturm und Drang* and man's cessation with *das Mögliche*. For the first time the Western world looked to reality and man for inspiration in their creations. This is the second major change in the notion of art. The heart and catalyst for *das Wirkliche* was Lenz's *Anmerkungen übers Theater*. He radically changed the aim of art to revolve around the actions of man instead of the actions of gods.

The final concept of art illustrated within this thesis is *das Unmögliche* and its development of the Unreal. This began with German Romanticism and continued into the Symbolist movement. Oscar Wilde summarized the transformation in art that had occurred beyond *das Wirkliche* in his dialogue "The Decay of Lying", the key text representing the most recent notion of art. Unlike the texts analyzed in the previous chapters, "The Decay of Lying" did not initiate the new, progressive frame of mind for which the writer argues. Oscar Wilde was a product of the Romantic and Symbolist poets who came before him. The third chapter of this thesis aims to show a glimpse of the fantastical orientation of Romanticism and the evolution of its poetry, which led to Oscar Wilde and his argument for the Unreal in art.

The comprehension of the historical progression of art and its differing concepts is essential to understand not only individual artistic movements and the overarching notions of the past, but is also necessary in order to objectively view art that is produced in the present day. The relationship between the artists and the time in which they write is of the utmost importance. As a student of art, one should always strive to grasp concepts of the moment, within the moments it was created, thus removing oneself and one's modern understanding from the equation. This is critical not only to make sense of the history of art, but also of understanding art's relationship with nature and society. Without knowing the moments of great change that have happened in art and how they have affected the world, likelihood of any ability to initiate change within art is diminished.

CHAPTER 2 DAS MÖGLICHE

The first major and most influential work on art still deemed relevant today, is Aristotle's *Poetics*. However, the numerous translations of this ancient Greek text have resulted in many mistranslations. Creative liberties have led to the loss of the original intent within Aristotle's argument: Drama, as well as other arts, is the imitation of the plot of the myth: "die Nachahmung der Handlung ist nun der Mythos" (Aristoteles *Poetik* Trans. Fuhrmann 19). Yet because of the difficulties translating the intent behind each individual word, all critics from the Renaissance on chose to concentrate not on the notion of *Handlung*, but on the idea of *Mimesis*, an ancient Greek word commonly translated into German as *Nachahmung*. In seeking a corresponding English word for *Nachahmung* and its stronger counterpart *nachahmend darstellen* in an attempt to understand *Mimesis*, we are often hindered by the connotations of 'imitation'. Our understanding of this English translation is severely clouded by modern interpretations of 'imitation', which prevent us from capturing the essence of *Mimesis*.

Today the word imitation implies that you are copying something that exists in the real world[6], but that is not the definition of the word that is needed in order to understand the *Poetics*. For Aristotle, poetry is not the imitation, or reflection of reality. Today we place enormous value on finding the real[7] within art because reality provides us with truth. Yet this version of truth is subjective.

The use of the plot of the myth is the vital part of the concept of imitation in Greek tragedies. Unlike Greek sculptures, myth shows humans as dependent on the gods.

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[6] According to the Oxford English Dictionary Online: "1. a) The action or practice of imitating or copying b) Phrase: in imitation of (cf. French à l'imitation de). Also †after the imitation of, according to the imitation of, out of an imitation of; †in his imitation (cf. French à son imitation). c) Psychol. The adoption, whether conscious or not, during a learning process, of the behaviour or attitudes of some specific person or model. 2. The result or product of imitating; a copy, an artificial likeness; a thing made to look like something else, which it is not; a counterfeit. 3. Literature. 'A method of translating looser than paraphrase, in which modern examples and illustrations are used for ancient, or domestick for foreign' (Johnson); a composition of this nature." ("Imitation.")

[7] What is real is something that people see with their eyes in front of them. It is described by the OED as "Having an objective existence; actually existing physically as a thing, substantial; not imaginary" ("Real").

The Apollonian sculpture has nothing to do with tragedy and its Dionysian origins. The image of gods and the men in sculpture that the Greeks worshipped "records the first naïve, unperplexed recognition of man by himself; and it is a proof of the high artistic capacity of the Greeks, that they apprehended and remained true to these exquisite limitations, yet, in spite of them, gave to their creations a mobile, a vital, individuality" (Pater 177). The sculptures were emancipated from architecture and stood independently. Yet despite the idealized appearance of the sculptures, which glorified mankind and are the basis of humanism in the Western world, the stage had a different goal. What we consider to be mythological tales was religion for the Greeks. J.M.R. Lenz points out that:

> Aristoteles konnte nichts anders lehren, nach den Mustern, die er vor sich hatte, und deren Entstehungsart ich unten aus den Religionsmeinungen klar machen will. Eben hier ist die unsichtbare Spitze, auf der alle herrliche Gebäude des griechischen Theaters ruhen. (Lenz 35-7)

The intention of Greek drama was to tell universal plots of the fate of mankind that lay within their myths[8]. Myth unifies and focuses on a single plot and not on the action of a single person.

> Der Mythos ist eine Einheit nicht dann (wie einige meinen), wenn er sich um einen einzigen Helden dreht. Denn unzählig vieles kann an einem einzelnen geschehen, und es wird dennoch aus dem allem keine Einheit. So gibt es auch viele Handlungen eines einzelnen, ohne daß eine einzige Handlung daraus wird. (Aristotle *Poetik* Trans. Gigon 35)

The plot provides unity. A play should take place during a single day and present one event. Basing works on a specific mythological plot is what Aristotle calls the art of *Mimesis*. Each god and goddess is so powerful that the human character cannot be the sole focus of a tragedy as is the case in modern tragedies where the gods or god have lost their power. It is the power of the gods that is shown through the plot. This is why the plot itself is of such vital importance. It requires that the writer give a clear structure with

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[8] "Greek art, when we first catch sight of it, is entangled with religion. […] Greek religion, where we can observe it most distinctly, is at once a magnificent ritualistic system, and a cycle of poetical conceptions. Religions, as they grow by natural laws out of man's life, are modified by whatever modifies his life" (Pater 166).

a beginning, middle and end to his tale[9]. The role of any given human character is of no significance in tragedy as "das Wichtigste davon ist der Aufbau der Handlungen. Denn die Tragödie ist nicht die Nachahmung von Menschen, sondern von Handlungen und Lebensweisen, von Glück und Unglück" (Gigon 31). It is the plot, the ways of life that are defined by the plot and most importantly *άνάγκη*[10], which should be imitated. Since the *Handlung* excludes *Wirklichkeit*, the *Mimesis* seen in drama is to be the imitation of the plot of the myth—hence the ultimate power of the gods and the decided fate found within every plot.

For Aristotle, there are two genres of plays— comedy and tragedy. For our purposes we will be focusing on the structures of the tragedy to discover the primary motivation behind Aristotle's writings. The *Poetik* is a guide to Aristotle's ideal for all works of literature including poetry and drama. The plot is the first of three essential elements that make up Aristotelian drama: because it is the *Handlung* of the Myth, it can never be reality as we see it today in our empirical way of thinking. In the center of the plot are *das Mögliche* and *das Wahrscheinliche* (the possible and the probable, likely). They rely on one another to create a tragedy because a mythological plot is always possible and has the appearance of being true. Purpose of a drama is to demonstrate the gods' superiority over mankind that causes fear and pity[11] in the audience. This, and its effect, catharsis is one of the most important parts of mimesis. It is the reason why this plot has been shared and is what lives on in the mind once the audience has finished viewing the tragedy.

The act of imitating is something that comes natural to people. From childbirth on, we learn through replicating the actions and voices of those around us:

Nachahmen [ist] den Menschen von Kindheit an angeboren; darin unterscheidet sich der Mensch von den anderen Lebewesen, daß er am meisten zur Nachahmung befähigt ist und das Lernen sich bei ihm am Anfang durch

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[9] "Wir haben festgestellt, daß die Tragödie die Nachahmung einer in sich geschlossenen und ganzen Handlung ist, die eine bestimmte Größe hat; es gibt ja auch etwas Ganzes ohne nennenswerte Größe. Ein Ganzes ist, was Anfang, Mitte und Ende hat" (Fuhrmann 25).

[10] *άνάγκη – Ananke –* Greek concept of fate

[11] Fear and pity, referred to in German as *Furcht und Mitleid*, are derived from the Greek *phobos* and *eleos*

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Nachahmung vollzieht; und außerdem freuen sich alle Menschen an den

Nachahmungen. (Gigon 26-7)

Thus it is crucial that art should be an imitation as well. Through generations we have passed down stories by oral traditions. Though each speaker may use different words, the structure of the plot and the outcome remain the same. For Aristotle it is the plot that defines tragedy: "Es könnte ja auch ohne Handlung gar keine Tragödie entstehen, dagegen wohl ohne Charaktere" (Gigon 32). The character is irrelevant because human individuality is of no significance. The plot and its effect on human characters is something that is imposed by the gods. Aristotle did not want to see reality on stage. The myth and its plot, which took place in the past, preclude this. He recognized that man is a complex being, who has flaws. In his tragedies, Aristotle wanted to see characters that were inherently good, but were still bound to their fate and the faults that lie in their humanity. This was the truth that he sought within drama—there are things out of a person's control. Flaws within men always exist and it is these faults that are the subject of the *Handlung – hamartia*[12] and the *hubris*[13] that exist within men, which they cannot change. "Sie handeln also nicht, um die Charaktere darzustellen, sondern in den Handlungen sind auch die Charaktere eingeschlossen. Darum sind Handlung und Mythos Ziel der Tragödie. Das Ziel ist aber das Wichtigste von allem" (Gigon 32). The myth is the most important part of Aristotle's notion of drama. Without the myth, no character would exist because he is simply a part of it. It is the interplay between him and the gods that is the subject of the play[14]. For the Greeks, within the context of a drama or epic poem, the gods always decided the outcome of the story, letting no one escape his or her predetermined fate. Both Oedipus and his birth parents attempted to avoid what was foretold of his life. His birth parents tried to have him killed without success. Oedipus became a foundling. Not realizing he was adopted, he ran from home to avoid killing his father. Yet it was during Oedipus' journey to the neighbouring kingdom that his hubris led him to kill his birth father by mere coincidence. The characters do not have a part in

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[12] "Greek ἁμαρτία fault, failure, guilt. The fault or error which entails the destruction of the tragic hero (with particular reference to Aristotle's Poetics)" ("Hamartia.").

[13] "Greek. Presumption, orig. towards the gods; pride, excessive self-confidence" ("Hubris.").

[14] Walter Pater summarizes this as the major difference between sculpture and poetry "In poetry and painting, the situation predominates over the character, in sculpture, the character over the situation" (Pater 179). Not all Greek art serves the same purpose.

defining their fate. They exist to serve and be subject to the predetermined fate. By listening and seeing the stories from myth, the audience too, is forced to confront their role in the world. Oedipus, like all characters in Greek tragedy, has no individual control because he is subject to the decisions made by the gods and the fate that was decided for him.

Aristotle does not to see any relationship between tragedy to a person's day-to-day reality in drama. He is interested in the general nature of man's condition: *das Allgemeine*[15], which has to be *wahrscheinlich* and *notwendig*[16]. What is real in the 'here and now' is irrelevant within his vision of literature because the poet should be distinguished from the historian, the guardian of 'reality'. The poet writes about truth-*Wahrheit*, but *Wirklichkeit*, reality, never comes into play. It is not the role of the writer to tell the story of what has happened, but what might happen—the reflection of *das Mögliche*.

In the realm of *das Mögliche*, art is meant to express the truth without the real world. The 'real world' is not the subject matter of poetry. History and politics deal with it:

> Aus dem Gesagten ergibt sich auch, daß es nicht Aufgabe des Dichters ist mitzuteilen, was wirklich geschehen ist, sondern vielmehr, was geschehen könnte, d. h. das nach den Regeln der Wahrscheinlichkeit oder Notwendigkeit Mögliche. Denn der Geschichtsschreiber und der Dichter unterscheiden sich nicht dadurch voneinander, daß sich der eine in Versen und der andere in Prosa mitteilt—[…] sie unterscheiden sich vielmehr dadurch, daß der eine das wirklich Geschehene mitteilt, der andere, was geschehen könnte. Daher ist Dichtung etwas Philosophischeres und Ernsthafteres als Geschichtsschreibung; denn die Dichtung teilt mehr das Allgemeine, die Geschichtsschreibung hingegen das Besondere mit. Das Allgemeine besteht darin, daß ein Mensch von bestimmter Beschaffenheit

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[15] *Allgemeinheit*, along with *Heiterkeit* are key terms in discussing Greek sculpture "*Heiterkeit* – blitheness or repose, and *Allgemeinheit* – generality or breadth, are, then, the supreme characteristics of the Hellenic ideal" (Pater 177). *Allgemeinheit* is also valid for the plot of tragedy to create wholeness and unity.
[16] "Denn es ist notwendig, daß man entweder handelt oder nicht handelt und es entweder weiß oder nicht weiß" (Gigon 43).

nach der Wahrscheinlichkeit oder Notwendigkeit bestimmte Dinge sagt oder tut –
eben hierauf zielt die Dichtung, obwohl sie den Personen Eigennamen gibt.
(Fuhrmann 29; 31)

Literature is more philosophical than the writing of history. The role of the poet is to tell
what is possible and could happen, whereas the role of the historian is to tell what has
happened – the reality. It is the possibility of such an immense tragedy occurring that
evokes *pathos*[17] in an audience.[18] The goal is to fear the gods, because what they can do
is terrible. It is our imagination that gives a myth the potential to be real. For Aristotle
only a single plot from any given myth can be presented as subject matter of a play.
Anything seemingly impossible that occurs within a plot is always resolved, often by an
act of a god[19].

