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AESTHETIC DECEPTION AND TOPOI OF MEMORY IN THE ROMANTIC  
IMAGINATION

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## Introduction

In searching for resonances between two national traditions, my investigation draws upon representative texts from German and Russian literature in order to theorize traits central to a Romantic imagination. In the tangled skein of historical and cultural connections woven between German and Russian literature, I trace a motif which I term, following Goethe, *Augentäuschung*. Playing on the two semantic possibilities of this German term, which can be understood either as “optical illusion” or, more literally, as a “deception/confusion of the eyes,” I use it to identify the dynamics of perception in encounters with female avatars of antiquity within poetry and prose.

I take the term *Augentäuschung* from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust* where it arises during a minor interpretive debate: Faust spots a black poodle wandering outside the city gates and asks his companion, “Do you notice how it races around us in a great spiral, getting closer and closer? And unless I’m mistaken, an eddy of fire follows closely wherever it goes.” His protégé Wagner – a practical man of little imagination - observes: “I see only a black poodle. Perhaps you see only an optical illusion [*Augentäuschung*].”<sup>1</sup> This brief moment of interpretation incited by supernatural intervention (for it is the mischievous demon Mephistopheles who appears before the pair in the guise of a poodle) is at the core of the *Augentäuschung* phenomenon with which I interrogate the Romantic imagination. In a minor way, Faust intuits the inner life of the poodle enough to perceive the ethereal fire of the demon’s presence. Wagner, as a pragmatic student of science, lacks this spiritual insight and sees only the physical surface features of the animal. This interpretive moment clarifies C.M. Bowra’s notion of the Romantic “imagination” to describe imagistic perception that extends beyond the mere identification of physical properties – promoted by Locke and Newton – to peer into the soul of the subject.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Goethe *Faust*, 1152-1157. See chapter 1 for an extended discussion of this exchange.

<sup>2</sup> See C.M. Bowra. *The Romantic Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949.

Beyond Bowra's observations on spiritual perception, I extend the category of a Romantic imagination to a metaliterary level to describe an inclination shared by authors of different national traditions and historical moments.

### Aisthesis, Vision, and Antiquity

Twilight encounters with mystical feminine figures are featured in numerous Romantic texts: Tieck's enchanted woman of the forest with marble-white limbs in *The Rune Mountain*; Novalis's veiled Rosenblüte taking the place of the statue of Isis; the white statue of Diana that captivates Maximilian in *Florentine Nights*; or Brentano's siren Lorelei perched atop a cliff over the Rhine luring men to their deaths. When considered in aggregate, these tales present a constellation of recurring elements beginning with a sudden and unexpected vision of feminine beauty. The hero stops in voyeuristic fascination and is punished or irrevocably changed by the experience. The key features of the scene coupled with classical imagery suggest the tale of Actaeon from Book III of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a probable predecessor. Actaeon, weary after the day's hunt, stumbles into an unfamiliar grove and sees the goddess Diana preparing to bathe in the waters. Overtaken with anger and shame, she takes up a handful of water and flings it over his head. "Go and tell them that you have seen me naked, if you can," she challenges. As penance for his transgression, Actaeon is transformed into a stag and torn to shreds by his dogs. In appropriating the central figures from this tale, Romantic authors also inherited the themes of vision, transgression, and transformation.

Classical works found new life as popular source material for 18<sup>th</sup> century fiction as well as inspiring philosophical reflections on art and aesthetic judgment. Johann Winckelmann spurred new interest in antique sculpture with his 1766 "Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture" which advocated imitating antiquity to create new works of

great beauty. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing countered Winckelmann's views in his 1766 *Laocoön, An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* by positing that art and poetry are subject to different rules. Herder later disputed Lessing's stance by further distinguishing sculpture (a tactile art) from painting (a visual art) in his 1778 *Sculpture*. His research led him to the Walmonden art collection in Hannover, the Kunsthaus in Kassel, and the Antikensaal in Mannheim. The Antikensaal in particular attracted the attention of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who visited in 1769, and Friedrich Schiller as well who would later read Herder's observations on sculpture with interest. Herder's conclusions from his visits to the galleries develop a theory of the visual experience of sculpture that is surprisingly tactile. In his view, "the eye that gathers impressions is no longer the eye that sees a depiction on a surface; it becomes a hand, the ray of light becomes a finger and the imagination becomes a form of immediate touching." Vision no longer occurs at a remove, but rather functions as a physical act that brings the viewer into immediate contact with the viewed object.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Herder ranks sight below touch when he declares that "sight gives us *dreams*, touch gives us *truth*."<sup>4</sup> Whereas sight is limited to illuminated surfaces, touch alone can "reveal bodies."<sup>5</sup>

In moments of *Augentäuschung*, I observe a similar textual engagement with the limitations of vision in protagonists' experience of sculpture-like figures. The hero cannot see through the fog or veil obscuring the figure, thereby creating ambiguity around the figure. In these moments, the moral crux of the narrative hinges upon the question of agency: is the hero the unwilling victim of a seductive siren or does he seek out the charming illusion of his own free will? Agency is central to the motif and acts like a fulcrum with the narrative tilting

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<sup>3</sup> Herder, *Fourth Grove* (4:64).

<sup>4</sup> Herder 38, *Fourth Grove*.

<sup>5</sup> Herder 35.

unpredictably towards tales of transgression or victimization. In every instance, the encounter triggers a conflict between the material present and the metamorphizing potential of the aestheticized memory object. In short, moments of *Augentäuschung* manifest a unique literary environment of fractured time (the hero at the boundary between past and present) and liminal space (the hero perched between land and sea, the geography of the real and the ethereal haze of the fantastic). I propose that the distinctive temporality, environment, and moral complexities endemic to such moments attest to an identifiable phenomenon reprised in diverse literatures and time periods. In exploring the features and range of this motif, I attempt to trace the genealogy of the *Augentäuschung* across two literary traditions in an effort to study the various adaptations, how it is communicated, and what social or historical factors influence its reemergence. This approach differs dramatically from traditional author-centered or periodic segmentations.

By contrast, cornerstone works analyzing German-Russian exchanges have focused on direct points of transfer in the form of translations, political and philosophical genealogies directly linked to the travels of Russian aristocracy, and similar exchanges. Selected Russian translations of German works contributed to the steady trickle of German texts, despite occasional omissions, such as the seminal writings of Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) which were not translated into Russian until 1898.<sup>6</sup> Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, widely read by the French-speaking aristocracy of Russia, offered a window into major German texts in French summaries of the plots. Dagmar Herrmann's multivolume *Deutschland aus russischer Sicht* (1998) catalogues various German-Russian diplomatic exchanges, marriages, aristocratic educations abroad, collaborations, and other direct socio-historical evidence. Other notable studies track the reception of a specific author or trend, such as Viktor Zhirmunskii's *Goethe in*

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<sup>6</sup> Some writers, such as Afanasii Fet, did read Novalis in the original German, but deemed him a minor poet.



*Russian Literature (Gete v russkoi literature)*, or André von Gronicka's *The Russian Image of Goethe*. Although these analyses contribute valuable historical information supporting direct interaction between the cultures, this approach does not address transformations within the new cultural sphere.<sup>7</sup> Instead of focusing on the direct influence of one author on another, I describe an intellectual inheritance that permeates Russian literature. In developing a theory of the Romantic imagination sufficiently flexible to extend across nations and time, I draw inspiration from three innovative theorists – French historian Pierre Nora, Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, and the Russian literary theorist Aleksandr Veselovskii. By identifying ambiguity of aesthetic representation as a central trait of this Romantic imagination, I reveal a modality that continues to function in defiance of the traditional boundaries of literary periodization.

#### Theorizing Movements: I.Nora, II. Bakhtin, and III. Veselovskii in Dialogue

On a theoretical level, this dissertation engages with traditional literary periodization that would define literary movements using artificial start and end dates or a constellation of canonical authors. A positivist historiographical approach, with its simplistic goal of representing the past “how it really was,”<sup>8</sup> may struggle with a literary phenomenon that cuts not only across various national literary traditions but also across disparate periods of time. This staggered emergence is particularly striking in the case of Russian Romanticism, which flourished just as Romanticism began to recede in Germany and then recurred in the early twentieth-century. If one focuses only on the publication dates of the movement's central authors, German Romanticism appears distinct from Russian Romanticism with no overarching literary-historical

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<sup>7</sup> See M.H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* for an extended analysis of Romantic criticism.

<sup>8</sup> A favorite claim of positivist historian Leopold von Ranke.

category to unite them. The German literary scholar Wilfried Barner critiques the retroactive creation of artificially demarcated time periods in his essay “On the Problem of the Epochal Illusion” (“Zum Problem der Epochenillusion”), pointing to a tendency towards self-delusion that he sees as a “guiding principle even in the history of epochal consciousness; little heeded and yet as virulent as living a lie.”<sup>9</sup> Barner’s polemic speaks to a penchant for retroactively bracketing literary movements into periods with dubious start and end dates. The permeable boundaries of these arbitrary divides – already overextended at the level of national literatures – show their seams once they are stretched to account for trends in world literature. Hans Robert Jauss addresses this peculiar mythology of the cohesive literary period in his essay “German Classicism: a Pseudo-Epoch?” (“Deutsche Klassik – Eine Pseudo-Epoche?”) in which he engages with the construal of an autochthonous and delimited Weimar Classicism in German literary history. Jauss’s brief case study is instructive for its methodical subversion of accepted criteria for delineating literary periods. Beginning with the accepted dates for Weimar Classicism, “from the beginning of Goethe’s Italian trip (1786) until Schiller’s death (1805)”, he identifies a “double-amputation” that ensues from this division: in chiseling out dates that, as part of the political spirit of German unification in 1871, create the illusion of a purely “German movement”, this division severs all connections with the European Enlightenment and frames Romanticism as a period of degradation from high Classicism.<sup>10</sup> Next he identifies a disjunction in this periodization with the general reception of the works of the movement’s foremost figures: “Even Goethe and Schiller are generally recognized as ‘Romantics’ in the European reception in

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<sup>9</sup> Barner 517 “...ist ein Leitprinzip auch in der Geschichte des Epochenbewußtseins; wenig beachtet und doch virulent wie die individuelle ‘Lebenslüge’” See Wilfried Barner’s “Zum Problem der Epochenillusion” in *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewusstsein*. Eds. Reinhart Herzog and Reinhart Koselleck. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987. 517-529.

<sup>10</sup> Jauss 582. See Hans Robert Jauss’s “Deutsche Klassik – Eine Pseudo-Epoche?” in *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewusstsein*. Eds. Reinhart Herzog and Reinhart Koselleck. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987. 581-585.

accordance with the great division of world literature into the Classic as an epoch of ‘the ancient’ and Romantic as an epoch of ‘the modern’ (divided along the emergence of the Christian era), which Madame de Staël appropriated from A.W. Schlegel and popularized.”<sup>11</sup> To avoid overly rigid periodizations, based on phenomena external to the text, we need to find alternative theoretical criteria.