Aristotle found the possible, *das Mögliche*, from within astonishing and
incomprehensible moments. The myth is bigger than the individual. The poet has to
create works that serve his audience, which is to say that he must do more than simply
please them. The poet must also fulfill their desires to see the possible onstage, and let the
audience experience the consequences and share in the *pathos*. The plot leaves the
audience with greater knowledge of many possibilities in life that they have not, and
hopefully will not experience if fate treats them kindly. A single terrible plot (*Handlung*)
is what makes tragedy. It is the *Handlung* of the myth that is most important. It is used as
a tool to tell the audience that they should be aware of the potential damage that can be
caused by their own hubris and the power the gods have over them. The *impossible* for
Aristotle does not exist and therefore can only be used to achieve a certain goal within the
realm of the *possible*[20]. Things can be unbelievable, but they must always be possible and

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[17] from Greek πάθος "1. An expression or utterance that evokes sadness or sympathy, esp. in a work of
literature; a description, passage, or scene of this nature" ("Pathos.").
[18] Pathos ist eine zum Untergang führende oder qualvolle Handlung, wie etwa Tod auf der Bühne,
Schmerzen, Verwundung und dergleichen (Gigon 34).
[19] "[…] wenn man Unmögliches dichtet; dennoch ist es in Ordnung, wenn sie damit ihr Ziel erreicht (und
wir haben dieses Ziel genannt) und wenn auf diese Weise dieser oder ein anderer Teil der Dichtung
erstaunlicher wird" (Gigon 64).
[20] "Ganz allgemein muß man das Unmögliche entweder mit Hinblick auf die Dichtung oder auf das Bessere
oder mit Hinblick auf die allgemeine Meinung rechtfertigen. In der Dichtung als solcher ist das
Unmögliche, aber Wahrscheinliche vorzüglicher als das Mögliche, das unglaubhaft ist. […] das
Unbegreifliche muß sich an die allgemeine Meinung halten; damit kann man zeigen, daß es zuweilen nicht

demonstrate an overall truth that is applicable to every individual. "Man muß nun die Mythen derart aufbauen und sprachlich ausarbeiten, daß man sie sich so viel als möglich anschaulich vor Augen hält" (Gigon 48). Reality and in particular nature[21] is of no concern anywhere where the gods are in the center[22] and is thus not wanted by Aristotle. His plots and subordinate characters are created to represent the possible fate of all mankind. This is the meaning of *das Mögliche*, *das Wahrscheinliche*. The plot of *Mythos* engages the audience. It maintains a distinct separation from everyday reality, yet it presents an insightful truth about human nature as the Greeks saw it. Greek drama is not one person's subjective opinion on an event in time, but shows a plot of what is possible. Reality has no claim over Greek plays; myth is the subject matter of Greek tragedy. Subjectivity has no place in the Greek world because one perspective makes it impossible to see *das Ganze* and *die Einheit*[23] in poetry and in the world. It is the relationship between humans and the gods that is shown and is of the utmost importance in myth, not the distinction between them.

The tragic circumstances ordered by the Greek gods and the fates of the characters in Greek mythology were created to inspire and educate the Greeks. What is said within the plots of tragedy is of vital importance and is relevant to life, but not because it has any reflection of a real occurrence, but because of the possibility of something so unspeakable happening.

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unbegreiflich ist. Denn es ist wahrscheinlich, daß sich die Dinge auch gegen die Wahrscheinlichkeit ereignen können" (Gigon 66).

[21] In modern thought, nature is the objective world and equated with reality and thus objective. The Greek understanding of nature was called *physis*, the generative principle that created everything.

[22] The same goes for Medieval Christianity and Islam.

[23] *Das Ganze* and *die Einheit* translate into English as "the whole" and "the unity"

CHAPTER 3 DAS WIRKLICHE

The imitation of *das Wirkliche*— 'the real'—was seen for the first time in 16th century Dutch art. The line between reality and art, which had always been absolute, became blurred, changing the definition of what makes art. Instead of showing allegorical images loaded with religious motives from Christianity, artists like Gerard ter Borch[24] began to depict what they saw in the world around them. They did not stylize and idealize men or landscapes to make them more beautiful through their work, but showed that the ideal was no longer subject matter for art. This was the Dutch realism of the 16th and 17th centuries that relied on the human observer, and not on the events portrayed by religion or history. The world depicted was without any influence of the gods. Unlike the concept of the plot and the emphasis on the gods in Aristotle's *Poetics*, those who wanted to show *das Wirkliche* created landscapes and people in their natural environment, drastically altering the presentation and understanding of art. The Greek imitation of the myth and the possible are not a part of the new art which had its theoretical foundation in the Renaissance. Leonardo da Vinci almost takes a Realist approach, but places no emphasis on the senses as a Realist would do. The mind is the most important instrument in the creation of art:

> The painter's mind should be like a mirror, which transforms itself into the colour of the thing that it has as its object, and is filled with as many likenesses as there are things placed before it. Therefore, painter, knowing that you cannot be good if you are not versatile master in reproducing through your art all the kinds of forms that nature produces – which you will not know to do if you do not see and represent them in your mind. (da Vinci *Treatise* 48)

A new kind of imitation comes about in the Renaissance, different from the concept which the ancient Greeks had. The Renaissance artists never deemed observed reality important if it was not reordered and made into a composition by the mind. Da Vinci shows us in his works a recomposed reality as well as an idealization in historical or

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[24] He made, as Fromentin maintains, an artless art "which adapts itself to the nature of things, a knowledge that is forgotten in presence of special circumstances in life, nothing is preconceived, nothing which precedes the simple, strong and sensitive observation of what is" (Fromentin 128).

religious subject-matter. Da Vinci saw the artist who would reproduce the natural world without a reordering by the mind as lacking any technical skills, unintelligent and unimaginative.

> The painter who draws merely by practice and by eye, without any reason, is like a mirror which copies every thing placed in front of it, without being conscious of their existence. (da Vinci *Notebook* 18)

> The painter should be solitary and consider what he sees, discussing it with himself, selecting the most excellent parts of the appearance of what he sees, acting as the mirror which transmutes itself into as many colours as exist in the things placed before it. And if he does this he will be a second nature. (da Vinci *Treatise* 49)

The core of the new art in the Renaissance was this 'second nature'. The artist became the *alter deus*. Art was not a reflection of reality, but an ordered and composed 'reality'. For the Dutch artist of the 16th century, it was no longer a necessity to use his mind to create another, more idealistic nature. The eyes were sufficient so that idealization was unwarranted. Critics and artists alike began to acknowledge that in order "to appear lifelike, a picture has to be carefully made" (Alpers 72) and it takes as much technique to do a realistic image as to create an ideal image.

Dutch realism took hold in German theories of art two hundred years later. In drama, the young German *Sturm und Drang*[25] writer J.M.R. Lenz was the first to create a theory opposing French idealizing drama and its Aristotelian orientation. The problem he found with using Aristotelian *Poetics* in the 1770s is that man was no longer dependent on the gods, which was the basis for Aristotle's work. He therefore scoffs at the French who still are adherents of Aristotelianism and could not see mankind as the first step on the ladder of the "freihandelnden selbstständigen Geschöpfe" (Lenz *Anmerkungen* 21). In other words, men were like God. People in Lenz's time could no longer feel the same sense of the imitation of *pathos*, the suffering which was imposed by the gods on humanity and which was the goal of tragedy for the Greeks. Lenz and his contemporaries

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[25] The *Sturm und Drang*, was a German movement in the 1770's, which rebelled against the classicistic artistic norms of the time that demanded the imitation of the Greeks.

saw the myth as mythology. For them reality was the goal. Therefore Lenz redefined imitation in art as "die Nachahmung der Natur, das heißt aller der Dinge, die wir um uns herum sehen, hören etcetera" (21). He felt that poets are obligated to show nature as Elizabethan poets did: "[d]iese Herren hatten sich nicht entblödet, die Natur mutterfadennackt auszuziehen und dem keusch- und züchtigen Publikum darzustellen wie sie Gott erschaffen hat" (17). The Elizabethans concentrated on reality and world. The plays of the Greeks were constructed differently because of their religious values and thus could no longer be used as a foundation for modern drama

> Die Schauspiele der Alten waren alle sehr religiös, und war dies wohl ein Wunder, da ihr Ursprung Gottesdienst war. Da nun fatum bei ihnen alles war, so glaubten sie eine Ruchlosigkeit zu begehen, wenn sie Begebenheiten aus den Charakteren berechneten, sie bebten vor dem Gedanken zurück. Es war Gottesdienst, die furchtbare Gewalt des Schicksals anzuerkennen, vor seinem blinden Despotismus hinzuzittern. Daher was Oedip ein sehr schickliches Sujet fürs Theater, einen Diomed führte man nicht gern auf. Die Hauptempfindung, welche erregt werden sollte, war nicht Hochachtung für den Helden, sondern blinde und knechtische Furcht vor den Göttern. Wie konnte Aristoteles also anders: *secundum autem sunt mores*[26]. (73)

Lenz felt it was time for a new drama. Thus art, in order to be considered art, should not have to be ideal, as the French postulated. Since society no longer had any religious affiliation corresponding to the one plot expressed by the myth, the French goal of imitating the plots of the myth was seen as a futile effort by Lenz. The truth that once existed within the old traditions of tragedy had no longer any context and therefore it could never ring true to the individual of the 18th century in the same way as it did to the Greeks, nor did it have any relevance to a modern person's life and its significantly different religious views. Lenz calls for a new vision of humans for the stage, where characters shape the plot and make the world in their likeness without the interference of invisible gods in the sky:

> Es ist die Rede von Charakteren, die sich ihre Begebenheiten erschaffen, die selbständig und unveränderlich die ganze große Maschine selbst drehen, ohne die

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[26] The characters come in second place.

Gottheiten in den Wolken anders nötig zu haben, als wenn sie wollen zu

Zuschauern, nicht von Bildern, von Marionettenpuppen – von Menschen. (41)

Lenz puts people, not god, in the center of everything. The writer becomes an observer of mankind and therefore a Realist, similarly to the Dutch painters before him.

Lenz resents the French notion of beauty because he saw their "belle nature" as the most "artificial beauty" (19). The French did not yet find beauty in the individual, but in the imitation of the general, *das Allgemeine*. This of course was the center of Aristotle's *Poetics* and also the foundation of Greek sculpture. For Lenz, the imitation of nature is the source of art. Nature as an object and its effects cannot be defined by unity, "[d]enn die Natur ist in allen ihren Wirkungen mannigfaltig" (57). Thus the imitation of nature is an individual perception by the senses, which observe the variety within nature.

The discovery of *das Wirkliche* is a result of the subject using its senses. The subject is an individual and particular being, and sees the existing *Mannigfaltigkeit*; both have to be seen in their characteristic and particular states. Man divides the world by the senses that are limited and limiting as far as the understanding of the world is concerned. The world becomes an object, reinforcing the individual as independent from the rest of nature[27]. Mankind creates its own reality, which Lenz defines as what the eye sees and the ear hears. To Lenz the imitation of what a person hears and sees is the way for him to understand the world "nichts anders als die Nachahmung der Natur, das heißt aller der Dinge, die wir um uns herum sehen, hören etcetera" (21). The object world now becomes the subject matter of literature. It is not the beautiful manner of other poets that the modern poet imitates[28], but the actions of a character. For Lenz, the character is the source of drama. *Nachahmung* and *Anschauung*[29] are its foundation, combining the senses with the intellect:

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[27] Decartes famous quotation "cogito ergo sum" reinforces the importance of individual perspective and shows that man can longer define himself by his relationship to god, but by his own thoughts and actions.
[28] This was the classicistic tradition against which the *Sturm und Drang* revolted.
[29] "Aber trostlos wären wir, wenn wir darüber das Anschauen und die Gegenwart dieser Erkenntnisse verlieren sollten, und das immerwährende Bestreben, all unsere gesammleten Begriffe wieder auseinanderzuwickeln und durchzuschauen, sie anschaulich und gegenwärtig zu machen, nehm ich als die zweite Quelle der Poesie an" (Lenz *Anmerkungen* 25).

> […] die letztere [Quelle] die Nachahmung [sollte] allen schönen Künsten gemein [sein], wie es denn auch Batt – die erste aber, das Anschauen allen Wissenschaften, [sollte] ohne Unterschied, in gewissem Grade gemein sein sollte. Die Poesie scheint sich dadurch von allen Künsten und Wissenschaften zu unterscheiden, daß sie diese beiden Quellen vereinigt, alles scharf durchdacht, durchforscht, *durchschaut* – und dann in *getreuer* Nachahmung zum andernmal wieder hervorgebracht. (31)

This combination is Lenz's great merit. The 17th century Dutch discovery of the senses is a result of an ever-increasing emphasis on the senses corresponding to a decreasing role of God. This emphasis on the senses changed humanity's view of nature itself. For the Greeks nature (*physis*) was the creator of everything. Therefore it could stand for unity and totality, which was also the core of Aristotle's *Poetics*. For Lenz and his contemporaries, nature is an object.

Lenz detested the imitation of art that inspired the French movement of Classicism. Classicism, as mentioned earlier, was motivated by an ideal of beauty, as manifested in *les beaux arts*. In Lenz's search for an independent and free-acting man, he relied on the imitation of man in his individuality and particularity as the vital part of creating drama and poetry. The French notion of *Nachahmungen* meant the imitation of an established, traditional, mythological subject matter, which was the Greek concept of the plots. The act of imitation itself is ingrained in mankind:

> […] [E]s [gibt] für die menschliche Natur kein einzig Vergnügen […], wo nicht Nachahmung mit zum Grunde läge – die Nachahmung der Gottheit mit eingerechnet usw. Herr Aristoteles selber sagt – – Es kommt itzt darauf an, was beim Schauspiel eigentlich der Hauptgegenstand der Nachahmung: der Mensch? oder das Schicksal des Menschen?". (33)

Demonstrating the fate of mankind was the primary motivation for writers who followed the *Poetics*. However, without a god to impose fate upon a character, a single person has the opportunity to stand alone as the subject of a play. Yet, as Lenz criticizes, his contemporaries do not have the courage to put the free-acting independent character on the stage because it is the "Blick der Gottheit in die Welt, den die Alten nicht haben

konnten, und wir zu unserer Schande nicht haben wollen" (41). In following Aristotle's work, the popular French poets[30] of the time stress the unities (which were French inventions) and lack individual characters. Though he appreciates Aristotle's demands and their historical conditions, Lenz sees the evolution of Aristotle's ideals in French drama to be lacking substance. He describes them as: "die heutigen Aristoteliker, die bloß Leidenschaften ohne Charakteren malen" (37). They presented a generalized version of what is human in a single form. By following in the footsteps of the Greeks, the French could not explore the soul of the modern man[31]. They never developed a concept of man in their attempt to continually imitate the traditions of Greek tragedy. Though the characters within the 'old' tradition have different names, they all play the same part and are all subjects of a predetermined fate. Lenz notes Aristotle's lack in characterization "gerade im Trauerspiele, wo auf die handelnden Personen alles ankommt, das die Epopee dramatisiert heißen könnte, den Charakteren so wenig gibt" (73). In the effort to imitate the myth and Aristotle's teachings the French fail: "[…] sie machen mit dem Aristoteles die Charaktere nicht nur zur Nebensache, sondern wollen sie auch, […] gar nicht einmal im Trauerspiele leiden" (55). In seeking humans to be the cause of their own fate, Lenz makes the character the most important part of any drama.

For Lenz the individual is free and therefore has now become its own god. There is no divine power controlling it and it is free to make their own decisions. Thus it is not the imitation of other works or of the myth which modern man finds attractive in drama, but the imitation of man that can be observed. Seeing ourselves independent is the essence of Lenz's poetics: "[…] das Wesen der Poesie sei Nachahmung und was dies für Reiz für uns habe – Wir sind, m.H. oder wollen wenigstens sein, die erste Sprosse auf der Leiter der freihandelnden selbstständigen Geschöpfe, und da wir eine Welt hie da um uns

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[30] "Es gibt nirgend in der Welt so grübelnde Beobachter der drei Einheiten: der willkürliche Knoten der Handlung ist von französischen Garnwebern zu einer solchen Vollkommenheit bearbeitet worden, daß man ihren Witz in der Tat bewundern muß, als welcher die simpelsten und natürlichsten Begebenheiten auf so seltsame Arten zu verwirren weiß […]" (*Anmerkungen* 55)

[31] "Das griechische Theater, das die Franzosen zum Muster nahmen, war nach innerer und äußerer Beschaffenheit so, daß eher ein Marquis dem Alcibiades nachahmen könnte, als es Corneillen dem Sophokles zu folgen möglich wäre. Erst Intermezzo des Gottesdiensts, dann feierlich politisch, zeigte das Trauerspiel einzelne große Handlungen der Väter dem Volk mit der reinen Einfalt der Vollkommenheit; erregte ganze und große Empfindung in den Seelen, denn es war selbst ganz und groß. Und was für Seelen! Griechischen!" (Goethe "Zum Shakespears Tag" 10).

sehen, die Beweis eines unendlich freihandelnden Wesens ist, so ist der erste Trieb, den wir in unserer Seele fühlen, die Begierde's ihm nachzutun" (21). In Aristotelian drama, a character is never a particular or characteristic individual, but its character is general because it illustrates mankind's dependence on the gods. Therefore man in Greek tragedy is not an individual, but only the outline of a human[32] when shown on the stage. Yet these people are conditioned to always do what they should do, as the gods command. They are bound by the *Sollen* imposed on them and are unable to be seen as being independent from the plot made by the gods. In emancipating mankind from the gods, Lenz could finally demand: "[…] daß wir den Menschen sehen wollen, wo jene nur das unwandelbare Schicksal und seine geheimen Einflüsse sahen" (47). Man's fate would now be defined by the *Wollen* of an individual. Thus, Lenz was able to put the character in charge of his own actions and have characters that think outside the restrictions of society.

Lenz knew the new anti-Aristotelian ideals that he presented to his readers were not completely revolutionary. Drama had often been used to reflect certain societal expectations, and there had been a handful of poets who had veered from the Aristotelian norm: "Die Italiener hatten einen Dante, die Engelländer Shakespearn, die Deutschen Klopstock, welche das Theater schon aus ihrem eigenen Gesichtspunkt ansahen, nicht durch Aristoteles' Prisma" (53). These few great writers were on the path to show the true nature of humanity emancipated from the gods, but were not followed widely enough to prevent the continuing influence of Aristotelian *Poetics*.

Shakespeare is the one that Lenz sees as the inspiration for the future of all drama: "[…] Lenz beträgt sich mehr bilderstürmerisch gegen die Herkömmlichkeit des Theaters, und will denn eben all und überall nach Shakespearescher Weise gehandelt haben" (Goethe *Dichtung und Wahrheit* 539). Shakespeare is the master of language and created a theatre that anticipated a classless society[33]. Unlike the characters in Greek tragedies,

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[32] Lenz sees Aristotle's interpretation of character as a mere figure, not a character, only "der kenntliche Umriß eines Menschen auf der Bühne" (*Anmerkungen* 35).

[33] "Seine Sprache ist die Sprache des kühnsten Genius, der Erd und Himmel aufwühlt, Ausdruck zu den ihm zuströmenden Gedanken zu finden. Mensch, in jedem Verhältnis gleich bewandert, gleich stark, schlug

Shakespeare's characters are the first to make use of the notion of *Wollen*: "Die alte Tragödie beruht auf einem unausweichlichen Sollen, das durch ein entgegenwirkendes Wollen nur geschärft und beschleunigt wird" (Goethe "Shakespear und kein Ende!" 643). Mankind has the ability to work independently towards fulfilling its own desires, without interference from higher powers. It is given the opportunity to create its own fate, and live with the consequences it makes for itself. The *Sollen*, what one should do, no longer defines one's every action. The character can contemplate if what he should do and what he wants to do are one and the same. Ideas of this kind had previously never existed on the stage:

> Wollen und Sollen suchen sich durchaus in seinen Stücken ins Gleichgewicht zu setzen; Beide bekämpfen sich mit Gewalt, doch immer so, daß das Wollen im Nachteile bleibt. Niemand hat vielleicht herrlicher, als er, die erste große Verknüpfung des Wollens und Sollens im individuellen Charakter dargestellt. (644)

To illustrate the change from *Sollen* to *Wollen*, Shakespeare showed the inner workings of his characters on the stage. Through key dialogues and soliloquies, he let the audience share in the thought process of a character, shedding light on every situation.

> Nach der Bezeichnung der Charactere bilden wir uns zwar gewisse Gestalten, aber eigentlich sollen wir durch eine Folge von Worten und Reden erfahren, was im Innern vorgeht, und hier scheinen alle Mitspielenden sich verabredet zu haben, uns über nichts im Dunkeln, im Zweifel zu lassen. (639)

In showing the inner workings of his characters, Shakespeare made his characters come alive for the audience. The characters became more than just figures of people, but people themselves, who in turn made the challenges they faced just as real to the audience as their own daily lives.

Though Lenz was arguing for characters on stage emancipated from the gods, society had not yet emancipated itself from all the restrictions of a class society and from the higher powers – be they religion and or rule of monarchs. The *Anmerkungen übers*

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er ein Theater fürs ganze menschliche Geschlecht auf, wo jeder stehn, staunen, sich freuen, sich wiederfinden konnte, vom obersten bis zum untersten" (*Anmerkungen* 81).

Theater were published in 1774, more than ten years before the French Revolution. Until then it was not imaginable for a king to have been killed by his people. Shakespeare, who was writing dramas two hundred years before Lenz, was not able to envision man completely independent from God. Despite valuing the *Wollen* over the *Sollen*, fate and higher powers still played a significant role in the outcome of his plays.

The Christian god and prayer both play significant roles in Shakespearian tragedies. Hamlet has the perfect opportunity but cannot kill his stepfather/uncle Claudius, because Claudius is praying[34]. At the same time Claudius cannot pray because he knows he cannot obtain forgiveness for murdering his own brother and stealing his brother's wife in cold blood[35]. The line between *Sollen* and *Wollen* becomes blurred. Everything to do with *Sollen* "[…] ist despotisch. Es gehöre der Vernunft an: wie das Sitten- und Stadtgesetz; oder Natur: wie die Gesetze des Werdens, Wachsens und Vergehens, des Lebens und Todes" (Goethe, "Shakespear und kein Ende!" 643). On the other hand "Das Wollen [...] ist frei, scheint frei und begünstigt den Einzelnen. Daher ist das Wollen schmeichlerisch, und mußte sich der Menschen bemächtigen, sobald sie es kennen lernten. Es ist der Gott der neuen Zeit" (643). When *Wollen* drives a person and no god stops him, that individual becomes master of their own fate. Thus he plays the role of God. Though Shakespeare's characters are on the way to be free to make their own choices, they are still repressed by the *Sollen* because Shakespeare's power of the *Wollen* does not solely come from the character alone. The *Wollen* is hindered by

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[34] Hamlet confesses his dilemma: "Now might I do it pat, now he is praying; / Ad now I'll do't: and so he goes to heaven; / And so am I reveng'd. That would be scann'd: / A villain wills my father ; and for that, / I, his sole son, do this same villain send / To heaven." (3.3.73-8) He continues to deliberate his situation: "But in our circumstance and course of thought/ 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then reveng'd, / To take him in the purging of his soul, / When he is fit and season'd for his passage?/ No. / Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent; / When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage, / Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed, / At gaming, swearing, or about some act / That has no relish of salvation in't; / Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven, / And that his soul may be as damn'd and black / As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays: / This physic prolongs thy sickly days." (3.3.83-96)

[35] The following citations are extracts of Claudius' expression sorrow and impasse caused by his inability to pray: "O! my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;/ It hath the prima; eldest curse upon't;/ A brother's murder! Pray can I not,/ though my inclination be as sharp as will: / My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent" (3.3.36-40) "My fault is past. But, O! what form of prayer / Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'? / that cannot be; since I am still possess'd / Of those effects for which I did the murder, / My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen. / May one be pardon'd and retain the offence"" (3.3.51-56) "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: Words without thoughts never to heaven go." (3.3.97-98)

religious ideology and outside influences, which demonstrate a situation, which still has resemblance to the Greeks:

> […] denn wie Hamlet durch den Geist, so kommt Macbeth durch Hexen, Hekate, und die Über-Hexe, sein Weib, Brutus durch die Freunde in eine Klemme, der sie nicht gewachsen sind; ja sogar im Coriolan läßt sich das Ähnliche finden; genug, ein Wollen, das über die Kräfte eines Individuums hinausgeht, ist modern. Daß es aber *Shakespear* nicht von innen entspringen, sondern durch äußere Veranlassung aufregen läßt, dadurch wird es zu einer Art von Sollen, und nähert sich dem Antiken. (644)

Lenz goes beyond Shakespeare's example in giving power to mankind through illustrating his *Wollen* on the stage: "[…] durch seine Behandlungsart das innerste Leben hervorzukehren gewinnt er den Leser" (647).

Lenz sought to eliminate any traces of the *Sollen* in theatre. The *Sollen* cannot be removed from Aristotelian theatre, because tragedy is "nicht eine Nachahmung des Menschen, sondern der Handlungen, des Lebens, des Glücks oder Unglücks, denn die Glückseligkeit ist in den Handlungen gegründet, und Endzweck des Trauerspiels ist eine Handlung, nicht Beschaffenheit" (Lenz, *Anmerkungen* 35). A new definition of drama, both for *Komödie* and *Tragödie*, had to be established, in order to remove the idea of the *Sollen* from theatre. Lenz saw: "Die Hauptempfindung in der Komödie ist immer die Begebenheit, die Hauptempfindung in der Tragödie ist die Person, die Schöpfer ihrer Begebenheiten" (75). Rather than the plot taking priority and the gods affecting all, *Tragödie* shows the person who creates its own opportunities, whereas *Komödie* – comedy – is about a person who is in the middle of a series of incidents over which he has little control. Lenz negates two thousand years of theatrical history by seeing the tragedy not as the perdition *(Verlust)* of life, but as the triumph of mankind. In consequence German Classical drama dispenses with the name tragedy altogether and replaces it with *Schauspiel* and *Drama*. In a *Komödie* the plot takes precedent because the characters lack control in their own lives similarly to the audience. However, their inability to change their situation never comes from the *Sollen*. It is a decision that the characters independently make, or it might even reflect a kind of tragic flaw.

The *Sollen* no longer existed within the new reality of post-Enlightenment thought and its emphasis on human freedom. Lenz believed the *Sollen* (a person being willed from outside) should also not exist on the stage. People do simply what they want to do. They define themselves by their own actions. To demonstrate his new model for theatre, Lenz wrote his own play called *Die Soldaten*. The *Wollen* is what drives most of his characters. There is no god, (and no king) to punish them. Within this play, nobility is represented by the military as the highest caste, whose officers are barred from marriage. Nevertheless, Marie Wesener, the protagonist of *Die Soldaten,* chooses to strike up a relationship with the officer Desportes, despite of her being engaged to Stolzius, a man from her own class. Her father encourages her, against any social conventions, because of the possibility of her achieving a higher status through her union to an officer and nobleman. Herr Wesener even goes so far as to paying off Desportes' debts. Marie's flirting with other men in the play eventually leads her to become a beggar woman on the street. Her lust for men and advancement in society drives much of the plot. Soon after, her father discovers her on the street and takes her back into his home, as if nothing had ever happened. Marie does not experience any lifelong consequences for her actions, which would have been unheard of in earlier times.

Lenz refers to *Die Soldaten* as a *Komödie*. Our current understanding of comedy and tragedy is often based on the overall emotion of a play. If a play is sad, if there are many deaths, it is called a tragedy. A comedy is a play that is happy and funny. *Die Soldaten* is called a comedy because tragedy, in the Aristotelian sense, can no longer exist given the historical changes and the different role of the human being. Further it is a *Begebenheit* and not *eine Person*, which is in the center of the play. Lenz turns the Aristotelian genres of tragedy and comedy upside down by showing the freedom of mankind in tragedy and a conditioned individual in comedy. In rejecting all forms of *Sollen* and by making mankind independent and turning them into gods themselves, Greek tragedy, although still put on stage by French writers, was no longer an option for Lenz. Instead, *das Wirkliche* is put on the stage to expose reality and its problems.

In changing the objective of both the *Tragödie* and *Komödie*, and by eliminating the *Sollen* Lenz can affect his audience in new ways. When *Sollen* motivated drama, the audience was being informed of what they should or should not do. For the Greeks, it was the external motivation of fear of the gods from their religion that drove them to heed the lessons drama told. In giving humans power, Lenz puts a world on the stage which is based on the reality which surrounds him. Thus the audience can immerse themselves in an 'artistic reality' similar to the one they experience in their own lives. In addition Lenz ends his play by creating a utopia, where he proposes changes to be made in society. The conclusion of *Die Soldaten* suggests to the audience an ideal means to resolve problematic situations, like Marie's, before they even happen:

> **Obrister** *(zuckt die Schultern)*. Wie ist dem abzuhelfen? Schon Homer hat, deucht mich, gesagt, ein guter Ehmann sei ein schlechter Soldat. Und die Erfahrung bestätigt's. – Ich habe allezeit eine besondere Idee gehabt, wenn ich die Geschichte der Andromeda gelesen. Ich sehe die Soldaten an wie das Ungeheuer, dem schon von Zeit zu Zeit ein unglückliches Frauenzimmer freiwillig aufgeopfert werden muß, damit die übrigen Gattinnen und Töchter verschont bleiben.