### **I. Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* and places of cultural memory**

Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire*, or the “places of memory,” provides a model to describe the persistent echo of cultural memory across time periods and nations.<sup>12</sup> In this model, Nora posits “sites of memory” – places of pure sign that escape from history.<sup>13</sup> Such ephemeral places attract accretions of memory that are both individual and collective. These sites are generated by “linchpin moments” that stimulate strong affective responses. In his essay on the commonplace notion of a “generation”, Nora demonstrates how this concept effectively “converts memory into history.” Rather than limiting his definition to people born within a set period of time, Nora construes the concept of “generation” as a purely symbolic unit of time embracing all people drawn, through a complex network, to a linchpin moment, like the civil unrest of 1968 in France for his generation. In accounts of the mass demonstrations, strikes, and occupation of universities, he notes a tendency to privilege subjective experience over facts, thereby creating a “historical elasticity” or “symbolic malleability” to the events of 1968. In this respect, sites of generational memory emerge in public spaces to become centers of collective

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<sup>11</sup> Jaus 582. “Selbst Goethe und Schiller sind in der europäischen Rezeption bekanntlich als “Romantiker” verstanden worden, der großen Scheidung der Weltliteratur in Klassik als Epoche der ‘Ancien’ und Romantik als Epoche der ‘Modernes’ (getrennt durch die Heraufkunft der christlichen Ära) zufolge, die Madame de Staël von A.W. Schlegel übernahm und popularisierte.”

<sup>12</sup> Presented in Pierre Nora’s three-volume collection *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (the 1992 English translation by Arthur Goldhammer renders this *The Realms of Memory*). See Nora’s “General Introduction: Between Memory and History” in this collection for a detailed definition of *lieux de mémoire*.

<sup>13</sup> Nora, “General Introduction”, 20.

participation that may still be “susceptible to personal appropriation.”<sup>14</sup> Given the central role of memory, the notion of a generation is thus a retroactive observation that precludes the historian as intermediary.

Nora’s account of the otherwise nebulous concept of “generation” unites various intangible and seemingly unrelated threads of cultural memory. This explanatory model is easily adapted to provide insights into the fluid notion of literary Romanticism. Literary movements encapsulate similar accretions of memory, including personal remembrances that are filtered through the inescapably social dimension of a publicly available text. What Nora terms the “retrospective explanatory power” of the notion of “generation” qualifies equally for literary movements with their monolithic demarcations. To varying degrees, generations and literary movements alike are the product of memory and history in their dependence upon a combined independent and universal memory. In declaring *lieux de mémoire* the “spontaneous horizon of individual historical objectification,”<sup>15</sup> Nora advances Maurice Halbwachs’s 1925 theory of collective memory in which individual memories are likewise part of a past that is socially acquired.<sup>16</sup> Whereas Halbwachs focused on commemoration and the relative power of social groups, Nora extended this concept to historical memory and researched the images with which historical actors represented their world.<sup>17</sup> His observations on collective imagination shed light on the power of social groups to reshape how both individuals and groups process history. Nora’s conclusions later found resonance in *Archeology of Knowledge* where Foucault expounds on the power wielded by groups in shaping the images of remembrance – a collective power far

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<sup>14</sup> Nora, “Generation”, 526.

<sup>15</sup> Nora, “Generation”, 528.

<sup>16</sup> See Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Paris: Mouton, 1976. Translated as *The Collective Memory* by Francis and Vida Ditter in 1980 and *On Collective Memory* by Lewis Coser in 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Halbwachs’s notion of commemoration extends mainly to monuments and historical sites.

exceeding the ability of historians to evoke memory. Nora's productive theory applies readily to literary history, which presents similar challenges to synthesizing disparate, yet related aspects of culture. I use Nora's notion of sites to account for the series of cultural and historical "returns" to literary topoi of Romanticism.

## II. Bakhtin's chronotope and Romantic topoi

While Nora's theory offers a viable model for the Romantic imagination, the next challenge is one of selection – how to determine which elements offer the most convincing evidence of a genealogical affinity between German and Russian Romanticism. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope is productive in amalgamating literary phenomena, particularly with respect to distinctions of narrative time and place.<sup>18</sup> In this theory of genre, Bakhtin considers the congruence of temporal (*chronos*) and spatial relationships (*topos*) in literature. In his analysis of novels developed in antiquity, Bakhtin carefully distinguishes three novelistic chronotopes based on the reversibility of temporal sequence, their interchangeability in space, the location of key events and whether these events are consistently triggered at specific moments in the novels. In the moment of *Augentäuschung* that I observe at the heart of Romantic narratives, the relationship between time and location is crucial to fostering the aesthetic encounter that will force a schism between history and "fantasy." The twilight wanderers of the Romantic imagination stray into scenes at the boundary, often between land and sea. On this boundary appears a figure draped in markers of an ancient realm, either real or of legend. The figure's appearance causes a temporal eruption within the hero's present and creates an ahistorical environment for his experience. While Bakhtin promotes this model to distinguish

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<sup>18</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin's "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

literary genres, I extend the model to the level of literary movements, utilizing the chronotope's remarkable ability to distinguish macro-level literary categories. In this respect, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope provides a model for describing the spatial and temporal features of the Romantic when viewed through the lens of *Augentäuschung*. Bakhtin's theory also sidesteps the limitations of using traditional markers of genre (dates, central authors) to offer a more fluid approach that can accommodate a theory of genre that transcends national borders and time periods.

In his discussion of the three basic types of novels developed in ancient times, Bakhtin sketches out frameworks for three novelistic chronotopes based on common plots, characterizations, common settings, and distinct modes of narrative time. What he terms the "adventure novel of ordeal", for instance, develops a marriage plot full of sudden adventures of coincidence with two young characters of marriageable age at the center. The action sprawls across three to five countries usually divided by the sea. Finally, the sheer frequency of episodes and the momentum of the events (whether shipwrecks, presumed deaths, or the final union in marriage) contribute to a temporal framework that seems unique to the genre and therefore is designated "adventure-novel time." In this framework, the action is bracketed within two biographical moments: the first meeting of the future lovers and their final union. Between these two moments, the heroes brave various adventures that in no way affect their age or their devotion to one another. In this sense, adventure-time is distinct for time-sequences that "are neither historical, quotidian, biographical, nor even biological and maturational" – the characters and their world remain unchanged.<sup>19</sup> While each feature of the novel is not new, as Bakhtin notes, the collective deployment of these features constitutes a new unity.

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<sup>19</sup> Bakhtin, *Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel*, 91.

In tracing the reemergence of *Augentäuschung* from the German 18<sup>th</sup> century through Russian 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, I identify several key features of plot, characterization, and setting that unfold within a distinct temporal framework, thereby constructing a model akin to a “chronotope of Romanticism” which is at the center of a shared literary imagination. The topos of *Augentäuschung* features a combination of fixedness and fluidity in the environment that is often mirrored in the object of fascination. Each chapter traces literary moments occurring within a liminal environment that unites materials representing stasis and change: Faust’s false vision of Helen in an enchanted mirror, then Helen only half-realized in existence within a spectral shadow-play, and finally Helen in the flesh through an ethereal haze; the stony figure of Isis traded in Novalis’s *Novices of Saïs* for the blushing youth of Rosenblüthe behind a veil; Eichendorff’s eponymous marble statue which fluctuates between hard marble and mortal flesh in a park (stasis) beside a pond (change); Pushkin’s monk who beholds a *rusalka* (half maiden, half demon) between land and sea; a spiritual encounter in Ivanov’s silver forest beside a flowing creek at twilight. The topos of the *Augentäuschung* is thus an encounter between the wanderer and an aestheticized female figure in a natural setting that fluctuates between stasis and change. The temporal frame of the encounter is similarly volatile. The aesthetic object, whether an avatar of antiquity or of a folkloric past, erupts into the present before the Romantic hero and suddenly relocates the narrative somewhere between these temporalities. Once the aesthetic figure is encountered, visions of the past overwhelm the narrative. The temporal breaks are associated exclusively with the aesthetic encounter and find resolution only once the hero has chosen either to yield to the lures of the past (succumbing to *Sehnsucht*/nostalgia and the familiarity of a finalized past) or to resist this lure and continue with the developing present. The voyeuristic

tableau at the water's edge, saturated with a mystical haze, comprises the moment of visual and moral uncertainty that I designate as an identifying topos of the Romantic imagination.

### III. Veselovskii and the inheritance of forms

In addition to Nora's historicizing model and Bakhtin's genre theory, my analysis also engages with the methodology proposed by Aleksandr Veselovskii in his work on historical poetics.<sup>20</sup> In identifying and tracing a particular "form" (Veselovskii's term *forma* in this context can be construed as "concept"), I track a brief moment in the life of a literary phenomenon that has undoubtedly undergone countless iterations and evolutions in the long history of world literature. This approach is drawn from Veselovskii's notion of popular memory which "has preserved sediments of images, plots, and types, which were once alive" and subsequently were invoked "when a popular-poetic demand has arisen, in response to an urgent call of the times. In this way popular legends recur...whereas others are apparently forgotten."<sup>21</sup> In investigating points of transfer between national literature and time periods, I draw inspiration from Veselovskii's model for the inheritance and evolution of forms.

#### Chapter Overview

Drawing on these three theorists, the following four chapters chronicle the life of the *Augentäuschung* motif to which each narrative returns in a timeless visitation like a literary pilgrimage. The first chapter analyzes Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* as the Urtext in the aesthetic of 'deception' (*Täuschung*). As the premise of the work is whether Faust can be tempted or tricked to stray from the true path, I consider the different types of deception that are deployed. In part I of *Faust*, Mephistopheles, the main antagonist/deceiver, is a generator of illusions. His main instrument of manipulation is verbal deception (lies, puns, substitutions of

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<sup>20</sup> Veselovskii, Aleksandr. *Izbrannoe: na puti k istoricheskoi poetike*. Moskva: Avtokniga, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Veselovskii *Izbrannoe*, 18-19.



meaning). Even when he utilizes costumes to confuse identification or weave illusions, his manifestations are rooted in verbal trickery. Part II places greater emphasis on the dangers of visual deception. As opposed to Mephisto's active attempts to deceive, Faust is now exposed to the dangers of interpretation with Helen supplanting Mephisto as the main generator of interpretive confusion. First introduced in Part I in the magic mirror ("himmlisch Bild" I.2429), her role expands in Part II to become Faust's main preoccupation. She is an image – praised for her beauty and devoid of an existence beyond the visual. The danger lies in her mesmerizing beauty, which invades the mind of the viewer and disrupts all reason. Drawing on the aesthetic theories of Johann Gottfried Herder, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and Goethe himself, this chapter first posits an epistemological crisis in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries. The Romantic reaction to the enlightenment celebration of reason is to challenge this absolutism with complex moral situations. Goethe dissects the visual moment and thematizes vision in his work with accounts of the act of seeing, optical transmission, and the reception of moral information. In addition to inaugurating a wider discussion of visual aesthetics, Goethe's work also exemplifies a neoclassical engagement with topoi from antiquity. The appropriation of sites and forms of antiquity extends into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and offers one of the strongest connections supporting the continuity of Goethe's visual aesthetic.

Chapter Two elaborates upon the Romantic push against epistemological absolutism and the subsequent de-divinization of the text. Friedrich Schiller, August Schlegel, and their contemporaries forecast the end of literature's power to enthrall through mystery with the rise of empiricism. In response to this perceived threat, Romantic authors developed tales that directly challenged the reader's ability to resolve stories in favor of the phenomenal or supernatural. In representative works from Joseph von Eichendorff, Novalis, and E.T.A. Hoffmann, this chapter

pursues the dynamics of aesthetic deception into the German Romantic period. Each selected work features a metamorphic central figure poised in a liminal space. Vision is again thematized with the ethereal feminine figure fragmenting the world into realms of light and dark, phenomenal and supernatural. This fluid metamorphosis of stone suspends the narrative in a liminal state by undermining the veracity of the perceived object. The effect is achieved by utilizing two distinct forms of the fantastic – what E.T.A. Hoffmann would identify as *das Wunderliche* (the improbable) and *das Wunderbare* (the impossible). In his collection of tales *The Serapion Brothers*, the fireside storytellers compete to present a tale that eludes both categories and instead exemplifies the Serapiontic Principle – an unresolved narrative encounter between the natural and supernatural. The chapter identifies various devices used to foster narrative liminality in the works of the three canonical German Romantic authors: 1. mysticism as a universal transcendental force (Novalis), 2. aesthetic encounters as a stimulus for permeable subjectivity (Eichendorff), and 3. scientific theories of the divided subject (Hoffmann). Novalis’s *The Novices at Sais* promotes a reality governed by mystical universals in which man understands himself *through* nature in an act of endless mirroring that fails to define either completely. In Eichendorff’s *The Marble Statue*, we witness identity confusion result from the intersubjective activity of vision in which the subject both projects and receives. Finally, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *The Mines of Falun* theorizes a subconscious connection between self and nature. In this pseudo-scientific model, the subject is cleaved in two once he becomes aware of this second “night side” governed by natural forces. This section acknowledges the complexity of textual representations of art objects that reify the figure as a material trace of historical memory filtered through subjective experience. In a sense, the poet-wanderers who encounter the statuesque figures potentially shape them with their own desires. At the crux of these tales of fluid

metamorphoses stands the question: to what extent is the memory object the product of the hero's desire and to what extent does he merely unlock memory latent within the stone? These dual fulfillments of imminent life or latent memory are illuminated by Nora's notion of places of memory in that the intersection of the individual and national/historical consciousness meet in one place, structure, or monument.

Chapter Three focuses on the shifting representations of the *rusalka* water demon from Slavic folktales into nineteenth-century literary tradition. The altered narrative function and context of the *rusalka*'s transformation reveals sedimentations of a German Romantic aesthetic of radical indeterminacy, which manifests as an extension of aesthetic ambiguity. Continuing the exploration of the *Augentäuschung* moment of visual confusion, Chapter Three arrives at a Romantic poetics of uncertainty in Russian literature by considering the liminal nature of the *rusalka* who emerges at the intersection of conflicting moralities, modes of perception, and competing realities. In the ambiguous and ethereal depictions of these water demons, Russian Romantics deploy a visual aesthetic similar to the metamorphic figures of German Romanticism. In the *rusalka*'s emergence in representative works by Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, and Mikhail Lermontov, these authors retain the subversive aesthetic of indeterminacy fostered by the *rusalka* as indicating the emergence of the fantastic as a mode of critical reason in Russian Romanticism. I begin with Pushkin's "Rusalka" ballad of 1819, which explores the liminal narrative space characteristic of the *Augentäuschung* motif by fostering moral ambiguity with a water demon who is neither fully Slavic nor Germanic in nature. Gogol's 1831 short story "A May Night" exemplifies prose appropriations of this motif in a tale notable for shifting polarities of "the everyday" and "the unusual." The *rusalka* character functions as an inviolate image (*obraz*) – not a means but an end unto itself with no symbolic potential. Finally, Lermontov's

*Hero of our Time* rounds out the literary emergence of the *rusalka* in a conscious ironization of established tropes with origins in Germanic tales, thus completing the trajectory of the *rusalka*'s transition from oral tradition to the world of letters.

The fourth chapter delves into the aesthetics of mysticism in the Russian Symbolist movement of the early twentieth-century. In this section, selected works by Valerii Briusov, Aleksandr Blok, and Viacheslav Ivanov attest to the Symbolist deployment of mystical ambiguity to transcend the limits of artistic expression. The aesthetic challenge endemic to moments of *Augentäuschung* in Romantic literature reemerges in Symbolist poetry in the form of a polysemous mystical situation. This chapter reflects on commonalities in the respective figurations of the past centered on memory objects. This discussion of the semiotic duality of objects as both imminent with memory and passive vessels for the reception of imaginative poetic memory will introduce general conclusions on collective memory and the chronotope of Romanticism. Similar to the antinomic convergences that motivated German Romantic narratives, these Symbolist texts foster unusual “correspondences” – unlikely or improbable pairings – that generate the mystical situation. Each of the selected authors’ works fleshes out different aspects of devices that testify to the kinship between Symbolist mystical ambiguity and Romantic aesthetic deception. Briusov carefully constructs a purposefully ambiguous situation that indexes two disparate environments on a cognitive level – the empirical versus the supernatural. His non-coexistent worlds hinge upon the perception of the central female figure and borrow Romantic topoi. Ivanov’s poetry is important to an analysis of aesthetic deception for the unique moments of correspondence that occur between two existential planes. In “Serebrianyi bor” (“The Silver Copse”), we see the divine imminent in the empirical with only the poet-theurge to make it known. Whereas Briusov merely *allows* for the mystical, Ivanov’s

poetics *depends* upon its existence. Blok reifies antinomic Romantic doubling in a poetics of thesis and antithesis. In the mysterious female subject of his *Verses About the Beautiful Lady*, Blok describes a threshold figure at the boundary between the empirical and the supernatural. Further complicating this precarious balance is an added ambiguity of motive, leaving viewer and reader perplexed as to whether she is a force of good or evil. The Symbolist appropriation of the *Augentäuschung* evolves to accommodate overlapping realms of existence. Whereas the phenomenal and fantastic represented mutually exclusive realities for German Romantics, comparable moments of ambiguity in Russian Symbolism occur during encounters between the phenomenal and the universal with the poet uniting them through a creative act of theurgic mediation.

#### Romantic Topoi and Literary Visitations

Literary history presents unique challenges to the researcher hoping to focus on discrete phenomena, be they specific movements, authors, or genres. As literary movements cut across national literary traditions, the flow of history prevents any ready division into distinct spheres of influence or periods. In setting out to identify the central characteristics of Romanticism in Western literature, one embarks on a task akin to describing the whimsical patterns of ripples in a pond. What began as a single droplet breaking the placid surface of the water radiates outward in countless ripples born of the same disturbance. Layer after layer shudders forth in arcs that bend or grow unpredictably, bearing whispers of the tremors to the farthest reaches of the pond. This dissertation aspires to unite remote literary “ripples,” long since altered by distance and time, which still speak to some kinship in the historical tremor of Romanticism.

Harkening back to Ovid’s voyeuristic Actaeon peering through the cypresses at the disrobed goddess in the spring, this Classical imagery found new purchase in the German 18<sup>th</sup>

century as a template for aesthetic enthrallment. The chance encounter in Ovid's simple tale acquires ethical complexity in the Romantic appropriation. Are the twilight wanderers truly victims of a chance encounter with hypnotic beauty? Or are the charming female figures – unobserved by other characters – in fact the realization of the poet-wanderer's creative vision that animates the world with his desire? The key moment of encounter hinges upon questions of agency. Although the encounter occurs to an individual character, his idealized vision (or imagining) of the past is the product of a collective cultural narrative. In this sense, the moment of *Augentäuschung* is a linchpin moment depicting an individual experience of a socially inflected memory – in short, a *lieu de mémoire*, playing out in a physical place with a tangible event that nevertheless becomes malleable in the clutches of memory. Similar Romantic topoi reemerge in a quasi-nostalgic reimagining in the Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century and again in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On a metaliterary level, the *Augentäuschung* motif itself constitutes a key figment of a shared or inherited imagination – a grand scale literary *lieu de mémoire* Nora's predecessor, Maurice Halbwachs, advances a theory that may serve as a final guide for construing the persistence of literary forms: "Collective memory differs from history in at least two respects," he claims. "It is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive." He observes that remembrances, unlike historical periods, are difficult to relegate completely to the past: "Stating when a collective remembrance has disappeared and whether it has definitely left group consciousness is difficult, especially since its recovery only requires its preservation in some limited portion of the social body."<sup>22</sup> The twilight

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<sup>22</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

fantasy of the Romantic imagination survives as long as such moments of literary visitation persist.

## Chapter 1: Goethe's Poetics of Deception in *Faust*

In Act I, Part II of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's verse epic *Faust*, we encounter an unexpected economic parable. The scene opens on an emperor surrounded by court attendants who tell of the kingdom's steady decay in the face of insurmountable debt. Mephistopheles, in the guise of the newly appointed court jester, beguiles the court with wit disguised as wisdom: a vast reserve of precious metals, he says, must surely reside deep within the earth. Regardless of whether these metals can ever be found, he reminds the king that the ruler, by law, possesses all that is above and below the earth in his kingdom. He concludes that the kingdom's debt can be settled by the mass distribution of paper IOUs backed by the hypothetical metals. In a few steps, Mephisto introduces paper currency into the kingdom and the previous system based on the exchange of precious metals is discarded.