> **Gräfin**. Wie verstehen Sie das?

> **Obrister**. Wenn der König eine Pflanzschule von Soldatenweibern anlegte; die müßten sich aber freilich denn schon dazu verstehen, den hohen Begriffen, die sich ein junges Frauenzimmer von ewigen Verbindungen macht, zu entsagen. (5.5.24-38)

The utopia Lenz creates does not only have the higher class musing over a perfect solution for the situation, but, as mentioned before, the cause of all the trouble, Marie Wesener, survives without any consequences. People now have the ability to influence society to better itself. By presenting *das Wirkliche* on stage and ending the play by a utopia, the audience can be inspired by the independence of the characters, their thoughts and actions, and change society as well.

CHAPTER 4 DAS UNMÖGLICHE: OSCAR WILDE'S "UNREAL AND NON-EXISTENT"

"An Artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them. We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty"
(Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray 12-3)

Less than 100 years later, through Oscar Wilde's writings, the next major notion of art following the discovery of Realism in literature and its emphasis on *das Wirkliche* was summarized. *Das Unmögliche* had to become a part of the practice and theory of art. The way was prepared by German Romanticism and the reception of the Orient and its symbolic art.

By the time Oscar Wilde was writing on literature, Lenz's demand to see *das Wirkliche* in drama had taken root within Western art. Artists changed their methods and began to find inspirations for their work from their own experiences. Lenz's objective was to create social reform by showing *das Wirkliche* in drama. In his theory man is in the center and the master of his own fate; man thus gains power to effect change in society. As other Realists (and in the 19th century Naturalists) adopted his methods, they started to focus more and more on factual events and people while fighting against societal restrictions that man had to overcome. However, Realism and Naturalism were met with opposition.

The German Romantic movement had its influence all over Europe. The continuing exploration of new worlds also led to a discovery of different artistic and literary traditions. Despite the elements of Naturalism in its sculptures, and that Greek sculpture laid the foundation for western realism[36], Greek art was highly idealized. The Orient countered Greek formation and its realistic tradition. In particular, Japanese art and its deformation of reality extended its influence from the 1860's onwards. Its ornamentation was shared by the reception of the Oriental carpet: "And this indeed is the

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[36] See Schwarz *Orient-Okzident* 39

reason of the influence which Eastern art is having on us in Europe, and the fascination of all Japanese work. While the Western world has been laying on intellectual doubts and the spiritual tragedy of its own story, the East has always kept true to art's primary and pictorial conditions" (Wilde, "Critic: Nothing" 133). Oscar Wilde felt that the primary objective of art, to present something beautiful, had been forgotten in the midst of the Naturalist and Realist movements. Through the images of the Oriental carpet and Japanese art, Europe was introduced to the power of flatness or surface, colour, lines and *das Unmögliche*.

Following these trends, Oscar Wilde called for the rediscovery of the Unreal in art, which existed in the works of the German Romantics before him. He disagreed with making the character the most important part of art because this means that life and nature also become the most important parts of art. He believed that none of these elements, the character, nature or life, can let art express itself beautifully. *Das Wirkliche* forgets that "Art begins with abstract decoration with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is Unreal and non-existent. This is the first stage. Then Life becomes fascinated with this new wonder, and asks to be admitted into the charmed circle" ("Decay" 21-22). Wilde encourages life and art to be distinctly separated. Only through the imagination can one create something that is beautiful, 'Unreal and non-existent', thus shunning the Real from art.

"The Decay of Lying" is Oscar Wilde's postulation on the root of his thought and art's shift from *das Mögliche* to *das Wirkliche*. He summarizes the effects of these periods of thought and how that must, in his opinion, be changed. To assist in the new transition he gives us four new doctrines of art:

One: "Art never expresses anything but itself." (53)

Two: "All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to art they must be translated into artistic conventions. […] As a method Realism is a complete failure, and the two

things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter." (54)

Three: "The third doctrine is that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life's imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realize that energy. […] It follows, as a corollary from this, that external Nature also imitates Art." (55)

Four: "The final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art." (55)

It is the combination of these four elements with which Wilde changes the understanding and application of art in English literature. It has to be noted, however, that many of his ideas are derived from German Romanticism, the foundation of European Symbolism. Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Goethe and Hegel's aesthetics are the inspiration for his criticism.

Rather than following conventions of proposing his new aesthetic principles, Wilde chooses to present his argument in "The Decay of Lying" in the form of a performative dialogue. For Wilde, like the German Romantics before him, criticism and literature should both be presented in a beautiful manner; however, Wilde found that in recent years "there has been a tendency in literature to appeal more and more to the eye, and less and less to the ear, which is not really the sense which, from the standpoint of pure art, it should seek to please, and by whose canons of pleasure it should abide always" ("Critic: Nothing" 112-3). This conversation between two friends lets Wilde share his perspective of art in greater detail, while promoting his aesthetic ideals in the structure of his work. His dialogue has nothing to do with the eye and everything to do with the ear. Wilde is able to counter and explain probable questions that would emerge from his critics. Wilde does not only make an argument, but he enacts it. His characters read and debate parts of an essay one of them has written with the same title 'The Decay of Lying'. Thus he articulates himself in a straightforward manner, which makes his argument more accessible to a larger audience. In doing so he eliminates fact while

simultaneously creating fiction and replicating his argument in a dialogue as he presents it.

4.1 The First Doctrine

Wilde's first doctrine seeks to separate art from all other activities of the world: "Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines" ("Decay" 53). The need to make art distinct from all other mediums is what differentiates Wilde's thought from that of his English predecessors. Art should not be seen as anything more than art. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Lenz's *Anmerkungen übers Theater* was not an argument against Aristotle's *Poetics* itself, but the French imitation of Greek tragedy. Lenz put man in the center of drama, and he does certainly propose to change Aristotle's original distinction between the poet and the historian[37]. In showing *das Wirkliche* in drama, Lenz relied on what he saw and heard. He created situations in his plays that reflected reality; the conflicts shown between men were solved in a utopian fashion. As *das Wirkliche* became more popular in art, especially with the 19th century Naturalist movement, creating parallel realities within drama and novel became an imperative. Recreating actual events took precedent. Lenz's definition of nature: "aller d[ie] Dinge, die wir um uns herum sehen, hören etcetera" (*Anmerkungen* 21), makes the artist look to the world around him for inspiration for his work.

Wilde disapproves of his contemporaries' focus of melding nature and art together because it attempted to create a link to art that he believed could not exist. They sought to let nature inspire their art, whereas Wilde felt that "[w]hat art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition" ("Decay" 3). Art gives man the opportunity to create something better and prove nature wrong.

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[37] By Aristotle's definition, Lenz would be more of a historian than an artist. He calls himself a historian: "Der „Beobachtungsgeist"wird dichterische Methode: „Glaubt man etwa, ich habe aus der Luft gegriffen, was bei mir halbe Authentizität *eines Geschichtschreibers* ist"" (Schwarz, *Dasein* 77).

The juxtaposition between French, ancient Greek and German interpretations of 'Nature' is the source of Wilde's debate. In the Greek sense nature was *physis*, which created everything, man and the gods. *Physis* makes everything possible; the myth is the realm of *das Mögliche*. The French chose to imitate the Greek traditions of nature, using the French language. They did this with a belief in God as the creator of everything. Their idea of nature is quite different from the Greeks. Thus they created *la belle nature*. This was an idealized nature, which we can also see reflected in the landscape architecture of the French Gardens, manicured and controlled by man. Wilde wants to see the beautiful, *das Schöne*, in art, a concept inspired by the Greeks. Yet he realized that there is no perfection in nature. To him, it is this same lack of perfection that should veer us away from nature and make art the foundation for art:

> It is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should
> have no art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature
> her proper place. As for the infinite variety of Nature, that is a pure myth. It is not
> to be found in Nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated
> blindness of the man who looks at her. ("Decay" 4)

He sought to reestablish the German ideal of and distinction between art and nature that had not existed in English thought[38]. Rather than finding inspiration for art from outside influences such as religion or nature, Wilde, inspired by the German Romantics, wants art to come from the imagination of the artist. Art begets art.

The notion of art begetting art can be seen as an offshoot of Greek thought, where art is created through imitation of the plot of the myth, but in Oscar Wilde's thinking, the gods, who once controlled man, do not influence anything. Art is independent from all religions and higher powers that were once imposed on it. The only part nature plays in Wilde's aesthetic of art is its ruin:

> If we take Nature to mean natural simple instinct as opposed to self-conscious
> culture, the work produced under this influence is always old-fashioned,
> antiquated, and out of date. One touch of Nature may make the whole world kin,

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[38] Some of these ideals can be seen in the influx of Orientalism to England and the rest of Europe, but they were not widely understood by the public.

but two touches of Nature will destroy any work of Art. If, on the other hand, we

regard Nature as the collection of phenomena external to man, people only

discover in her what they bring to her. She has no suggestions of her own. (21)

Wilde completely reverses Lenz's concept of the *Nachahmung der Natur* to create his

new theory of art. Nature is not only influenced by art it is completely dependent on it.

Art, for Wilde, should only be bound to other forms of art because "Art never expresses

anything but itself. This is the principle of [his] new aesthetics" (43) and the first of his

four doctrines. The *Decay of Lying* is Wilde's effort to deter the public from realism to

appreciate the value of the German Romantics' *Unendliche* and Unreal literary motifs.

4.2 The Second Doctrine

The concept of nature illustrated by *das Wirkliche* is a subjective one. It can only

be fully comprehended by the individual describing what his senses tell him. The same

can be said of life. If man is in the center of things, he is unable to see a greater picture.

He cannot remove himself from his thought. His understanding is completely dependent

on the context of his own life and his subjective opinion. Shakespeare was seen as the

inspiration for the Lenzian definition of nature, and for *das Wirkliche*.

Inspired by life, Lenz changed the form of drama to be something completely

different from the Greeks. For Wilde, Lenz's aim to show "[l]ife soon shattered the

perfection of the form. Even in Shakespeare we can see the beginning of the end. It

shows itself by the gradual breaking up of the blank-verse in the later plays, by the

predominance given to prose, and by the over-importance assigned to characterization"

(23). Rather than regarding Shakespeare as the inspiration for modern art, Wilde sees him

as the end of art. By focusing on man's condition there is no room left to nurture the

soul. Wilde found that people relied so heavily on the character that the beautiful and

imagination in art is lost: "Shakespeare is not by any means a flawless artist. He is too

fond of going directly to life, and borrowing life's natural utterance. He forgets that when

Art surrenders her imaginative medium, she surrenders everything" (23-4). The reliance on *das Wirkliche* to produce art is the origin of Wilde's second doctrine:

> All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to art they must be translated into artistic conventions. The moment Art surrenders its imaginative medium it surrenders everything. As a method Realism is a complete failure, and the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter (54).

Modernity of form and subject-matter, which are developed from imitating reality, *das Wirkliche,* are problematic to Wilde for many reasons. One of these difficulties is seen in the depiction of the character of man. Naturalists and Realists attempted to recreate man on stage through writing dialogues in a manner that the audience would possibly hear in society. Yet what people say in society does not necessarily hold any value. When applying this subject-matter, art cannot nurture the human spirit with its beauty. The men imitated on stage do not say anything of importance: "the characters in these plays talk on the stage exactly as they would talk off it; they have neither aspirations nor aspirates; they are taken directly from life and reproduce its vulgarity down to the smallest detail" (24).

When realism is the goal, the imaginative element of art is lost. For Wilde Realists and Naturalists "do not succeed in producing even that impression of reality at which they aim, and which is their only reason for existing. As a method, realism is a complete failure" (25). In recreating an impression of reality, one must have some understanding of the things around him. Yet in articulating this reality, the artist is forced to create something completely subjective. Rather than achieving the ability to experience man, this subjectivity isolates man from the world around him. It prevents the public from finding any form of the whole. Art should not be forced to be a subjective entity. Lenz created art that imitated what we see and hear around us, but as Naturalism and Realism progressed, artists enclosed themselves in the definitions of their new art form. Though in life every individual has its own reality, art is not a medium that should be

restrictive and contain a singular opinion. A subjective creation cannot be a part of reality because it can never fully imitate it, therefore defeating its intended purpose. Including reality in art, according to Oscar Wilde, is not only futile, but limiting to art as well.

Shakespeare marks the beginning of this problem of reality taking an all too important role in Western art. However he "did not go directly to life for their subject-matter, but sought for it in myth, and legend, and ancient fate" ("Critic: Nothing" 138). Shakespeare still used the art produced before him as influence for creating his masterpieces. By using art as the foundation for art, the imagination can still be availed of to its full potential. The amount of Realism found in Shakespeare's work comes secondary to the presentation of the "possible" of ancient works. The ancient Greeks limited the range of possibilities within their art by not permitting man to take action in the plot. Lenz's *Anmerkungen* did away with the gods, but they also created new limitations. Instead of strengthening the relationship of art to other forms of art, Lenz's realism bound art to man and nature. This new relationship enforced even more limitations on art because laws continually bind nature. This limits the imagination, which is vital to the creation of all art. In using characters from life artists restrict their work further because:

> in point of fact what is interesting about people in good society […] is the mask that each one of them wears, but the reality that lies behind the mask. It is a humiliating confession, but we are all of us made out of the same stuff ("Decay" 14-5).

He believes that:

> the only real people are the people who never existed, and if a novelist is base enough to go to life for his personages he should at least pretend that they are creations, and not boast of them as copies. The justification of a character in a novel is not that the other persons are what they are, but that the author is what he is. Otherwise the novel is not a work of art (14).

Wilde advocates for art to go beyond the natural laws and obvious relationships that exist in society. It is only through art that the destruction and transformation of all natural and

societal laws is possible without dire repercussions. He does not want life to be forgotten. Wilde wants the artists to take the opportunity to use their medium to transcend life:

> But the artist, who accepts the facts of life, and yet transforms them into shapes of beauty, and makes them vehicles of pity or of awe, and shows their colour-element, and their wonder, and their true ethical import also, and builds out of them a world more real than reality itself, and of loftier and more noble import – who shall set limits to him? ("Critic: Everything" 193)

Bad art exists in returning life and nature to art because life and nature impose upon art and man more than the gods ever could. There is no possible means to escape from life into art if art's sole purpose becomes to imitate life itself. For Wilde, the artistic conventions of Realism and Naturalism should serve no purpose in art because they inhibit the imagination. Without imagination, good art can never be created.