The parable speaks to the trope of exchange or substitution that pervades Goethe's *Faust*. Mephisto's success in persuading the kingdom to accept empty promises in place of tangible currency anticipates his rhetorical games: throughout Faust's fitful wandering across time and spiritual realms, he is dogged by Mephisto's deceptions rooted in substitutions of meaning. In their travels, Faust demands to see the life's great wonders, but often finds only counterfeit spectacles. In considering the two chief generators of illusions in the drama, I distinguish between the linguistic deceptions of Mephistopheles and Helen's mesmerizing visual influence. I argue that the two forces speak to Goethe's theoretical reflections on aesthetic representation – particularly the properties of poetry (*Dichtung*) and painting. A seminal influence extending well into the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Goethe's *Faust* provides a fruitful point of departure in understanding the origin and dynamics of the phenomenon of visual 'deception' that constitutes



the common thread of the Romantic imagination articulated in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

### The “Spirit of Lies”: Verbal Deception in *Faust*

#### **The Moral Universe of *Faust***

The acts of deception or confusion that dominate *Faust* are grounded in the work’s complex moral universe. As Mephistopheles and the Lord converse in the “Prologue in Heaven” of Part I, we encounter a moral system that hinges upon a dialectic of striving (*Streben*) and inertia. The Lord humors Mephisto’s machinations to lead Faust astray on the principle that activity of any kind can only benefit man:

DER HERR

Des Menschen Tätigkeit kann allzuleicht erschlaffen,  
Er liebt sich bald die unbedingte Ruh;  
Drum geb’ ich gern ihm den Gesellen zu,  
Der reizt und wirkt und muß als Teufel schaffen. –  
(340-343)

THE LORD

All too easily can man’s activity slacken,  
For he thoroughly loves rest;  
Thus I give him a companion to provoke him,  
antagonize him, and work like the devil.<sup>1</sup>

In this universe, the devil is a stimulating companion who moves man to *act*. The Lord acknowledges man’s fallibility and instead emphasizes the activity itself, thus rendering man’s intentions only secondary to the will to act itself:

DER HERR

Solang’ er auf der Erde lebt,  
Solange sei dir’s nicht verboten.  
Es irrt der Mensch solang’ er strebt.  
(315-317)

THE LORD

As long as he lives upon the Earth,  
Nothing will be forbidden to you.  
Man will ever err as long as he strives.

In this moral system, error is an acceptable consequence of the divinely sanctioned activity of striving.

Mephistopheles, as one of the mischievous “spirits of negation” (338, “Geist des Widerspruchs”), promotes idleness and inertia. As a direct counterpoint to the divine project of

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<sup>1</sup> All English translations of *Faust* are based on the following with occasional modifications: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Faust I & II*. Trans. Stuart Atkins. Cambridge, MA: Suhrkamp/Insel Publishers Boston, 1984.

*striving*, his deeds annul all progress: in response to Faust's fervid wish to know what sublime truths "hold the world together at its core" (382-383 "was die Welt/ Im innersten zusammenhält"), Mephistopheles presents him with frivolous distractions – a raucous pub night in Auerbachskeller and erotic visions. In declaring his intentions to lead Faust astray, Mephisto's proposed method is to trade substance for emptiness. The Lord invites Mephistopheles to use whatever means he chooses to try to lead Faust from the "true path" (*der rechte Weg*). It is in response to this challenge that Mephisto declares his intention to ensnare him with empty illusions:

DER HERR

Nun gut, es sei dir überlassen!  
Zieh diesen Geist von seinem Urquell ab,  
Und führ ihn, kannst du ihn erfassen,  
Auf deinem Wege mit herab,  
Und steh beschämt, wenn du bekennen mußt:  
Ein guter Mensch in seinem dunklen Drange  
Ist sich des rechten Weges wohl bewußt.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Schon gut! nur dauert es nicht lange.  
Mir ist für meine Wette gar nicht bange.  
Wenn ich zu meinem Zweck gelange,  
Erlaubt ihr mir Triumph aus voller Brust.  
Staub soll er fressen, und mit Lust,  
Wie meine Muhme, die berühmte Schlange.  
(330-335)

THE LORD

Very well, then I leave it to you!  
Wrench this spirit from his well spring  
And lead him down your path,  
If you can catch him;  
And be ashamed when you at last recognize  
That a good man in his darkest hour  
Knows well the true path.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Agreed! The business won't take long.  
As for my bet, I'm not the least bit worried.  
When I achieve my purpose,  
let me beat my breast triumphantly.  
Dust shall he eat, and greedily,  
Like my celebrated serpent-cousin.

The man who demands the "most beautiful stars" (304, *die schönsten Sterne*) and the "greatest pleasures of the Earth" (305, *von der Erde jede höchste Lust*) will be sated with dust. When Mephisto appears before Faust in his study for the first time, he is therefore scrupulously honest when he declares by way of introduction, "I am the spirit that ever negates!" (1338, "Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint!").

The following analysis attends to the various types of verbal trickery that Mephistopheles employs and how these devices constitute moments of semantic exchange or trade. Mephisto's

exchange of meaning contrasts with Helen of Troy’s influence in Part II in which her manifestations force the viewer into an ethical situation of vision. Both characters tempt their victims to seek meaning where there is none in an operation I call *Augentäuschung*, a term I borrow from the poem. Although this term is more commonly translated as “optical illusion,” it is literally a “deception/confusion of the eyes.” While *Faust* presents several traditional forms of deception – ensnarement, beguilement, trickery, betrayal, counterfeit, and even self-deception – I propose that these operations are all forms of exchange or trade (*tauschen, wechseln*).<sup>2</sup> In presenting the two modes of deception (word and image), we will delve into Goethe’s poetics of deception in order to clarify the shift to visual deception.

### **“In the Beginning was the...”: Exchange and the Problem of Identification**

We first encounter Faust in a high-vaulted prison-like chamber sitting amidst piles of worm-eaten books and lamenting the years wasted in fruitless study. His readings in philosophy, law, medicine, and theology have brought him no closer to understanding life’s mysteries. Faust’s opening monologue thus culminates in a radical rejection of academic pursuits and all non-experiential learning:

<p>Daß ich nicht mehr, mit sauerm Schweiß, Zu sagen brauche was ich nicht weiß; Daß ich erkenne was die Welt Im Innersten zusammenhält, Schau‘ alle Wirkenskraft und Samen, Und tu‘ nicht mehr in Worten kramen. (380-385)</p>	<p>So that I need no longer toil and sweat to speak of what I do not know, can learn what, deep within it, binds the universe together, may contemplate all seminal force – and be done with peddling empty words<sup>3</sup>.</p>
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<sup>2</sup> The *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob und Wilhelm Grimm* proposes two possible roots for the verb *täuschen*; the first (*tiuschen*) means to speak untruths, tease, or mock; the second (*tüschen*) means to deceive, exchange, or defraud.

täuschen Vb. jmdn. etw. Falsches glauben machen, jmdn. irreführen, refl. sich irren, eine falsche Vorstellung, Meinung haben.

i) mhd. tiuschen: Spaß, Gespött, Schelmerei treiben, unwahr reden, betrügen.

ii) mhd. tüschen: täuschen, betrügen, sein Spiel mit jmdm. haben, mit Würfeln spielen, tauschen, wechseln.

<sup>3</sup> In verse 385, Atkins’s translation captures Faust’s frustration with words and their detachment from experience, however he has added “empty” to this verse and deemphasized Faust’s rejection of the activity itself. A more literal translation of this verse might be: “and no longer deal in rummaging through words”. I argue that Faust is rejecting

Having reached the limits of his studies, Faust turns instead to magic and action. His increasing skepticism of the written word gradually ripens into a crisis of faith while translating the opening lines of the Book of John:

Geschrieben steht: "im Anfang war das *Wort!*"  
Hier stock' ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?  
Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,  
Ich muß es anders übersetzen,  
Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.  
(1224-1228)

It is written, "In the beginning was the *Word.*"  
How soon I'm stopped! Who'll help me to go on?  
I cannot concede that *words* have such high worth  
and must, if properly inspired,  
translate the term some other way.

Faust struggles with his translation of the Greek *logos* and deems the German *Wort* insufficient. He tries next *Sinn* (1229, "sense"), *Kraft* (1233, "energy"), and finally settles on *Tat* (1237, "deed"). Faust again withdraws from the written word to embrace the world of action. Yet Faust's inclination to privilege action over words aligns with the divine project of striving. It is in the midst of this small hermeneutic crisis that Mephistopheles, the "spirit of lies" (1854, *Lügengeist*), suddenly appears before him. As we will see, Mephisto's verbal manipulations lead to epistemological dilemmas brought on by exchanges or substitutions of meaning.

### **Epithets and the Problem of Identification**

Mephisto's game of subversive substitution is central to many of his manipulations. His double-dealing is particularly evident in linguistic games of signification that rely on verbal play such as puns (concurrent dual signification), lies (substitution of the signified), and allusive epithets (substitution of the signifier) with each of these verbal masks striving towards the fulfillment of his prophecy of negation.

When Mephistopheles first appears in Faust's Study, the game of prevarication begins. "Wie nennst du dich?" (1327, "What is your name?") Faust demands, expecting that his visitor

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the activity of reading/studying itself and instead proposes a new task for himself: experiencing the world through action rather than studious contemplation.

bears a speaking name that will give some insight into purpose, such as “Fliegengott, Verderber, Lügner” (1133, “Lord of Flies, Destroyer, Liar”). In lieu of a name, Mephisto answers in riddles:

FAUST  
Nun gut wer bist du denn?

FAUST  
But still I ask, who are you?

MEPHISTOPHELES  
Ein Teil von jener Kraft,  
Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft.  
(1335-1337)

MEPHISTOPHELES  
A part of that force  
which, always willing evil, always produces good.

An initial reading of this response allows for the possibility that Mephistopheles himself is a spirit of changeable temperament who may hinder or aid as he chooses. Faust, having recently encountered the Earth spirit, is unsure if Mephisto is a creature of Good or Evil. The riddle speaks to a deeper truth about Mephisto’s true function in Goethe’s moral universe. He works to deceive and misdirect man’s actions, believing that the intention and result of man’s deeds are of greatest importance. In pursuing this agenda, Mephisto unwittingly furthers the divine project of striving in pushing his victims to *act*.

As the generator of semantic confusion, Mephistopheles himself evades ready definition. Throughout Part I of *Faust*, several epithets are ascribed to the demon that allow him to slip effortlessly between identities. The following chart catalogues the variety of labels applied in Part I:

**Table 1: Epithets Ascribed to Mephistopheles in *Faust, Part I***

Speaker, Scene	Epithet
The Lord, Prologue in Heaven	One of the “Geist[er] die verneinen” (338, “spirits of negation”), “Schalk” (339, “rogue”), “Gesell[e]” (342, “companion”)
Faust, <u>Faust’s Study [I]</u> <u>Faust’s Study [II]</u> <u>Street (1)</u> <u>Street (2)</u>	“Sohn der Hölle” (1397, “Son of Hell”) “Pedant” (1716, “pedant”), “du böser Geist” (1730, “you evil spirit”) “mein Herr Magister Lobesan” (spoken ironically, 2633) <sup>4</sup> “Lügner, ein Sophiste” (3050, “liar, a sophist”)

<sup>4</sup> Schöne 289. “Lobesan” was once a formal form of address that is now out of use.

**Table 1: Epithets Ascribed to Mephistopheles in *Faust, Part I* (continued)**

<u>A Summerhouse Forest and Cave</u>	“Ein Tier!” (3207, “animal!”) “Verruchter!“ (3326, “villain!”), “Kuppler!“ (3337, “pimp!”), “Teufel” (3362 “devil”)
<u>Marthe’s Garden</u>	“Kauz” (“Es muß auch solche Käuze geben” – 3483), “Du Ungeheuer (3528, “monster”), “Du Spottgeburt von Dreck und Feuer!” (3536 “monstrosity of filth and fire!”)
<u>Walpurgisnight Dreary Day</u>	“Du Geist des Widerspruchs!” (4030, “Spirit of contradiction!”) “Verräterischer, nichtswürdiger Geist” (4, “Perfidious, contemptible spirit”), “Hund! abscheuliches Untier!” (14, “Dog! Detestable monster!”), “Schandgeselle” (38, “ignominious companion”), “Ungeheuer” (57, “monster”).
<u>The Witch, Witch’s Kitchen</u>	“O Herr” (2490, “my lord”), “Junker Satan” (2504, “Squire Satan”), “Schelm” (2515, “rascal”)

Despite the variety of labels applied to Mephisto, two themes emerge that attest to the demon’s linguistic predilection: mediation and contradiction.