4.3 The Third Doctrine

The necessity for art to be produced with limitless imagination becomes evident in his third doctrine. Wilde emphasizes:

> that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life's imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realize that energy. […] It follows, as a corollary from this, that external Nature also imitates Art ("Decay" 55).

To have an understanding of this third doctrine, one must first grasp the intended definitions of life and nature. Life is an individual's experience in the world, in which this person tries to make his or her own choices. Nature is a concept of man's own invention: "[She] is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life" (41). Nature and life, respectively being our own invention and perception of the world, both imitate art because human beings are born imitators who are endlessly influenced by art. Art alters our understanding of the world. It

is never influenced by life because it is an independent being. Only art influences art. For Oscar Wilde, man's attempt to join life and art together is a childish desire that does not hold any merit. It is obvious to him that:

> Life holds up the mirror to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realized in fact what has been dreamed in fiction. Scientifically speaking, the basis of life –the energy of life, as Aristotle would call it–is simply the desire for expression, and Art is always presenting various forms through which this expression can be attained. Life seizes on them and uses them, even if they be to her own hurt. (39-40)

In "The Decay of Lying" Wilde presents multiple concrete examples of life imitating art. Some of these incidences are unconscious imitations. One example Wilde presents, however, is a woman who is compelled to follow in the footsteps of a story she read because of the uncanny resemblance to herself that she finds in the heroine. The woman imitates the story's actions, despite knowing the impending tragedies that would most certainly fall upon the heroine:

> At that time I used to read serial stories, and I well remember the shock of surprise I felt when I came to the description of the heroine. She was so like my friend that I brought her the magazine, and she recognized herself immediately, and seemed fascinated by the resemblance. […] She told me that she had felt an absolutely irresistible impulse to follow the heroine step by step in her strange fatal progress, and that it was with a feeling of real terror that she had looked forward to the last few chapters of the story. When they appeared, it seemed to her that she was compelled to reproduce them in life, and she did so. It was a most clear example of this imitative instinct of which I was speaking, and an extreme tragic one. (38-9)

The woman in Wilde's story was unable to prevent her life from imitating art through no fault of her own. Man's intimate connection to art induces us to let our life and nature imitate it.

Modern thinkers abhor the notion of art having such an ultimate effect on life and nature. For them the natural world is absolute and defines everything. Seeing art as a force that has a stronger influence on the world than nature itself seems absurd. They believe that it is only nature that influences art. Yet man is a being that constantly tries

> to improve the conditions of the race by means of good air, free sunlight, wholesome water, and hideous bare buildings for the better housing of the lower orders. But these things merely produce health; they do not produce beauty. For this, Art is required, and the true disciples of the great artist are not his studio imitators, but those who become like his works of art, be they plastic as in Greek days, or pictorial as in modern times; in a word, Life is Art's best, Art's only pupil. (33)

In limiting art to life, art becomes stagnant. Life too loses its ability to change and grow. Lenz's goal was not simply to show man on stage, but to create a utopia in which society can discover new solutions to common problems.

Despite advocating for the real, Lenz's ideology unwittingly belongs in some degree to the world of the Unreal. The realm he showed on stage could never fully be a part of reality because of the shifting ideals articulated by his characters. It is art and "Literature [that] always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose" (35). In *Die Soldaten*, Lenz's utopia does not hold any merit in reality. The final scene is his creation of a new world. Though Lenz has some idea of new realities, by creating ideal societies he transcends nature. The suggestion to prevent Marie Wesner's story from ever happening again was never possible in Lenz's society. This moulding of life into literature is not enough for Wilde. He wants art to go further than Lenz imagined that *das Mögliche* and *das Wirkliche* were capable of. Wilde wants art to not just transcend reality, but to do so beautifully. Modern realist thinkers could not see the possibilities that lay in the rediscovery of the beautiful, which was such a strong component of ancient Greek thought. They prevented themselves from exploring this new meaning of art because they were dependent on the new form of Realism. To Oscar Wilde the public was not critical enough to realize that:

[p]ure modernity of form is always somewhat vulgarizing. It cannot help being so. The public imagine that, because they are interested in their immediate surroundings, art should be interested in them also, and should take them as her subject-matter. But the mere fact that they are interested in these things makes them unsuitable subjects for art. The only beautiful things, as somebody once said, are the things that do not concern us ("Decay" 18).

Beauty cannot be found in Lenz's utopias. It is part of the Greek world and European Classicism. Reality does not tolerate it. It is an ideal[39]. Beauty comes from the Unreal, which can only be cultivated through art that goes beyond life and nature: **"It is through Art, and through Art only, that we can realize our perfection; through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual experience"** ("Critic: Everything" 168). Naturalism and Realism have nothing to do with beauty. They rose to popularity because unlike Greek mythology these new movements promised to reveal "truths" about man instead of god. Yet the truth that many sought was falsely equated with morality. In wanting morals to take precedent in art, the public unintentionally reunited itself with the objective of teaching that had been so embedded in Greek drama. They could not comprehend that morality and truth are not one and the same. The progress and value of art, like science, in any capacity should not be restricted by morality: "Science is out of the reach of morals, for her eyes are fixed upon eternal truths. Art is out of the reach of morals, for her eyes are fixed upon things beautiful and immortal and ever-changing" ("Critic: Everything" 192). Beauty has nothing to do with reality for it belongs to a higher intellectual realm. It is conflict and not truth that is found in Realism. Moral dilemmas can be shown through conflicts, but truth takes no part in it. This is because truth in and "of art cannot be taught: they are revealed only, revealed to natures which have made themselves receptive of all beautiful impressions by the study and worship of all beautiful things" ("English" 144). Life imitates art so that it can find

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[39] The ideal that stems from *das Wirkliche* is also seen in Dutch realism. Svetlana Alpers demonstrates the bond between reality and the ideal in relation to Hoogstraten's art theories:
 "The prime example for Renaissance picture-makers of beauty so conceived was the justly proportioned human body—constructed or imagined, but never seen" (Alpers 85).
"Put simply, one could say that Italian art was based on an intentional turning away from individuality in the name of general human traits and general truths. In such art *resemblance* to certain ideals of appearance or of action, and thus the resemblance between things, was a constitutive truth. This not only helped give the art a certain ideal cast, it also encouraged the differentiation between kinds of works" (Alpers 78).

beauty as a means to express itself and thus reveal its own truths. Realism cannot give us truth because the average person interprets what is 'real' as something concrete. Contrary to common interpretations, the use of the word 'real' to describe something does not make it true. Truth and life's imitation of art are found in abstraction and symbolism – not in the ideal or individual.

4.4 The Fourth Doctrine

This understanding of art stems from a new thought in history that begins with the appreciation of Eastern art and its symbolism. Oriental art does not idealize man or gods. It transcends Western art's fixation with the human form and purpose— choosing to look for beauty elsewhere. This break from Western tradition is the origin of *das Unmögliche*. Wilde, in an attempt to establish a solid, comprehensible foundation for *das Unmögliche* called this new primary objective 'lying': "The final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art" ("Decay" 55). This fourth doctrine is essential to the concept of *das Unmögliche*. The lies Wilde refers to are not frivolous fibs fabricated without foundation. They require creativity and imaginative intellect: "After all, what is a fine lie? Simply that which is its own evidence. If a man is sufficiently unimaginative to produce evidence in support of a lie, he might just as well speak the truth at once" (6). Truth is often interpreted as factual description of an incident. This common perception can be extremely misleading.

Truth relies on lies to contradict them. Lies are necessary to find truths because truths can be anything. The 'facts' that define them are completely subjective: "To know the truth one must imagine myriads of falsehoods. For what is Truth? In matters of religion, it is simply the opinion that has survived. In matters of science, it is the ultimate sensation. In matters of art, it is one's last mood" ("Critic: Everything" 188). A lie can be more than something false. It can go beyond falsehood and be *unmöglich* and unreal. In society these qualities are often portrayed negatively. Art, on the other hand, can never be factual because "[…] the truths of art cannot be taught: they are revealed only, revealed

to natures which have made themselves receptive of all beautiful impressions by the study and worship of all beautiful things" ("English" 146).

Art never claims to be truthful, nor does it force truth on an audience in a bold unruly manner. Only those who seek the truth in art through its beauty can find it. This is because, as we said previously in this chapter, art can only express itself:

> Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance. She is a veil, rather than a mirror. She has flowers that no forests know of, birds that no woodland possesses. She makes and unmakes many worlds, and can draw the mood from heaven with a scarlet thread. Hers are the 'forms more real than living man,' and hers the great archetypes of which things that have existence are but unfinished copies. Nature has, in her eyes, no laws, no uniformity. She can work miracles at her will, and when she calls monsters from the deep they come. She can bid the almond tree blossom in winter, and send the snow upon the ripe cornfield. At her word the frost lays its silver finder on the burning mouth of June, and the winged lions creep out from the hollows of the Lydian hills. ("Decay" 30-1)

To reestablish a discourse for the newest notion of art that we speak of, the aim had to be "the telling of beautiful and untrue things". Wilde demanded that the restrictions of the laws of man and gods be removed from art. Art expresses *das Unmögliche*. The sole purpose for art is now to divulge everything beautiful.

By accepting lies and the Unreal as a part of art, the possibility for creation is limitless. Wilde's character Lord Henry, in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* expresses his desire for *das Unmögliche*: "I should like to write a novel certainly; a novel that would be as lovely as a Persian carpet, and as unreal" (*Picture* 36). Like the art Wilde reestablishes in the *Decay of Lying*, the images on carpets divulge no factual truths, only beauty.

The comparison of literature to Persian carpets is a key element to the development of *das Unmögliche*. Persian carpets are the symbol for the Unreal because

they belong in both the *Phantasie* and *Realität*. Carpets function as the link between these opposing artistic ideologies in both *das Wirkliche* and *das Unmögliche:* "Mit dem Teppich als Motiv von Realität und von Phantasie und Märchen sind zwei Pole in der literarischen Darbietung abgesteckt. Sie entsprechen zwei Weltsichten, die sich mit Bejahung oder Verneinung der vorgegebenen Wirklichkeit identifizieren lassen" (Schwarz *Orient – Okzident* 81). Carpets are often viewed as mere practical objects to be used in daily life. Despite the commonplace of their physical form, the beauties of Persian carpets are not from this world. They are an unusual form of art because they hold high aesthetic value, but also maintain a practical purpose. The carpets represent both life and art: "Damit geht der Teppich über seine visuelle Existenz hinaus und entwickelt Symbolwert. Dieser umfaßt nicht nur das Leben, sondern auch die Kunst. So wie der Teppichknüpfer aus dem Chaos der verschieden gefärbten Wollknäuel ein harmonisches Kunstwerk schafft, so möchte auch der Künstler seine Welt ordnen" (*Orient – Okzident* 72). Each carpet shows us a new and different universe in every traditional tapestry. The creation of these new, beautiful, intangible worlds is the aim of literature of the unreal. They are fantastic constructions whose use of *Phantasie* and form are of equal importance. Persian carpets inspired artists to create with *Realitätsvermeidung*, an avoidance of reality, and change the expectations within art[40]. Beauty is the most important part of the carpet motif. The images on the carpets are created by the combination of lines, forms and colour–all on a flat surface: "Die Vorbildfunktion des Teppichs umfasst mehrere Bereiche. Primär ist die Umsetzung der objektiv-empirischen Realität in eine Gedankenrealität von Linie und Farbe zu nennen. Dabei kommt der Farbe des Teppichs ein besonderer Inspirationswert zu. Gauguin gibt den zeitgenössischen Malern den Rat, Teppiche zu studieren, wenn sie die Technik der Farben meistern wollen" (305). It is the unnatural forms and colours that define the carpets and their ability to transcend reality.

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[40] Die Realitätsvermeidung des Teppichs, die als allgemeines artistisches Phänomen des Orients bereits die literarische Rezeption beeinflußte, führte zu einer Revolution in der europäischen Malerei um 1890. Diese wandte sich von der mimetischen Bewältigung der Wirklichkeit, dem Kunstziel seit der Renaissance, ab. Farbe, Linie und Fläche ersetzen die Nachahmung. Der „Geist" des Orients ersetzt das westlichen „Sehen". (Schwarz *Der Orient und die Ästhetik der Moderne* 25-6)

CHAPTER 5 GERMAN ROMANTICS: POETS OF "DAS UNMÖGLICHE, UNREAL, AND NON-EXISTENT"

"A voir les choses d'un peut haut, il n'y a, en poésie, ni bons ni mauvais sujets, mais de bons et de mauvais poètes. […] L'espace et le temps sont au poète"
(Victor Hugo *"*Introduction*" Les Orientales* 19).

In the nineteenth century, the colours and forms in carpets are attractive to the Western Naturalist audience foremost for their superficial beauty as visual objects. As a movement, Naturalism is primarily focused on the exterior. Man's conflicting role in society is of greater importance in the realm of *das Wirkliche* than man's inner soul. The problem is solved in modern paintings where "[d]as Außen [als] Thema der Malerei weniger wichtig [ist] als das Innen. Dieses diktiert Farbe und Form. Anstatt des Naturalistischen überwiegt das Abstrakte als eigentliche Erfüllung der dekorativen Ambitionen der modernen Malerei" (Schwarz *Orient – Okzident* 307). The inner soul cannot be shown by literal images. In painting it is created through colour, forms, lines and ornamentation, not the imitation of reality. Instead of reality the artist should:

> seek rather for the imaginative beauty of design and the loveliness of fair colour, and rejecting the tedious realism of those who merely paint what they see, try to see something worth seeing, and see it not merely with actual and physical vision, but with that nobler vision of the soul which is as far wider in spiritual scope as it is far more splendid in artistic purpose. (Wilde "Critic: Everything" 199)

Das Mögliche and *das Wirkliche* found the best literary representation of their notions in plays for the theatre. Through plays, other forms of literature were inspired and began to take up the new artistic ideals. The Unreal, however, does not share this progression of artistic influence. *Sturm und Drang* literature cannot achieve the ornamentation of painting or carpet needed to uncover *das Unmögliche*[41]. They are restricted by plot and character, which link them too closely to reality. Instead of changing the form of drama, *das Unmögliche* is represented primarily through poetry.

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[41] Works of the *Sturm und Drang* movement and those it inspired cannot share any notions of *das Unmögliche* because they are unable to go beyond reality: "Die Wirklichkeit tritt nicht, wie im Realismus und Naturalismus, in das Leben, sondern aus dem Leben" (Schwarz *Orient – Okzident* 168).

Oscar Wilde attempted to create plays that had a subject-matter that was unreal and non-existent, but society's yearning for realism has resulted in many scholars being blind to Wilde's intent[42]. Though it is possible to create them, dramas of any kind are not the ideal medium of *das Unmögliche*. Poetry, on the other hand, is an art that is filled with different structures and forms and therefore it is flexible. There is not one specific way to construct a poem. A poet does not require man or god to play a central role in his creation. Drama did not even exist in Eastern Literature, the inspiration for *das Unmögliche*:

> Höchst merkwürdig ist, daß die Persische Poesie kein Drama hat. Hätte ein dramatischer Dichter aufstehen können, ihre ganze Literatur müßte ein anderes Ansehn gewonnen haben. Die Nation ist zur Ruhe geneigt, sie läßt sich gern etwas vorerzählen, daher die Unzahl Mährchen und die gränzenlosen Gedichte. So ist auch sonst das orientalische Leben an sich selbst nicht gesprächig. (Goethe "Nachtrag" 358)

The muse for eastern poetry is a free imagination and fairy-tales. *Mythos* and reality play no part in the sphere of the Unreal. Their poems are always about beauty. The eastern poet's knowledge to live and create free from purpose, along with western poet's desire for independence from the power of man and gods, is the origin of the spirit of *das Unmögliche*. It allows poetry the freedom to focus on beauty alone.

5.1 Novalis

The poetry of *das Unmögliche* developed almost at the same time as the drama of *das Wirkliche.* Lenz's *Anmerkungen*, the seed of the Naturalist movement, was written in 1774, a little more than ten years before the beginning of the French revolution. Artists

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[42] Wilde's famed play *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a prime example of Wilde's efforts to intertwine his ideals of what is unreal and non-existent. The plot primarily revolves around the character John Worthing. His desire to marry his love is hindered by the fact that he does not know his family origin because the man who raised him found him in a bag in a train station in London. The absurd actions in the play are often accredited to Wilde's desire to comment on English Society. While this is a part of his intent, the unreal and non-existent in his plot is a greater overall notion, which is often overlooked.

have the ability to see beyond current circumstances. Their work not only illustrates the thoughts, emotions and intentions of society but also anticipates them. For Wilde:

> [Great poetry] lies at the base of all noble, realistic and romantic work as opposed to the colourless and empty abstractions of our own eighteenth-century poets and of the classical dramatists of France […] opposed, too, to that spirit of transcendentalism which also was the root and flower itself of the great Revolution. ("English" 117)

It was only a year after the revolution ended in 1800 that the German poet Novalis wrote his poem "Hymnen an die Nacht". This work is the first poem of *das Unmögliche* and the inspiration for the Symbolist movement. As discussed in relation to Oscar Wilde, the *Unmögliche*'s sole purpose is beauty. It does not impose any limitations on its subject matter.

The possibility to discover new non-existing worlds and beauties is endless. This is where "Hymnen an die Nacht" establish themselves – in the *Unendliche*. In a society where art and life were determined by the **eye**, Novalis creates an art beyond the gift of sight. "Hymnen" look to a symbolic night for endless beauty, for there the eye does not see. The night is the realm of dream and imagination. The speaker of the poem wants the day to go away so he can live, sleep and dream in the darkness of night

> Muß immer der Morgen wieder kommen?
> Endet nie des Irdischen Gewalt?
> Unselige Geschäftigkeit verzehrt
> Den himmlischen Anflug der Nacht?
> Wird nie der Liebe geheimes Opfer
> Ewig brennen?
> Zugemessen ward
> Dem Lichte seine Zeit
> Und dem Wachen –
> Aber zeitlos ist der Nacht Herrschaft,
> Ewig ist die Dauer des Schlafs.
> Heiliger Schlaf!
> . . . .
> In jener Dämmerung
> Der wahrhaften Nacht. (Novalis 381)

Light is a symbol for truth, the gods, as well as rationalism as manifested by the Enlightenment. It is a positive force that gives man power. Yet in light there is a

limitation on how much one can actually see. Boundaries exist and assumptions are instantly made. The darkness of night lets us dream and see with infinite variety with no interference from preconditioned thoughts or judgment. In night, man can live free of the shackles of his day-to-day realities.

> Himmlischer als jene blitzenden Sterne
> In jenen Weiten
> Dünken uns die unendlichen Augen
> Die die Nacht
> In uns geöffnet.
> Weiter sehn sie
> Als die blässesten
> Jener zahllosen Heere
> Unbedürftig des Lichts
> Durchschaun sie die Tiefen
> Eines liebenden Gemüts
> . . . .
> Du kommst, Geliebte –
> Die Nacht, ist da –
> Entzückt ist meine Seele –
> Vorüber ist der irdische Tag
> Und du bist wieder mein.
> Ich schaue dir ins tiefe dunkle Auge,
> Sehe nichts als Lieb und Seligkeit. (Novalis 380)

It is only in the night the never-ending, infinite depths can be dreamt to be seen by the inner eye. There the limited sight of day does not exist – only fathomless vision prevails. Maeterlinck spoke of the spirit of *das Unmögliche* in Novalis' work: "'Ihm scheint, daß dem Geiste nichts so erreichbar ist wie das Unendliche', so denkt man an die, wie immer leicht ironisch gefärbten, Worte Mallarmés, mit denen er von seiner 'Unfähigkeit zu allem, was nicht das Absolute ist' spricht" (Vordtriede 101). German Romanticism lives in the imagination and has nothing to do with reality. In this world, anything is possible: "Der Glaube Novalis' an das mögliche Wunder in der Welt hat sich in das leise Geständnis verwandelt, daß der Dichter sich im Unmöglichen bewegt" (143). It is his belief in the impossible that made him capable of generating the sphere of the Unreal in his work.

In Novalis' poem, the speaker discovers immortality in night. He positions himself looking down from above enjoying immortal life.

Unendliches Leben
Kommst über mich
Ich sehe von oben
Herunter auf dich.
An jenem Hügel
Verlischt dein Glanz
Ein Schatten bringet
Den kühlen Kranz.
O! sauge Geliebter
Gewaltig mich an
. . . .
Unendliches Leben
Wogt mächtig in mir
Ich schaue von oben
Herunter nach dir (Novalis 386; 405)

In *dem Wirklichen*, people became the master of their own fate on earth. They secured god's position and power in literature, but never lived in the heavens. At the time, such a perspective did not exist on earth. In this revolutionary viewpoint, Novalis goes far beyond the objectives laid by *dem Wirklichen* to put man in the center. He exposes man's hope about his new domain.

Daß ich bald ewig
Entschlummern kann.
Ich fühle des Todes
Verjüngende Flut
Und harr in den Stürmen
Des Lebens voll Mut (Novalis 387)

Novalis' poetic composition, the internal dream of man's soul, established an essential piece of the *Unmögliche*—the *Phantasie* within poetry. In the realm of the *Phantasie*, new realities, like those that exist on carpets, can always be created. German philosopher K.W.F. Solger explained:

'Das Reich der Phantasie ist selbst die Wirklichkeit, nur in ihrem Wesentlichen und wahrhaft höheren Dasein.' So könne man auch wohl sagen, 'das Geschäft des Künstlers sei, das Innere der Dinge zum Äußeren zu machen.' Das steht in unmittelbarer Nachbarschaft zu den Forderungen von Novalis[.] (Vordtriede 115)

Carlyle viewed Novalis' work and his "Naturverehrung [als] eine[] Erkenntnis von Einheit alles Natürlichen, von dem Erlebnis des Traums als innerer Wirklichkeit" (Vordtriede 40). Dreams are a part of the *Phantasie*, which transcends everyday life.

They let us experience artificial worlds and discover inner truths, which are not found in everyday life. The poetry of *das Unmögliche* was a new means to

> 'exprimer l'inexprimable' oder wie es schon bei Novalis heißt: 'Der Sinn für Poesie hat viel mit dem Sinn für Mystizism gemein. Er ist der Sinn für das Eigentümliche, Personelle, Unbekannte, Geheimnisvolle, zu Offenbarende, das Notwendig-Zufällige. Er stellt das Undarstellbare dar. Er sieht das Unsichtbare, fühlt das Unfühlbare usw.' (Vordtriede 100)

It gave poets a new vocabulary to explore non-existing ideas. They could expand human consciousness through their art. The inexplicable realms of *das Unmögliche* initiated a new understanding of art and life.

5.2 Goethe

Christianity had dominated the West for centuries, while in the East, Islamic traditions had a stronger influence. Both religions share a literary origin in the stories they recount from the Old Testament. The well-ornamented and detailed manner in which the lessons of this religious text are woven together, is in itself a work of poetry. This makes the Bible the oldest collection of poetry: "Da wir von orientalischer Poesie sprechen, so wird nothwendig der Bibel, als der ältesten Sammlung, zu gedenken. Ein großer Theil des alten Testaments ist mit erhöhter Gesinnung, ist enthusiastisch geschrieben und gehört dem Felde der Dichtkunst an" (Goethe "Hebräer" 266). Yet despite their common poetic origin, Eastern and Western societies addressed religion and art in two extremely different manners.

Previously, Western art demonstrated a constant need to either distinguish or define itself in some way by religion. The Greeks used art to share the tales of the influence of their gods on man. Lenz made it obvious that god should play no part in art. In Eastern traditions there was never any question about the relationship between religion and art for one reason – there was none. Religion was about unquestionable faith in the word of the prophet Mahomet. He acted as the vessel for the word of god and instructed

god's people on morality and the proper way to live. In Islamic art, the poet sometimes plays the role of the teacher as *Saadi*[43] shows. But more than anything the poet shows imagination[44]. The East is the homeland of the *Phantasie,* as Herder stated. The poet creates beauty through the mastery of his words. His purpose, if anything, is pleasure[45]. It is the understanding of the significant contrast between the role of the poet and the prophet, which gave Eastern art the freedom to transcend reality even in the earliest forms of their art:

> Wollen wir nun den Unterschied zwischen Poeten und Propheten näher andeuten, so sagen wir: beyde sind von einem Gott ergriffen und befeuert, der Poet aber vergeudet die ihm verliehene Gabe im Genuß, um Genuß hervorzubringen, Ehre durch das Hervorgebrachte zu erlangen, allenfalls ein bequemes Leben. Alle übrigen Zwecke versäumt er, sucht mannigfaltig zu seyn, sich in Gesinnung und Darstellung gränzenlos zu zeigen. Der Prophet hingegen sieht nur auf einen einzigen bestimmten Zweck; solchen zu erlangen, bedient er sich der einfachsten Mittel. Irgend eine Lehre will er verkünden und, wie um eine Standarte, durch sie und um sie die Völker versammeln. Hiezu bedarf es nur, daß die Welt glaube, er muß also eintönig werden und bleiben. Denn das Mannigfaltige glaubt man nicht, man erkennt es. ("Mahomet" 287)

Art is not a religion that requires unquestionable faith. It is a creation through which man can experience the infinite variety of all that does and does not exist in reality. Genuine understanding of *das Unmögliche* is only feasible through Oriental art:

> Wer den Dichter will verstehen
> Muß in Dichters Lande gehen;
> Er im Orient sich freue
> Daß das Alte sey das Neue. ("Entschuldigung" 435)

It was the discovery of the works of the old Persian poet Hafis[46] in the translation of Hammer Purgstall, which aquainted Goethe with Persian poetry. Through Hafis, he

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[43] Saadi was a famous Persian poet who died in 1291 at the age of 102.
[44] The German philosopher Herder also discussed the need for imagination in art throughout his aesthetic work "Kritische Wälder oder Betrachtungen, die Wissenschaft und Kunst des Schönen betreffend, nach Maßgabe neuerer Schriften", which he first published in 1769
[45] To describe this idea of pleasure in poetry, Goethe uses the word *Genuß.*
[46] The poet Haifs lived until 1389.

uncovered *das Unmögliche* of the Orient. This poet, who lived four hundred years before him already attained everything Goethe hoped to achieve in art. In contrast to many of Goethe's contemporary Western poets and despite his talents in art, his Persian 'Zwillingsbruder' Hafis was a religious man: "Zu einer solchen Gewandtheit war das schönste dichterische Talent erzogen und heran gebildet; ihm gehörte der ganze Koran und was für Religionsgebäude man darauf gegründet war ihm kein Räthsel. Er sagt selbst: 'Durch den Koran hab' ich alles/ Was mir je gelang gemacht.'" ("Hafis" 311). Unlike Western artists who did away with religion for their art, Eastern religiosity and poetic imagination allowed artists to produce art independently from their faith. Goethe was already sixty-five when he began writing his collection of poems, the *West-östliche Divan*. He aspired to compose a body of poems dedicated to the Western reader, but in Hafis' literary image:

> Meinen Divan besonders möcht' ich also bezeichnen, dessen gegenwärtige Ausgabe nur als unvollkommen betrachtet werden kann. In jüngeren Jahren würd' ich ihn länger zurückgehalten haben, nun aber find' ich es vortheilhafter ihn selbst zusammenzustellen, als ein solches Geschäft, wie Hafis, den Nachkommen zu hinterlassen. Denn eben daß dieses Büchlein so da steht, wie ich es jetzt mittheilen konnte, erregt meinen Wunsch ihm die gebührende Vollständigkeit nach und nach zu verleihen. Was davon allenfalls zu hoffen seyn möchte, will ich Buch für Buch der Reihe nach andeuten. ("Künftiger Divan" 366-7)

In his poem "Unbegrenzt" Goethe places himself in contest against the Persian poet. The poem dwells on the theme of *das Unendliche,* which Novalis had introduced to German literature. Western realist boundaries are overcome by Eastern infinitude, resulting in the transcendence of earthly limitations:

> Daß du nicht enden kannst das macht dich groß,
> Und daß du nie beginnst das ist dein Loos.
> Dein Lied ist drehend wie das Sterngewölbe, ("Unbegrenzt" 1-3)

Everything in life has an end, but poetry continues to exist limitlessly. It is an art that can be free of purpose. This *zweckfreie Natur* gives poetry the freedom to transcend any reality. Goethe challenges himself to create works as great as Hafis. Their oeuvres can exist side by side. Yet unlike the example of previous artistic traditions, this is not done

through the imitation of Hafis' work. Rather than imitating Hafis' poetry, Goethe fashions his own blend of west-eastern poetry. He succeeds in writing his own poems with unbound, infinite themes of the unreal and non-existent[47]:

> Und mag die ganze Welt versinken,
> Hafis mit dir, mit dir allein
> Will ich wetteifern! Lust und Pein
> Sey uns den Zwillingen gemein!
> Wie du zu lieben und zu trinken
> Das soll mein Stolz, mein Leben seyn.//
> Nun töne Lied mit eignem Feuer!
> Denn du bist älter, du bist neuer. ("Unbegrenzt" 13-20)

Hafis may have lived hundreds of years before him, but for Goethe, his work was the most profound and most important collection of poetry to date. "Unbegrenzt" is not only an analogy to Novalis' theme of *das Unendliche* in "Hymnen an die Nacht", but also a praise of Hafis' fame as a poet. By delving into a world of infinite variety, the ultimate finite entities of reality – life and death – lose their dominion. Hafis' poetry, like the *Arabian Nights* in the chapter "Mahomet", has the aim to carry man "außer sich hinaus ins unbedingte Freie führen und tragen" ("Mahomet" 291). The 'Bedingtheit'[48] of realism, *das Wirkliche,* is overcome.