### **Mediation**

Mephisto’s puns and prevarications prove him to be a faithless semantic messenger. In his despair at reaching the limits of human knowledge, Faust turns to the occult for deeper insights into the world and eventually encounters Mephisto within this context. In this sense, Mephistopheles presents himself as a teacher or guide to the spiritual world. He fails in this role by deliberately showing Faust banalities rather than the deeper truths he seeks. Mephisto’s purposeful failure as a guide mirrors his continued disruption of meaning: by speaking in riddles and puns, Mephistopheles obfuscates or redirects messages. As a guide – the sole link between Faust and the higher knowledge he seeks – Mephisto again muddles the path to truth in a series of twists and turns.

Mephisto’s role as a guide is articulated by the Lord himself in the “Prologue in Heaven” in the passage that has already been cited: “Thus I gave [man] a companion to provoke him,/

antagonize him, and work like the devil” to save man from his own tendency to rest.<sup>5</sup> In “Outside the City Gate,” Mephisto whimsically fulfills the role of *Geselle* by appearing before Faust as a black poodle. In contrast to the associations that the contemporary reader may have with poodles, at the time of the drama’s composition this breed was recognized as a powerful hunting dog used to retrieve game.<sup>6</sup> The guise of a hunting dog suggests divergent fulfillments of the role of “companion”: in one respect, this role positions Mephisto as man’s paradigmatic companion – a trusted creature known for its fidelity and usefulness. The designation of “companion” is repeated at the end of “Outside the City Gate” when Faust calls to the poodle, “*Geselle* dich zu uns! Komm hier!” (1166 italics mine, “Come and join us! Come here!”). However, the predatory nature of the animal speaks to Mephisto’s true intentions to bring about Faust’s downfall. The figuration of the dog’s movements and appearance suggest darker motives in his ominous dark fur and his curious movement in “ever-tightening circles” around Faust and Wagner (1152-1153). As his companion, Mephisto is tasked with assisting Faust in every way possible, often helping him to acquire desired items. Faust eventually relies on his trusty intermediary to determine what objects will aid him in his journey and retrieve them accordingly. Instead, Mephistopheles returns with baubles and distractions. The demon convinces Faust that he must first regain his youth before they begin their journey and leads him to a witch who will brew the potion. Invigorated with new life from the potion and a young man’s desires, Faust falls for the first woman he encounters. Turning to his sworn companion, he demands: “Listen, you must get her for me” (2618, “Hör’, du mußt mir die Dirne schaffen”). Mephisto busies himself with obtaining precious jewels to help him win Gretchen’s affections. The mischievous intermediary

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<sup>5</sup> Goethe 342-343 “Drum geb’ ich gern ihm den Gesellen zu./ Der reizt und wirkt und muß als Teufel schaffen. –”

<sup>6</sup> Schöne 242-243.

thoroughly earns the label of “pimp” (3337, “Kuppler”) that Faust hurls at him in frustration. Whether as a *Geselle* or *Kuppler*, Mephistopheles obfuscates and redirects Faust’s efforts.

### **Contradiction**

The demon’s activities as a faithless actor anticipate his verbal trickery. Mephisto’s verbal subversion depends upon similar efforts to redirect, occlude, or evacuate words of all meaning. He is accordingly dubbed one of the “spirits who negate” (338, “Geister, die verneinen”), a “pedant” (1716 “Pedant”), “liar” (3040 “Lügner”), “spirit of contradiction” (4030 “Geist des Widerspruchs”), and a “deceptive, unworthy spirit” (line 4 in “Trüber Tag”, “verräterischer, nichtswürdiger Geist”). As the articulation and fulfillment of the terms of the wager constitutes Mephisto’s chief verbal manipulation, I will consider this in detail.

Upon their second meeting, Mephistopheles offers his services to Faust as a servant and guide to the unknown. After a lifetime seemingly wasted in the search for deeper insights, Faust is skeptical that the demon could show him anything of significance. He anticipates only tricks and further banalities, none of which could halt his feverish search for anything more to life. On account of this, Faust formulates a wager that bets against his own satisfaction:

FAUST

Werd’ ich beruhigt je mich auf ein Faulbett legen:  
So sei es gleich um mich getan!  
Kannst du mich schmeichelnd je belügen  
Daß ich mir selbst gefallen mag,  
Kannst du mich mit Genuß betriegen:  
Das sei für mich der letzte Tag!  
Die Wette biet’ ich!

MEPHISTOPHELES

Topp!

FAUST

Und Schlag auf Schlag!  
Werd’ ich zum Augenblicke sagen:  
Verweile doch! du bist so schön!  
Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen,

FAUST

If on a bed of sloth I ever lie contented,  
may I be done for then and there!  
If ever you, with lies and flattery,  
can lull me into self-complacency  
or dupe me with a life of pleasure,  
may that day be the last for me!  
This is my wager!

MEPHISTOPHELES

Here’s my hand!

FAUST

And mine again!  
If I should ever say to any moment:  
Tarry, remain! – you are so fair!  
then you may lay your fetters on me,



Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn!  
Dann mag die Totenglocke schlagen,  
Dann bist du deines Dienstes frei,  
Die Uhr mag stehn, der Zeiger fallen,  
Es sei die Zeit für mich vorbei!

MEPHISTOPHELES

Bedenk' es wohl, wir werden's nicht vergessen.  
(1698-1707)

then I will gladly be destroyed!  
Then they can toll the passing bell,  
your obligations then be ended –  
the clock may stop, its hand may fall,  
and time at last for me be over!

MEPHISTOPHELES

Consider well your words – we'll not forget them.  
(1692-1707)

Although Faust flippantly agrees to the wager, he includes two stipulations that Mephisto will attempt to fulfill. The first stipulation is a prophecy of skepticism: he wagers that the demon will never coax him into lying contented in a “bed sloth” (*Faulbett*), which is to say that Faust resigns himself to searching in vain indefinitely. Mephisto fulfills this first term of the wager both literally and metaphorically. In the “Palace” scene of Part II, Act V, Mephisto alludes to the original terms as they were stated:

FAUST

Ja diesem Sinne bin ich ganz ergeben,  
Das ist der Weisheit letzter Schluß:  
Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben,  
Der täglich sie erobern muß.  
Und so verbringt, umrungen von Gefahr,  
Hier Kindheit, Mann und Greis sein tüchtig Jahr.  
Solch ein Gewimmel möcht ich sehn,  
Auf freiem Grund mit freiem Volke stehn.  
Zum Augenblicke dürft' ich sagen:  
Verweile doch, Du bist so schön!  
Es kann die Spur von meinen Erdetagen  
Nicht in Äonen untergehn. –  
Im Vorgefühl von solchem hohen Glück  
Genieß ich jetzt den höchsten Augenblick.

FAUST

*sinkt zurück, die LEMUREN fassen ihn auf und legen ihn auf den Boden.*

MEPHISTOPHELES

Ihn sättigt keine Lust, ihm gnügt kein Glück,  
So buhlt er fort nach wechselnden Gestalten;  
Den letzten, schlechten, leeren Augenblick  
Der Arme wünscht ihn festzuhalten.  
Der mir so kräftig widerstand,  
Die Zeit wird Herr, der Greis hier liegt im Sand.

FAUST

To this idea I am committed wholly,  
it is the final wisdom we can reach:  
he, only, merits freedom and existence  
who wins them every day anew.  
And so, beset by danger, here childhood's years,  
maturity, and age will all be vigorous.  
If only I might see that people's teeming life,  
share their autonomy on unencumbered soil;  
then, to the moment, I could say:  
tarry a while, you are so fair –  
the traces of my days on earth  
will survive into eternity! –  
Envisioning those heights of happiness,  
I now enjoy my highest moment.

FAUST

*falls backward and is caught by the LEMURES, who lay him on the ground*

MEPHISTOPHELES

No pleasure sates him, no success suffices,  
And so he still keeps chasing shapes that always  
change;  
this final, mediocre, empty moment –  
the poor wretch wants to cling to it.  
He who resisted me with such great vigor

Die Uhr steht still –

CHOR

Steht still! Sie schweigt wie Mitternacht.  
Der Zeiger fällt.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Er fällt, es ist vollbracht. (11587-11596)

–time triumphs–lies here on the sand an old,  
old man.

The clock stands still –

LEMURES

Stands still? As deathly still as midnight!  
Now its hand falls.

MEPHISTOPHELES

It falls, and all is finished.

Just as Faust believes his land reclamation project has been fulfilled, he falls into a grave prepared by Mephisto's minions and dies. In a sense, Faust lays down in his final resting place – a reasonable substitute for the *Faulbett* – and gives up his search.

The second stipulation is Faust's challenge to Mephisto to present him with one rapturous moment, the *Augenblick* (1699), that could move him to cry out: "Tarry, remain! – you are so fair!" (1700, "Verweile doch! du bist so schön!"). Mephisto believes this stipulation to be satisfied when, in his final moments, Faust says, "then, to the moment, I could say: tarry a while, you are so fair" (11581-82, "Zum Augenblicke dürft' ich sagen: Verweile doch, Du bist so schön!"). In a sneering reprisal of this exclamation, Mephisto delights in his deception and terms it "this final, mediocre, empty moment" (11589, "den letzten, schlechten, leeren Augenblick"). As Karl Eibl notes in his analysis of the wager, Faust speaks in the subjunctive mood: "Zum Augenblicke *dürft'* ich sagen:/ Verweile doch, Du bist so schön!" (11581-82 emphasis added, "then, to the moment, I *could* say: / tarry a while, you are so fair"). Eibl observes that this formulation is equivalent to the more explicit "*Wenn* dieser Augenblick höchster Erfüllung einträte, *dann* dürft ich sagen..." ("If I were to arrive at this moment of highest gratification, *then* I could say...")<sup>7</sup>. Although the verse is indeed phrased as a hypothetical, the meaning

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<sup>7</sup> Eibl 9.

nevertheless depends upon the intention of the speaker. If Faust believes this moment to be an instant of the highest gratification, then he loses the wager and must serve Mephistopheles for eternity in hell. In this sense, the drama builds up to a high-stakes hermeneutic moment in Faust's death scene that underscores the importance of Mephisto's acts of interpretation. Faust's fate thus hinges upon divergent interpretations of the terms of the wager which Mephisto interprets quite literally. Despite the conditionality of Faust's declaration of "Verweile doch, du bist so schön!" Mephisto considers the terms fulfilled once Faust utters the words, regardless of context. His interpretation of Faust's *Faulbett* stipulation was also literal, again showing a willful disregard for context. The final struggle between Mephisto and the angels for Faust's soul form a perfect tableau of the high stakes of interpretation.