The transcendence of time and space in "Unbegrenzt" sets the tone and intent of the *West-östliche Divan*. Goethe goes beyond all Western conventions to take his audience, be they readers or listeners of his poems, on a journey of the mind. It is with this work that the true reception of the Orient has commenced. Goethe eliminated the necessity to imitate art and replaced it with imagination and creation. He learned from Hafis that poetry did not have to be created from a poet's past experiences:

> [...] [M]it einem wirklichen Lehramte stehen seine Gedichte völlig im
> Widerspruch, der sich wohl dadurch heben läßt, wenn man sagt: daß der Dichter
> nicht geradezu alles denken und leben müsse was er ausspricht, am wenigsten
> derjenige der in späterer Zeit in verwickelte Zustände geräth, wo er sich immer

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[47] "Ganz im Sinne der Dichtung von Hafis schafft Goethe im *Divan* keine zweite Welt, die mit der ersten, vor den Augen liegenden, rivalisiert, sondern eine neue Welt, die einzig und allein von der Phantasie bestimmt ist. Goethe bricht mit dem Nachahmungsgebot, das seit Aristoteles die Literatur bestimmt und nähert sich den künstlerischen Zielen der Romantik." (Schwarz *Der Orient und die Ästhetik* 168)

[48] *Bedingtheit* roughly translates in English to 'limitation'.

der rhetorischen Verstellung nähern und dasjenige vortragen wird was seine Zeitgenossen gerne hören. Dieß scheint uns bey Hafis durchaus der Fall. Denn wie ein Mährchen-Erzähler auch nicht an die Zaubereyen glaubt die er vorspiegelt, sondern sie nur aufs beste zu beleben und auszustatten gedenkt, damit seine Zuhörer sich daran ergötzen. ("Hafis" 311-2)

The poet creates a journey for the listener's mind, stimulates his imagination through imagination and leads him to freedom. Goethe himself never experienced the Orient first hand. It was only through art and literature that he was able to discover this new land. Because of his imagination, a trip to the East was not necessary. Goethe's mind could conjure all he could ever desire to enjoy in this foreign land, with infinite variety.

In "Liebliches", one of the most famous *Divan* poems, Goethe's desire to create a realm of freedom and to transcend reality comes into full effect. The poem is a journey of beauty that exists only in Goethe's *unendlichem Sehen*. The innovative and bold language within the poem has no relationship with Goethe's own reality. What lay before Goethe as he wrote "Liebliches", was the horrific aftermath on the battlefield of Erfurt from the Napoleonic war. He uses poetry to create an alternative reality where he can only see what he considers to be *lieblich*. Like Novalis, Goethe renders the physical eye powerless. Yet rather than blinding the eye with darkness and night, Goethe enlists the morning mist:

> Was doch buntes dort verbindet
> Mir den Himmel mit der Höhe?
> Morgennebelung verblindet
> Mir des Blickes scharfe Sehe. ("Liebliches" 1-4)

The eye cannot see the colours or shapes in front of it amidst the fog; instead they are dreamed up in an Oriental vision by the *unendliche Auge*. The blood on the battlefield is transformed into beautiful, intoxicating poppies, transcending the harsh reality before Goethe.

> Ja es sind die bunten Mohne,
> Die sich nachbarlich erschrecken,
> Und, dem Kriegesgott zum Hohne,
> Felder streifweis freundlich decken. (13-6)

Goethe gives art one purpose – beauty – an entity that is not particularly useful for an inflexible mind, but one that holds great value. Only the sun can break his dream, but his sense of beauty prevails. He profits from the prettiness of the flower as it is being highlighted by the sun.

> Möge stets so der Gescheute
> Nutzend Blumenzierde pflegen,
> Und ein Sonnenschein, wie heute,
> Klären sie auf meinen Wegen. (17-20)

Like Novalis, light is the singular entity that has the power to evaporate the poet's dreamland and the infinite vision, which can only exist without the restricted eye. The appearance of the sun in Goethe's poem is a positive experience. It directs the eye to the *Blumenzierde*. Goethe is free to create a world of unreal beauties for his audience, untouched by any human affliction. Rather than avoiding light, he uses it to profit from the beauty of the flowers and thus forget human pain. Nothing, not religion, nor nature has the ability to impose their restrictions on his art. The words and the imagination can live on their own. Only Hafis' art inspires Goethe's art in the *Divan*.

It is the *Unendliche* journey through the *Phantasie* that made the German Romantics and their connection to the Orient so mesmerizing to later poets like Gautier and Oscar Wilde. Unbound by reality, German Romantic poets discovered freedom in infinite variety and the aim to compose for beauty alone.

5.3 Poe

Novalis began the fascination of the *unendliche Sehen* that the night permitted. He inspired poets to reach beyond the limitations of reality and nature, which already lay before them, and dream of a new world: a world without limitations, where the laws that bind us to this earth are no longer needed. Goethe's *Divan* demonstrated how poetry can transcend time and space to uncover the infinite variety which can only be created through words. In English poetry, Edgar Allan Poe was the first to follow Novalis and

Goethe's new tradition of transcendence by creating another universe with his words, and also receive acclaim from his peers.

Poe's 1844 poem "Dreamland" does not establish an alternative reality of splendor to distract from life, as Novalis or Goethe had done. Instead he personifies night as an Eidolon – a 'Geist' from Ancient Greek traditions. The poet is a traveler who loses himself for a moment and looks to nature to ground himself. For some reason, nature does not exist in the same quality, which it once had. It is as if nature has lost its 'purity'. Each spot, regardless of its beauty, is turned into a "spot most unholy, / … each nook most melancholy,— " (III:11-12). The infinite vision of nature described by early German Romantics, like Novalis, was an impressive alternative for existing nature with unreal qualities.

Though the poem takes place at night, the colours the poet creates are more wondrous than those that existed in the day. The darkness' infinite capabilities were also a thing of beauty. Yet the world Poe fashions is not beautiful with illusory colours. The nature surrounding the traveler gives the initial appearance of reality, referring to lakes, mountains, skies and seas, but each are described as dark, distorted and dead

> Mountains toppling evermore
> Into seas without a shore;
> Seas that restlessly aspire,
> Surging unto skies of fire;
> Lakes that endlessly outspread
> Their lone waters, lone and dead,— (II:5-11)

The darkness is not something that man is accustomed to embracing. The traveler is searching for adventure and wealth that lies on the road to Eldorado:

> But the traveler, traveling through it,
> May not, dare not openly view it;
> Never its mysteries are exposed
> To the weak human eye unclosed;
> So wills its kind, who hath forbid
> The uplifting of the fringèd lid; (IV:5-10)

The traveler has fallen into a realm that is controlled by the night, who shields him from the natural world. Once engrossed in this new world, the traveler is confronted with the past, who he really is, and what he believes in:

> There the traveler meets aghast
> Sheeted Memories of the Past,—
> Shrouded forms that start and sigh
> As they pass the wanderer by,—
> White-robed forms of friends long given
> In agony, to the Earth—and Heaven. (III:13-18)

The darkness surrounding the traveler reveals truths to him which he did not know about himself. The impression is given that his memories are walking by, but the exact quality of these uncovered truths and memories are not shared.

Goethe transcended space and time to compete with Hafis. Though he had infinite vision in his poems, the act of transcendence was often implied with use of *das Unendliche*. Poe begins "Dreamland" by establishing a journey to another world, quite unlike his own

> I have reached these lands but newly
> From an ultimate dim Thule—
> From a wild weird clime that have lieth sublime
>   Out of SPACE—out of TIME. (I:5-8)

Though still closely related to the German Romantic literary traditions of *das Unendliche*, *das Unmögliche* and the Unreal, Poe's work is on the precipice of the Symbolist movement and its inspiration. The darkness within "Dreamland" is never broken, even when the traveler has wandered home. Poe establishes an opposing transcendental world differentiating his style to that of Goethe and Novalis. In doing so he strengthens and expands the German Romantics' ideology to uncover new forms of the transcendental spirit and even discover beauty in words that do not depict the most positive illustrations. Poe's character becomes a part of the infinite of night. Though many of the descriptions are dark and gloomy, the traveler is never afraid. He is now a part of his own transcendence. Rather than giving his audience a new life through "Dreamland" he establishes a realm where once the Unreal has been experienced, it never truly disappears.

5.4 Gautier and Baudelaire

The French artists discovered *das Unmögliche* of the German Romantics later than the rest of Europe. The Romantic movement that occurred in France was less influenced by Oriental art. It opposed the German Romantics, finding the *Sturm und Drang* and France's new post-revolution politics of stronger interest.[49] The French writer Théophile Gautier, like Goethe, produced works that expressed more than one notion of art and evolved through multiple movements in literature. Gautier's opus spreads through both French Romanticism, German Romanticism and illuminated in the French Symbolist movement, which he founded. Upon a trip to the Orient Gautier became enthralled by Eastern traditions. This naturally resulted in Gautier being the first major French writer to fall in love with Goethe's *Divan*[50] and the *Realitätsvermeidung*[51] it inspired. His fascination with the East and the *Divan* led Gautier to compose one of this most famous collection of poems: *Emaux et Camées*[52]. This work was unlike anything any French poet had ever written and later became the inspiration for the French Symbolist poet Baudelaire.[53] The poem "Préface" is a clear illustration that Goethe's *West-östliche Divan* was the catalyst which drove Gautier to write *Emaux et Camées*:

> Comme Goethe sur son divan

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[49] Though French Romanticism has more similarities to English Romanticism, there was an Oriental movement which occurred separately from French Romanticism, which began with Antoine Galland's translation of *Mille et une Nuits*. Later, the French writer Victor Hugo also published in 1829 the first book of poems in France, which drew on inspiration from the East titled *Les Orientales*.

[50] "Mit Goethes *Divan* beginnt ein Prozeß der Entwirklichung, der Gautier und die Symbolisten inspiriert. Das 'déréaliser' der Symbolisten zeigt sich am augenfälligsten in der Malerei mit ihrem vom Orientteppich beeinflußten Ideal von Fläche, Linie und Farbe. " (Schwarz *Der Orient und die Ästhetik der Moderne* 10)

[51] "Die Realitätsvermeidung ist vom Orient inspiriert. Sie beginnt mit der Rezeption der *Märchen aus 1001 Nacht* im frühen 18. Jahrhundert. Damit war ein entscheidender Bruch mit der klassizistischen Tradition, die Praxis und Theorie der Literatur prägte, gegeben. Der Orient ersetzt die Antike. Eine auf Wahrscheinlichkeit gegründete Mimesis weicht der Realitätsvermeidung. [...] Indem sie ein Gegenmodell zur rationalistisch-empirischen Welt des Westens bieten, formen die orientalischen Märchen seit dem 18. Jahrhundert und die persischen Dichter Hafis, Firdusi und Omar Chayyam seit dem 19. Jahrhundert wesentlichen die europäische Moderne. Sie retten die Phantasie vor Ratio und Empirie, den bestimmenden Elementen westlichen Aufklärungsdenkens und zeigen eine Alternative zum mimetischen Ideal der Antike. Der Orient entgrenzt Europa." (Schwarz *Ästhetik* 10)

[52] *Emaux et Camées* was first published in 1852, eight years after Poe's "Dreamland".

[53] "Théophile Gautier, der Vater der modernen französischen Dichtung, beginnt *Emaux et Camées* mit einem Preisgedicht auf Goethes *Divan.* Er sieht im *Divan* eine Methode der Realitätsvermeidung verwirklicht, die er zu seiner eigenen macht. Baudelaire widmet *Les Fleurs du Mal* seinem geistigen Vater Gautier. *Les Fleurs du Mal* zeigen erstaunlicher Parallelen zum *Divan*." (Schwarz *Ästhetik* 168)

> À Weimar s'isolait des choses
> Et d'Hafiz effeuillait les roses,
>
> Sans prendre garde à l'ouragan
> Qui fouettait mes vitres fermées,
> Moi, j'ai fait Émaux et Camées (9-14).

Without the *Divan*, *Emaux et Camées* would likely have never been written: "Goethe befreit sich von den Zwängen der Realität, den Kriegswirren der Zeit, indem er den *West-östlichen Divan* dichtet. Gautier macht sich Goethes Fähigkeit zu eigen, die Realität durch die Kunst zu transzendieren, sie zu vergessen" (Schwarz *Ästhetik* 195). Gautier uses his "Préface" poem to enlighten the reader of a different form his works will take because of Goethe's influence. This book led French literature to move beyond French Romantic traditions and begin a new era of *déformer* and *déréaliser* in art. Though the German Romantic ideology did not last long in France before the Symbolist movement took over, but without German Romantics and *das Unmögliche*, Symbolism would have never existed.