### ***Augentäuschung: The Theater of Illusion***

Mephisto's visual manipulations likewise depend upon divergent perceptions. When Faust first encounters Mephisto, the scene unfurls in a key moment of visual interpretation. Faust and Wagner encounter a black poodle just before the gates of the city:

FAUST  
Betracht' ihn recht! Für was hältst du das Tier?

FAUST  
Observe it well! What do you think the creature is?

WAGNER  
Für einen Pudel, der auf seine Weise  
Sich auf der Spur des Herren plagt.

WAGNER  
A poodle that in the usual way  
Goes to the trouble of tracking its master!

FAUST  
Bemerkst du, wie in weitem Schneckenkreise  
Er um uns her und immer näher jagt?  
Und irr ich nicht, so zieht ein Feuerstrudel  
Auf seinen Pfaden hinterdrein.

FAUST  
Do you notice how it races around us  
In a great spiral, getting closer and closer?  
And unless I'm mistaken, an eddy of fire  
Follows closely wherever it goes.

WAGNER  
Ich sehe nichts als einen schwarzen Pudel;  
Es mag bei Euch wohl Augentäuschung sein.

WAGNER  
A mere black poodle is what I see –  
you, I suspect, some optical illusion.

FAUST  
Mir scheint es, daß er magisch leise Schlingen  
Zu künft'gem Band um unsre Füße zieht.

FAUST  
It's my impression that, with quiet magic, the dog  
Is laying about our feet the snares of future

(1149-1159)

bondage.  
(1149-1159)

Wagner, deeming Faust's vision to be compromised, terms the affliction an *Augentäuschung*. More commonly translated as "optical illusion", the term literally means "confusion of the eyes." In short, Wagner, suggests that Faust's eyes are playing tricks on him. As is evident in Goethe's reflections on optical illusions in his *Color Theory (Zur Farbenlehre)*, he did not use the term *Augentäuschung* lightly. In his summary of Robert Waring Darwin's 1785 *On the Ocular Spectra of Light and Colours*, Goethe quibbles with an earlier translation of Darwin's work which rendered "ocular spectra" (after images) as *Augentäuschungen*:

Wir haben bei Rezension des Darwinischen Aufsatzes den Ausdruck *Augengespenst* mit Fleiß gewählt und beibehalten, teils weil man dasjenige was erscheint ohne Körperlichkeit zu haben, dem gewöhnlichen Sprachgebrauch nach, ein Gespenst nennt...Das Wort *Augentäuschungen* welches der sonst so verdienstvolle Übersetzer des Darwinischen *Zoonomie* dafür gebraucht hat, wünschten wir ein für allemal verbannt. Das Auge täuscht sich nicht; es handelt gesetzlich und macht dadurch dasjenige zur Realität, was man zwar dem Worte, aber nicht dem Wesen nach, ein Gespenst zu nennen berechtigt ist.<sup>8</sup>

In our criticism of Darwin's essay, we have deliberately chosen the expression *Augengespenst* and stuck with it, partly because that which appears to one is not corporeal and, according to the common vernacular, would be called a spirit...The word *Augentäuschungen*, which the worthy translator of Darwin's *Zoonomia* employed, we wish were banned once and for all. The eye does not deceive itself; it functions according to laws and realizes that which (according to the word, but not the entity) one is justified in calling a spirit.

Goethe's subtle distinction is ultimately a concern with the cause of the illusion: in opting for the term *Augengespenst* (literally an "eye spirit/ghost") instead of *Augentäuschung*, he attributes the illusion to some interference from an external force rather than the viewer.<sup>9</sup> As he says, the "eye does not deceive itself." Since the analysis deals with after-images that remain long after a light or object is removed from sight, the image is necessarily non-corporeal – a seemingly spectral

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<sup>8</sup> Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre* 54, 245. Historischer Teil, Sechste Abteilung – achtzehntes Jahrhundert (erste Epoche, von Newton bis auf Dollond).

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that *Augengespenst* is also the more literal translation of Darwin's Latin term *ocular spectrum*, literally "eye specter," which he employees in his analysis of after-images.

residue of that which is absent. The notion of an “eye spirit” may seem particularly suited to Faust’s confusion in seeing a spectral trail of fire along the dog’s path. Given Goethe’s sensitivity to visual perception and the agency of the viewer, we can reasonably conclude that Faust’s unusual first encounter with Mephisto serves to underscore vision itself as an interpretive act. Wagner and Faust perceive the same object in the same moment, yet their experiences diverge. If, as Goethe claims, the “eye does not deceive itself,” then Faust either saw what he wished or was deceived by Mephisto. Goethe’s dynamic of visual deception only grows more complicated in Part II when Helen of Troy supplants Mephisto as the primary force of perceptual confusion. It is on account of the still hazy question of agency and the layered intersubjective exchanges that I retain Goethe’s original term from the drama, *Augentäuschung*, to describe these visual moments rooted in exchanges, substitutions, deceptions, or simple confusion.

In his visual deceptions, Mephisto draws on the desires of the viewer to give life to his illusions. In this sense, the Mephistophelean principle is not simply an act of malice in which the demon works evil upon man; rather Mephisto’s deceptive skill is to discover the desire for self-deception inherent in his victims and to facilitate its development. Several of his identities are linked with an expressed wish or expectation. In the scene “The Neighbor’s House,” Marthe Schwerdtlein laments that no witness can testify to her long-absent husband’s death. As the two travelers require identities to insinuate themselves into Gretchen’s life, Faust and Mephisto arrive just in time to play false witness to Marthe’s husband’s death. Motivated partly by self-interest, Marthe accepts their false identities.

Mephisto’s realization of each new role is theatrical, bordering on farcical. He adorns himself with the markers of each new identity, from the black poodle’s coat in “Before the City-Gate” to Faust’s robe to fool a young scholar in “Faust’s Study [I].” His costume in “Witch’s

Kitchen” draws attention to the changing cultural perceptions of the devil and the corresponding semiological shifts that occur in the cultural imagination. In response to the witch’s inquiry “Wo sind denn eure beiden Raben?” (2491, “And where are your two ravens?”), he explains that his dress changes with cultural trends:

MEPHISTOPHELES

Für diesmal kommst du so davon;  
Denn freilich ist es eine Weile schon,  
Daß wir uns nicht gesehen haben.  
Auch die Kultur, die alle Welt beleckt,  
Hat auf den Teufel sich erstreckt;  
Das nordische Phantom ist nun nicht mehr zu schauen;  
Wo siehst du Hörner, Schweif und Klauen?  
Und was den Fuß betrifft, den ich nicht missen kann,  
Der würde mir bei Leuten schaden;  
Darum bedien‘ ich mich, wie mancher junge Mann,  
Seit vielen Jahren falscher Waden.

DIE HEXE *tanzend*

Sinn und Verstand verlier’ ich schier,  
Seh’ ich den Junker Satan wieder hier!

MEPHISTOPHELES

Den Namen, Weib, verbitt’ ich mir!

DIE HEXE

Warum? Was hat er euch getan?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Er ist schon lang’ in’s Fabelbuch geschrieben;  
Allein die Menschen sind nichts besser dran,  
Den Bösen sind sie los, die Bösen sind geblieben.  
Du nennst mich Herr Baron, so ist die Sache gut;  
Ich bin ein Kavalier, wie andre Kavalier.  
Du zweifelst nicht an meinem edlen Blut;  
Sieh her, das ist das Wappen, das ich führe!  
*Er macht eine unanständige Gebärde (2495-2513)*

MEPHISTOPHELES

This one time your excuse will do;  
it has indeed been quite a while  
since we two saw each other last.  
Refinement’s making everybody slick,  
and so the devil too has been affected;  
the Northern phantom’s gone and vanished,  
you see I have no horns or tail or claws;  
as for the foot I cannot do without,  
it would impair my social chances,  
and so, like many a young man,  
I wear false calves, and long have done so.

WITCH (*dancing*)

It’s more than my poor mind can grasp,  
seeing here Squire Satan again!

MEPHISTOPHELES

Woman, I will not tolerate that title!

WITCH

Why not? What harm is there in it?

MEPHISTOPHELES

It is now only mythological;  
yet mankind is no better off: the Evil One  
they may be rid of, evil ones have still not  
vanished.  
If you just call me Baron, that is fine;  
like other gentry, I’m a cavalier.  
You cannot doubt my noble blood –  
look at the coat of arms I wear!  
*He makes an indecent gesture*

Whereas Mephisto once bore horns, a tail, claws, a clubbed foot, and was followed by ravens, he has since traded them for the red jerkin (2485) and cock’s feather (2486) that are now in vogue. Each new performance features a fresh costume determined by the expectations of his audience.

In this scene, Mephisto employs costumes, symbols, and clear images to work his influence upon the viewer.

### Instability of Perception in *Faust*, Part II

“Und was ist Schönheit? Sie ist nicht Licht und nicht Nacht. Dämmerung; eine Gebuhr von Wahrheit und Unwahrheit. Ein Mittelding. In ihrem Reiche liegt ein Scheideweg, so zweydeutig, so schielend, ein Herkules unter den Philosophen könnte sich vergeiffen.”<sup>10</sup>

In Part II of *Faust*, the verbal manipulations that dominated Part I gradually yield to a subtle ethics of vision. Although Mephisto remains Faust’s constant companion (*Geselle*), he plays a diminished role once the work moves from a Christian framework to a pagan realm. Faust’s mind is cleansed of all unpleasant recollections by Lethean waters and he wakes to a new existence in settings borrowed from antiquity, traveling from the Aegean Sea to the reinvented Classical Walpurgisnight to Arcadia. At the center of this new mythological modality is Helen of Troy, whose presence dominates the second half of the drama and creates a similar instability in perception.

Much of Goethe’s late work demonstrates a preoccupation with the dynamics of vision. Ilse Graham deconstructs the visual moment in Goethe’s work to yield two possible types of seeing.<sup>11</sup> She draws inspiration for these categories from the term *Augenblick*, which she interprets as either “der Augen Blick” or “Der Blick der Augen.”<sup>12</sup> The former puts stress on the temporal aspect of the gaze (aligning the term more closely with the English translation of “an instant”). The later formulation, “der Blick der Augen,” is the “gaze of the eyes,” emphasizing

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<sup>10</sup> “And what is beauty? It is neither light nor night. Twilight; born of truth and untruth. A middle-thing. In its realm there is a crossroad so ambiguous, so crooked, that even a Hercules among philosophers could lose his way.” Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Letter to F.A. Deser’s daughter, Frankfurt a.M. Feb. 13, 1769 [*Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Brief und Gespräche*, p. 113-123].