The full effect of Eastern art on European literature blossomed inside of the Symbolist movement. One of the first and greatest French poets of this time was Charles Baudelaire and his oeuvre *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Baudelaire absorbs German Romantic themes of *das Unendliche* and *das Unmögliche* to center in on the unreal element of art. By uncovering unreal beauties through the *Phantasie*, Baudelaire falls into a world of beauty by concentrating on artificial nature. The Symbolist movement initiated the first true separation of life and art.[54] The frequent problem with *Les Fleurs du Mal* is that many readers misinterpret the text because they continually impose their vision of 'reality' on the poems, disregarding the fact that Baudelaire is a Symbolist who was inspired by Gautier and thus Goethe. Despite his heritage, Baudelaire's literature is the product of the German Romantics, not the French. Like Poe he sets his famed poem "Rêve Parisien" in a dream world. The title "Rêve Parisien" misleads many because of the impulse to assume that the objective of the work is to write about Paris. They forget

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[54]"Der Symbolismus trennt Leben und Kunst, Für diese Trennung ist Goethes *Divan* ein wichtiges Vorbild. Gautiers 'Preface', das Eingangsgedicht zu *Émaux et Camées*, dem grundlegenden Text für die Lyrikrevolution der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts, feiert Goethes *Divan* als Inspiration. " (Schwarz *Ästhetik* 194)

that "Le sommeil est plein de miracles!" (Baudelaire, "Rêve" 5). As with the German Romantic writers before him, the unreal dream, where the eye and light of day hold no power, is of greater significance than anything that could exist in reality.

Baudelaire too, sleeps to dream of an unreal nature, banishing reality from his slumber:

> J'avais banni de ces spectacles
> Le végétal irrégulier,
>
> Et, peintre fier de mon génie,
> Je savourais dans mon tableau (7-10)

The new nature surrounding him is artificial and non-existent. Any glimmer of light appears to originate from the reflective sheets of metallic water and walls:

> L'enivrante monotonie
> Du métal, du marbre et de l'eau (11-12)
> […]
> Et des cataractes pesantes,
> Comme des rideaux de cristal
> Se suspendaient, éblouissantes,
> À des murailles de métal. (17-20)

The light, however, comes from more than just reflections. In "Rêve Parisien" light and truth also are understood as one in the same. Yet it is not the truth that is revealed through seeing with the eye. The only source of light and truth is the fire of passion and creativity that is found within the poet. This power is the key to Baudelaire's ability to be the architect of his own *Unmögliche und Künstliche Natur*. The sun and the moon from the natural world do not exist:

> Architecte de mes féeries,
> Je faisais, à ma volonté,
> Sous un tunnel de pierreries
> Passer un océan dompté;
>
> Et tout, même la couleur noire,
> Semblait fourbi, clair, irisé;
> Le liquide enchâssait sa gloire
> Dans le rayon cristallisé.
>
> Nul astre d'ailleurs, nuls vestiges
> De soleil, même au bas du ciel,

> Pour illuminer ces prodiges,
> Qui brillaient d'un feu personnel!
>
> Et sur ces mouvantes merveilles
> Planait (terrible nouveauté!
> Tout pour l'oeil, rien pour les oreilles!)
> Un silence d'éternité. (37-52)

In the darkness his inner eyes can feast upon endless non-existent wonders. He laments that it is only the mind's eye that has the fortune to experience the *unendlich* Unreal while the other senses are left alone.

The dream is the most important element of the poem. In it, the infinite possibilities of the imagination can be created unbound by the natural world. The poet detests reality and yearns for its destruction:

> En rouvrant mes yeux pleins de flamme
> J'ai vu l'horreur de mon taudis,
> Et senti, rentrant dans mon âme,
> La pointe des soucis maudits;
> La pendule aux accents funèbres
> Sonnait brutalement midi,
> Et le ciel versait des ténèbres
> Sur le triste monde engourdi. (53-60)

Baudelaire's intense aversion to reality marks the distinct break from non-German European Romantic traditions. The awe-inspiring artificiality of Baudelaire's verse stems from the new worlds established by the German Romantic poets before him. The historical and literary bonds between Gautier, Poe, Goethe and Novalis are undeniable, but often overlooked. Each finds the Unreal through the imagination and creation of new realms to be the necessary foundation of new works or art.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

To view Western art from a historical perspective is essential. It is only through history that the fascinating plethora of relationships that can be drawn from art are revealed. All three notions of art, *das Mögliche*, *das Wirkliche* and *das Unmögliche* are interconnected and rely on one another to truly define themselves. The explanation of the interconnection between these notions, whether demonstrated through their similarities or their differences, is a key means method by which the revolutions of art can be reflected upon.

The possibility of thinking about the *Unmögliche* and creating art out of it came into existence with the increasing influence of Eastern art and literature on the Western world. "The Decay of Lying" is Wilde's summary of the artists' state in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the effect of the previous two notions of art and their influence on art and society. Both *das Wirkliche* and *das Mögliche* relied greatly on humanity's experience with either the gods in antiquity or class structure in modernity as foundations for their plots. None of these traditions, however, were relevant for the Unreal. Wilde sought a new truth outside the real (which had been conceived by Aristotle and Realists) to be created. Oriental art established the Unreal by transcending reality.

The first glimpse of the Romantic feelings of *das Unmögliche* developed a great deal earlier than the first Romantic poem, "Hymnen an die Nacht", written by Novalis. Antoine Galland published his translation of the Eastern tales from *Mille et une Nuits* (Arabian Nights) in 1704, significantly before German Romanticism and the *Sturm und Drang*. Inspired by the marvelous fairytale-like stories he had discovered, Galland also wrote some of his own tales to live alongside this great Oriental work. Galland created new worlds and a new poetics like those in *Mille et une Nuits*. He relied on his translation to provide support and context for his work rather than creating *das Unmögliche* on his own. Historically, the act of transcendence in literature for Galland would have been impossible.

The tradition of imitation began with the Greeks, who idealized the human form so tremendously that they presented even their gods in the shape of human figures. Dutch Realists and the *Sturm und Drang* imitated the nature surrounding them. Eastern art, on the other hand, does not imitate, nor does it idealize. The purpose of Oriental art is transcendence—something modern Western thought denies as impossible and unreal. Transcendence and therefore the Unreal was part of all Eastern religions, including Christianity. Goethe "emancipates" literature from religion. He regards the oriental tales as a manifestation of freedom: "[i]hr eigentlicher Charakter ist, daß sie keinen sittlichen Zweck haben, und daher den Menschen nicht auf sich selbst zurück, sondern außer sich hinaus ins unbedingte Freie führen und tragen" (Goethe, "Mahomet" 291). When a world is invented with no ties to reality (as is the case of *Arabian Nights*) comparisons to humanity and its life in nature or society become impossible to make. Nevertheless, the question remains: if Orientalism began to influence art in 1704, why did *das Wirkliche/Sturm und Drang* emerge before *das Unmögliche* and German Romanticism?

Though a definite answer to this query is impossible to provide, a probable explanation is that *das Wirkliche* could not have developed without the initial taste of the Orient and the Unreal, to inspire its emancipation from other institutions to which it was bound. *Das Wirkliche* is a by-product of the loss of religion and increase of scientific thought in the world. It is an intensification of Aristotle's "Mögliche" and "Wahrscheinliche". Through the notion of *das Wirkliche*, writer, painters and scientists alike became observers. Before Galland translated *Mille et une Nuits*, ancient Greek thought and practices dominated all artistic literary forms. God still had the ultimate say. In Eastern society, Allah continually plays a significant role. However, the stories of *Mille et une Nuits* were fairytales. Galland's translation gave Western society the opportunity to see an unreal world without Western causality and rationality. It was completely different from the first depiction of scenic nature in 16th century Dutch paintings of the *Wirkliche* in Western Art, which led the writer fashion a world on stage and in novels much like his own. In the 18th century *das Wirkliche* balances the two opposing notions of Aristotelian *Mögliche* and *das Unmögliche* of *Mille et une Nuits*. The full force of *das Unmögliche* could not have existed before *das Wirkliche* because

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humanity had not yet discovered itself in literature, let alone found a means to transcend in art without the assistance of any higher powers. However, it was only with Galland's translation that the cogs began to turn for man to envision art, and life beyond Greek ideals. *Das Wirkliche* had to gain recognition before *das Unmögliche* for change, like the French Revolution, to pass in art and society and prepare both for *das Unmögliche*'s unreal and non-existent ideals.

It is true that Galland was a man before his time, whose work caused a revolution in art. The fairy-tales from the Orient opposed Western rationalism and laid seeds for Romanticism. Goethe profited from Galland and would not have understood a great deal of Eastern literature without him. Unlike Galland, Goethe did not translate the works of the Orient, but was inspired and invented a likeness to them with his own modern understanding.[55] Of course, it was Novalis who first posits the *unendliche Sehen*, but it was Goethe who truly enlarged German Romanticism to the idea of the *Zweckfreiekunst*[56], through the readings of Hafis and eastern fairy-tales. This notion of purpose free creation is inherent in modern art, as the works of Gautier and Mallarmés shows, yet outside of Germany, the ideal of *das Unmögliche* and the Unreal in art were not well received. German Romantic ideals did not appear in French poetry until Gautier discovered the *Divan*. Gautier's poetry is often classified as the foundation of Symbolism, though no reference to Goethe *Zweckfreiekunst* is made outside of Gautier's own writings. The rest of Europe also rejected this idea of art without a purpose.

Poe was not the first English language poet to use themes of German Romanticism in his work[57]. At the turn between the 18th and 19th century, Coleridge attempted to weave elements, what he referred to as the supernatural, into his book of poems entitled *The Lyrical Ballads*, which he wrote in conjunction with Wordsworth. Coleridge attempted to utilize parts of German Romantic ideals in his verses; his co-author Wordsworth found *das Wirkliche* and *Sturm und Drang* concepts of humanity and nature of greater interest. This resulted in *The Lyrical Ballads* being a product of two

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[55] Hence the title of his book *Der West-östliche Divan.*
[56] *Zweckfreiekunst* is translated from German as art that is free of purpose.
[57] Poe was, however, the first to be accepted in his time.

worlds[58]. However, both styles were not equally received. Southey, well-known critic of the time, said that Coleridge's portion was impossible to understand or to analyze because "[i]t is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity. Genius has here been employed in producing a poem of little merit" ("Introduction" xli)[59]. Wordsworth's work was applauded, while "because of luke warm reviews […] Coleridge was basically cut out of the second edition. He has a more German world view that was not well received by the English" (xlviii). Coleridge was rejected because of his love for the German Romantics. English Romanticism, like French Romanticism, was more of an equivalent to the *Sturm und Drang* than its sister German movement. It was too early for them to understand the notion of the *unendliche Sehen* that is seen in Novalis's work. The reception of German Romanticism and Oriental art did not even begin to occur in Europe until it was already well established for decades in Germany. Even when German Romanticism appeared in the rest of Europe, it seemed to be short lived, and was quickly turned into the foundation of Symbolism and the unreal. To this day, the public's desire for *das Wirkliche* continues to dominate our art and thoughts because humans are creatures who desire to continually subject themselves to comparisons. Westerners remain to be children of the Enlightenment and its rationalism.

Despite Western society's Descartian desire to separate and classify all movements from one another, there was one point in the history of art that all three notions worked in synchronicity. The unity of *das Mögliche*, *Wirkliche* and *Unmögliche* was achieved in the poetry of T.S. Eliot. Wilde wrote the "Decay of Lying" in rejection

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[58] Coleridge writes in Chapter XIV of his *Biographia Literaria* that: "He [Coleridge] himself was to write about 'persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic,' but though supernatural they had to possess 'a semblance of truth sufficient to procure…that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith'. Wordsworth, for his part, was 'to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us'. Both of them were to observe what they considered to be 'the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination'" ("Introduction" xxi-xxii)

[59] "Southey was one of the first to review the volume, in *The Critical Review,* October 1798. He was aware of the joint authorship of the poems and the knowledge of this must have added for Coleridge a certain offensiveness to his criticism. He was especially truculent over the *Ancient Mariner:* 'Many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful;' he wrote, 'but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible'"("Introduction" xli)

of *das Wirkliche* and to promote the growth and appreciation for the invented and unreal in art. His final doctrine, that lying is the point of art, makes it clear that art is not reality. Art was invented to be an alternative to reality. Eliot realized that society's obsession with Realism was not about to fade so easily. Thus, he included references to familiar structures in order to bring his audience into the world of the Unreal, knowing that despite society's desire for *das Wirkliche* "human kind cannot bear very much reality" ("Four Quartets: First Quartet" 44-5). The first sections of Eliot's poem *Wasteland* titled "Burial of the dead" show the irreality of his work. Realists remain focused on the setting of London and the London Bridge. Romantics only see the setting as a distraction, paying more attention to the invention of the dead bodies walking over the bridge:

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many. ("Burial of the Dead" 60-3)

The multitude of layers embedded within Eliot's poetry encourages his audience to search for meaning beyond a mere topical understanding of his work. He acknowledged the evolution of art in his poetry and used it to create the depth in his work that integrated all three historic possibilities of art, while educating his readers, even if they were not aware of it. For Eliot as for the German Romantics, all of time is connected:

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past. ("Four Quartets: First Quartet" 1-3)

It is with Eliot's all-encompassing knowledge of history and thought that we must begin to approach the analysis of art.

The texts chosen to demonstrate the changing ideas about art relate to one another in order to create their new forms of art. Lenz uses Aristotle to dismiss the realm of the myth and the possible where humanity had no power and make a case for reality. Wilde takes all art that focuses on reality and turns it against itself to reinforce the German Romantic ideal.

The first notion, *das Mögliche* continually dominated the criteria of what constituted merit-worthy art in the Western world until the 18th century. Shakespeare and

his fellow Elizabethan playwrights were some of the first to initiate change within *das Mögliche*, but they were not well received by the English. German writers, like Goethe and Lenz, kept Shakespeare's work alive and used his work as inspiration to establish both the *Sturm und Drang* and *das Wirkliche*. The Germans were the first to write literature that had no need for any god, giving all the power to mankind. Therefore they were considered immoral by the French and the English. The rest of Europe took their time to follow suit, but once the people embraced this new territory of *das Wirkliche*, art began to change society and vice versa.

The effects of *das Wirkliche* changed what we value in art. Its continual presence is obvious within contemporary thought, politics, art, economics, and current societal consciousness. The desire to understand is not something that is always valued in today's society. However, in understanding the past, a possibility for new art, and thought— potentially more intricate, complex, and relevant to our present literary traditions— have the chance to be created.

The desire to chronicle and describe art historically by these three notions is a means to summarize the backgrounds and general thought processes of humanity and art. As it is within our rational human nature, we often try to categorize each new concept and how it is distinguished from the last. Yet there is, as this thesis shows, a constant broader theme, like the notions of *das Mögliche*, *das Wirkliche* and *das Unmögliche*, that can be found within art, which does not change as regularly, nor at such a rapid pace. Any new notion of art can only develop by distinguishing itself from the notions that have already occurred. The understanding of the progression of art in history and its expression of human thinking are essential for the development of art, literature and society, and their effects on one another.

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