<sup>11</sup> Graham puts forth this theory of vision in Goethe’s late works in her chapter on “Der Augenblick des Liebens: Gedanken zur *Helena*-Tragödie“ in *Goethe: Schauen und Glauben* (1988).

<sup>12</sup> Graham, 306-307. *Augenblick* is generally translated as “moment” or “instant” in English. The term literally is a compound of the word for “eyes” (*Augen*) and “gaze/view” (*Blick*). Graham proposes two possible elaborations of this compound which I discuss.

the act of seeing itself. I would propose an additional distinction, however, within the latter category to describe a visual situation that is simultaneously receptive and projecting. Whether the eye seeks out Helen's mesmerizing figure or is besieged by her image is an important distinction when assessing the ethics of the visual moment.

To understand the force of these visual encounters, I turn to Goethe's 1810 *Zur Farbenlehre* (*Theory of Colors*) which contains extensive observations on how color is perceived in various environments. The sixth section on "The Sensual-Ethical Effect of Color" ("Die sinnlich-sittliche Wirkung der Farbe") reimagines the experience of colors as an ethical one. In this theory of optics, color and light are united and penetrate the eye to varying effect. Goethe theorizes that the conditions of viewing (bright, dim, or turbid light) and the colors themselves generate a moral influence on the viewer. This stance is addressed in a preface in which Goethe expounds on the metaphorical language he uses to discuss his work: "...and thus develops a language, a symbol which one might apply and use in similar circumstances as allegory, as a related expression, as an intuitively suitable word."<sup>13</sup> He reasons that the key to understanding the phenomenon of color lies in the observer's subjective experience which will necessarily involve emotional responses to the phenomenon and will thus require the full force of metaphor to lend expression to these observations. The context and moral dynamics of viewership within Goethe's metaphors are crucial to deconstructing Goethe's figuration of Helen which is heavily codified using similar categories of shadow, turbidity, and duplication.

### **Simulacrum and Absence**

In Act III, Mephisto, in the guise of Phorkyas, alludes to a variant of Helen's mythology: "And yet they say that you appeared in twofold form, / that in both Ilium and Egypt you were

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<sup>13</sup> Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre*, 316. "und so entsteht eine Sprache, eine Symbolik, die man auf ähnliche Fälle als Gleichnis, als nahverwandten Ausdruck, als unmittelbar passendes Wort anwenden und benutzen mag."



seen” (8872-73, “Doch sagt man, du erschienst ein doppelhaft Gebild, / In Ilios gesehen und in Ägypten auch”). He refers to the accounts put forth by Herodotus in *Histories* and Euripides’ *Helen* that tell of the gods creating an *eidolon*, or phantom image, of Helen that is sent in her stead to Troy while she remains in Egypt. Goethe’s Helen is unsure about her own existence: “Do not confound the chaos of a mind confused. / I don’t know, even now, which of those two I am” (8874-75, “Verwirre wüsten Sinnes Aberwitz nicht gar. / Selbst jetzo, welche den ich sei, ich weiß es nicht”). This doubling anticipates imagery that will reflect the instability of her image. Rather than manifesting a strict binary of presence and absence, Helen exists between states. In reviewing Helen’s various manifestations throughout the drama, we see this liminality reinforced by spectral-type figurations.

### **Classical-Romantic Phantasmagoria**

In 1800, Goethe produced a 265-verse fragment titled *Helena im Mittelalter* (*Helen in the Middle Ages*) relating the encounter of the mythological Helen of antiquity with a medieval knight. The fragment cuts off just before the encounter itself on account of Goethe’s own hesitations about sully the noble with “the barbaric.” Twenty-six years later, Goethe would rework the fragment – partly on the advice of Friedrich Schiller who encouraged him to go “from the pure consciously into the impure” (“von dem Reinen mit Bewußtsein ins Unreinere”) – and develop the piece into what would become the third act of *Faust*, Part II. One curious addition to the Helen fragment was the inclusion of a subtitle that would be used in early editions – *Helen: Classical-Romantic Phantasmagoria* (*Helena: klassisch-romantische Phantasmagorie*).<sup>14</sup> Indeed

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<sup>14</sup> Trunz notes in his commentary to the 1996/2010 edition of *Faust* (C.H. Beck) that the term “fantasmagorie” entered the French language towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and referred to the artificial presentation of apparitions on stage by means of a “laterna magica,” invented by the physician Etienne-Gaspard Robertson. This term was then borrowed into German. In the shadow play enacted in the third act, we see the same spectral play of light suggested by the original subtitle. P.660-661.

much of the imagery and figurative language pervading Helen's various appearances lend her a spectral aspect or directly term her a "spirit" (*Geist*). Long before the fateful union of Faust and Helen in the third act, the first act heralds her arrival in a spectral shadow-play for the king. From the beginning, the stated objective is to find only the images of Helen and Paris and not to retrieve the personages themselves: the king asks to see "the paragon [*Musterbild*] of male and female beauty" (6185 emphasis mine, "Das *Musterbild* der Männer, so der Frauen"). The scene to be presented before the king is only a play of images (*Bilder*) derived from a primordial image that Faust will summon from the Mothers.<sup>15</sup> The shadow-play thus suggests a spectral appearance that shows only a reflection of a now-absent figure. This interpretation is supported by frequent references to the shadow-play as a "ghostly/spectral scene." As Faust prepares to retrieve the images of Helen and Paris, the chamberlain reminds Mephisto "We still are waiting for the phantom scene you owe us" (6307, "Ihr seid uns noch die Geisterszene schuldig"). The herald will later dub the hour a "gloomy spectral hour" (6387, "düster[e] Geisterstunde") and announce that all the court has gathered to see the "ghosts" (6390, "Geister"). Mephistopheles will also adopt the term in reminding Faust that he has brought about the grotesque play of spirits: "But you're the author of this spectral masque!" (6546, "Machst du's doch selbst das Fratzengeisterspiel!"). Finally, the designation of "spirits" extends to the stage directions after Faust reaches out to embrace Helen and the spectral scene explodes and fades to smoke:

*"Explosion. Faust is seen lying on the floor; the phantoms dissolve into smoke" ("Explosion, Faust liegt am Boden. Die Geister gehen in Dunst auf").*

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<sup>15</sup> Schöne observes that Goethe's invocation of the Mothers (*die Mütter*) has evaded any definitive interpretation, but does offer Eckermann's reflections of this term that he puts forth in his *Gespräche mit Goethe*: in a conversation with Eckermann, Goethe is said to have declined to explicate the scene, but did trace this use of the term "Mothers" to the historical writings of Plutarch in which "the Mothers" was supposedly a colloquial way of referring to divinities in ancient Greece. Eckermann goes on to posit an understanding of these *Bilder* that are held by the divinities as a platonic ideal, as "monads," "primordial images," or "primordial forms of nature" (See Schöne, 466-467).

As a revenant-type figure, Helen appears in a series of returns, all the while haunting the memory of the viewer and overwhelming his reason. If Mephistopheles is the being who “ever desires evil yet ever does good,” it could be said that Helen, conversely, “ever desires good and ever does evil.” This ambiguity of character is represented with bivalent imagery principally concerned with obscuration and revelation. Returning to Goethe’s treatment of beauty as a “middle-thing” (*Mittelding*), this seemingly paradoxical duality is evident in his figuration of the paradigmatic form of Beauty, Helen. Unlike Mephisto, however, Helen’s intentions are nebulous. In the following analysis of the devices Goethe employs in his reinvention of Helen, I will consider how this duality is represented metonymically in two types of “shrouds” that surround her: atmospheric haze and veils.

### **Atmospheric Haze: Clouds, Fog, and Smoke**

Helen’s presence effects a crisis of judgment in the viewer, often represented by moments in which vision is obstructed or compromised. Helen stands at the center of this world of light, dark, and turbidity; her beauty is partially obscured or shines forth in blinding clarity. The first category of objects to be considered comprises atmospheric occlusions. Here, as with the *Farbenlehre*, Goethe’s art is informed by his scientific studies. A seminal influence on Goethe’s articulation of cloud imagery can be found in Luke Howard’s 1803 analysis of cloud formations, *Essay on the Modification of Clouds*, which Goethe encountered in 1817.<sup>16</sup> Goethe pays tribute to Howard’s nomenclature system for clouds<sup>17</sup> in an 1820 poetic cycle that gives a voice to each

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<sup>16</sup> Schöne 486.

<sup>17</sup> The Latin terms introduced by Howard were preferred over the descriptive French terms previously used by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. Howard’s system proposes three main cloud types – cirrus, cumulus, stratus – but, unlike Lamarck’s system, Howard allows for intermediate forms as well with names derived from the three main categories (cirro-cumulus, cirro-stratus, cumulostratus, cumulo-cirro-stratus (nimbus)) [<http://www.rmets.org/weather-and-climate/observing/luke-howard-and-cloud-names>].

of the three main cloud formations as well as an intermediate form (nimbus).<sup>18</sup> The opening section of the cycle posits that the various cloud formations, each with its own unique character, are metamorphoses of the divinity Camarupa:

<p>Wenn Gottheit Camarupa, hoch und hehr,          Durch Lüfte schwankend wandelt leicht und schwer,          Des Schleiers Falten sammelt, sie zerstreut,          Am Wechsel der Gestalten sich erfreut,          Jetzt starr sich hält, dann schwindet wie ein Traum,          Da staunen wir und traun dem Auge kaum; (1-6)</p>	<p>When divinity Camarupa, high and noble,          Meanders through the air lightly, heavily,          Gathers the folds of the veil, scatters them          Is gladdened by the change of forms,          Now he holds himself stiffly, then disappears like          a dream,          There we marvel and hardly believe our eyes.</p>
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The viewer beholds the shifting cloud formations in a dream-like state (5, “dann schwindet wie ein Traum”) and is left overwhelmed and doubting his eyes (6, “Da staunen wir und traun dem Auge kaum”). Aspects of this cloud imagery and its relation to the divine clarify moments in the third act of Part II, “Inner Courtyard of a Castle,” in which the watchman, Lynceus, is overwhelmed by the sight of Helen. The scene begins with a similar topos of the mortal observer beholding a divinity emerge from a hazy atmosphere. Lynceus, as the quintessential avatar of Vision, fulfills the role of observer in both name and deed.<sup>19</sup> Lynceus himself will draw attention to this in his ballad-style confession, explaining that: “I am endowed with sharp, clear vision, / like the lynx in the highest tree” (9230-9231, “Augenstrahl ist mir verliehen/ Wie dem Luchs auf höchstem Baum”). With his powerful gaze, he stands atop the ramparts and surveys the landscape with orders to announce all who approach. His existence, as presented here, is entirely visual. His clear gaze scans and targets all within the visual field. While in search of an object, the image (Helen) presents itself and he is overwhelmed by the

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<sup>18</sup> Keller 217. The verses voicing the four cloud formations (“Stratus,” “Cumulus,” “Cirrus,” “Nimbus”) were published in 1820; a second version published two years later includes two preceding sections (“Atmosphäre” and “Howards Ehrengedächtnis”) as well as a concluding section (“Wohl zu merken!”) that frame the cloud verses.

<sup>19</sup> Schöne 609. Goethe names his watchman after one of the Argonauts known for his excellent sight. While the mythological Lynceus’s vision was powerful enough to see through the very earth, Goethe’s watchman initially cannot see past the haze that surrounds Helen (see verses 9230-37). Given that the name has been chosen to foreground his power of sight, this impediment to vision underscores the power of obscuration of this shroud.

sight. The interaction reveals a moment of hetero-affective fascination and beguilement. From the moment Lynceus first spies Helen approaching from the battlements, he is completely enthralled by the sight of her and neglects his duty by failing to announce her arrival. When an explanation of his lapse is demanded, Lynceus gives the following account:

TURMWÄRTER, LYNCEUS

Laß mich knien, laß mich schauen,  
Laß mich sterben, laß mich leben,  
Denn schon bin ich hingegeben  
Dieser gottgegebenen Frauen.

Harrend auf des Morgens Wonne,  
Östlich spähend ihren Lauf,  
Ging auf einmal mir die Sonne  
Wunderbar im Süden auf.

Zog den Blick nach jener Seite,  
Statt der Schluchten, statt der Höh'n  
Statt der Erd- und Himmelsweite,  
Sie die Einzige zu spähn.

Augenstrahl ist mir verliehen  
Wie dem Luchs auf höchstem Baum,  
Doch nun muß' ich mich bemühen  
Wie aus tiefem düstern Traum.  
Wüßt' ich irgend mich zu finden?  
Zinne? Turm? geschloßnes Tor?  
Nebel schwanken, Nebel schwinden  
Solche Göttin tritt hervor!

Aug' und Brust ihr zugewendet  
Sog ich an den milden Glanz,  
Diese Schönheit wie sie blendet  
Blendete mich Armen ganz.

Ich vergaß des Wächters Pflichten,  
Vollig das beschworne Horn,  
Drohe nur mich zu vernichten,  
Schönheit bändigt allen Zorn. (9218-9245)

THE WATCHMAN, LYNCEUS

Let me kneel and gaze upon her,  
whether I'm to live or die,  
for I am the slave already  
of this Lady sent from heaven.

Waiting for the dawning glory,  
looking eastward for the sun,  
suddenly I saw it rising  
by some magic in the south.

Drawn that way, my eyes now sought,  
not the valleys or the hills,  
firmament or earth's expanse,  
but this one and only Sun.

Though endowed with sharp, clear vision,  
Like the lynx on its tall tree,  
now I felt as if I strove  
to escape from dream-like darkness.  
How was I to find my bearings,  
see the barbican, the gate?  
The mists ebb, the fog wavers  
For this goddess now appears!

Turning eye and heart towards her,  
I imbibed the gentler light;  
beauty of such blinding splendor  
blinded me completely too;

I forgot my watchman's duties  
And the horn I'd sworn to sound.  
You may threaten to destroy me;  
Beauty, though, subdues all anger.

Lynceus's confession presents a panoramic view of the encounter. The second and third stanzas describe a brilliant landscape full of light, beginning with the arrival of the sun: "Waiting for the dawning glory, / looking eastward for the sun" (9222-9223, "Harrend auf des Morgens Wonne, /

Östlich spähend ihren Lauf“). Presented here as the “joy of the morning,” the sun’s rays spread from the east and draw his gaze. The lynx-eyed watchman, with his natural affinity to light, finds his gaze “pulled” not to the earth or the sky, but to “the one,” Helen, who is positioned somewhere between the terrene (the earthly, phenomenal) and the sky (the divine): “not the valleys or the hills, / not the earth or heaven’s expanse” (9227-9228, “Statt der Schluchten, statt der Höh’n, / Statt der Erd- und Himmelsweite”). Despite his exceptional clarity of sight, Lynceus has only a hazy vision of Helen as she approaches in the daylight: “now I felt as if I strove / to escape from dream-like darkness” (9232-9233, “Doch nun muß’ ich mich bemühen / Wie aus tiefem düsterm Traum”). The struggle for visual clarity is related in such a way as to suggest a sleeper’s efforts to free his mind from the fantasies of dreams. As Helen emerges from swirling clouds in the subsequent stanza, the atmospheric obstructions create a metonymic link between Helen and this disruption of judgment: “The mists ebb, the fog wavers / For this goddess now appears!” (9236-9237, “Nebel schwanken, Nebel schwinden / Solche Göttin tritt hervor!”). Lynceus’s affective state shifts once Helen emerges from the clouds and he has an unimpeded view. It is her beauty that overwhelms him and thoroughly compromises his vision: “beauty of such blinding splendor / blinded me completely too” (9240-9241, “Diese Schönheit wie sie blendet / Blendete mich Armen ganz”). Helen, the target of Lynceus’s gaze, overwhelms him and establishes a new dynamic of enthrallment. Lynceus neglects his duties – “I forgot my watchman’s duties” (9242, “Ich vergaß des Wächters Pflichten”) – and proclaims the dominance of beauty: “Beauty, though, subdues all anger” (9218, “Schönheit bändigt allen Zorn”).

The force of Helen’s appearance seems to contradict her mythological existence, which was largely shaped by male desire. The chronicle of her amorous kidnappers begins with Theseus, for whom the Dioscuri (Helen’s half-brothers Castor and Pollux) invade Attica to

rescue her. From there she chooses Menelaus for a husband only to be abducted by Paris and taken to Troy. However, once Paris is killed in battle, Deiphobus, another son of Priam, claims her. Menelaus, initially intending to kill her for her betrayal, instead takes her back. What is striking in this scene in the “Inner Courtyard” is the clear acknowledgment of Helen’s dominance. Lynceus immediately submits to her and makes deferential gestures: “Laß mich knieen, laß mich schauen” (9218, “Let me kneel and gaze upon her”). Lynceus’s enthralment anticipates Faust’s anxious fascination with Helen. In his own tribute, Faust places Helen in the role of a hunter:

FAUST  
 Erstaunt o Königin, seh ich zugleich  
 Die sicher Treffende, hier den Getroffnen;  
 Ich seh‘ den Bogen, der den Pfeil entsandt,  
 Verwundet jenen. Pfeile folgen Pfeilen  
 Mich treffen. Allwärts ahn’ ich überquer  
 Gefiedert schwirrend sie in Burg und Raum.  
 (9258-9263)

FAUST  
 I am amazed, o Queen, to see together  
 both the sure archer and the target struck;  
 I see the bow that sped the arrow forth,  
 And him it wounded. Arrow follows arrow,  
 Striking me too. I sensed their feathered whirl  
 on every side, in every castle room.

With this framing, we almost forget that Faust is responsible for her very appearance. In this repeated action of veiling and unveiling, it is clear that every movement, whether to obscure or reveal her beauty, is never without meaning. She is forever shrouded and ever-changing between becoming fully visible or threatening to withdraw from sight. Whereas the atmospheric haze around Helen exists outside of her, the veil she wears allows her to choose consciously between obscurity and revelation.

In reflecting on Helen’s veil, we might recall Hegel’s observation in “Art, Religion, and Science” (“Kunst, Religion, und Wissenschaft”): “beauty is rather more a veil that conceals the truth than it is its representation.”<sup>20</sup> In contrast with the atmospheric haze, the veil is manipulated

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<sup>20</sup> Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, v. 8 (1976). p. 279. “-die Schönheit ist vielmehr der Schleyer, der die Wahrheit bedeckt, als die Darstellung derselben.”

at will by the wearer. This game of obscuration and revelation, weighted with moral purport, is now in the hands of Helen. Veils were fairly commonplace adornments for women in ancient Greece with certain gestures of veiling or unveiling weighted with symbolic or social significance. One such moment from Helen's mythos, the recovery of Helen by Menelaus, contains certain points that may inform Goethe's own figuration of Helen in *Faust*. The main events of Helen's recovery are preserved in the later prose epitomes of lost epics on the fall of Troy ascribed to Arctinus and Lesches, as well as in the surviving fragments of lyric poets Ibycus and Stesichorus.<sup>21</sup> With some slight variation, the accounts describe Menelaus' pursuit of Helen, who takes refuge in a temple. He approaches her with sword drawn, but soon drops his weapon. In Llewellyn-Jones's extensive study of the veiling of women in the ancient Greek world from 900 BC to 200 AD, he notes that much of the iconography of this scene shows Helen making an *anakalypsis*-gesture in which "a woman raises part of her veil with one arm which she apparently extends in front of her so that the veil forms a large and distinctive flap of cloth which frames her face."<sup>22</sup>

While some accounts hold this gesture to be one of "sexual surrender" or "sexual submissiveness," Llewellyn-Jones reads it as a marriage gesture.<sup>23</sup> Not only is this veil-gesture common to wedding iconography, Llewellyn-Jones further notes that this motif often occurs at moments of departure: "In the mortal sphere, the *anakalypsis*-gesture is seen performed by women at departure scenes (presumably wives and mothers), women at tombs (again, presumably wives and mothers) and by women seated at a (funeral) banquet, or *Totenmahl* (a wife who accompanies her husband, it is to be supposed)."<sup>24</sup> In representations of the recovery of

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<sup>21</sup> Clement 47.

<sup>22</sup> Llewellyn-Jones 99.

<sup>23</sup> Llewellyn-Jones cites E.C. Keuls and E.D. Reeder, respectively, 102-103.

<sup>24</sup> Llewellyn-Jones 103.



Helen in which the spurned Menelaus eventually takes back his wife, the gesture invokes the wedding motif.<sup>25</sup>

Goethe's semiotics reflect a concern with veiling and unveiling throughout Helen's various manifestations in both parts of the drama. Her appearances within the text over a series of partial-introductions present parallels with the *anakalypsis*-gesture with respect to the gradual move from obscurity to her complete revelation in Act III. Helen's first appearance in the drama occurs in the "Witch's Kitchen" scene of Part I, in which only a hazy image of her is visible in a magic mirror. The initial vision is at the greatest remove from Helen's actual form. She is only an enchanting image in a magic mirror, shrouded in fog whenever Faust draws near: "Wenn ich es wage nah' zu gehn,/ Kann ich sie nur als wie im Nebel sehn!" (2434-2435, "whenever I venture any closer to her, / I see her only in a sort of haze!"). In this scene, Helen exists largely as an idea rather than a specific entity. Faust will later recall this initial vision and proclaim it a sort of illusory fraud: "The lovely form that in the magic mirror / once ravished me with such delight / was but this beauty's feeble counterfeit. -" (II. 6495-6497, "Die Wohlgestalt die mich voreinst entzückte,/ In Zauberspiegelung beglückte,/ War nur ein Schaumbild solcher Schöne! -").<sup>26</sup> When Helen returns to the drama in Part II, it is only as her "shade" or primordial form in the shadow-play for the king. It is Helen specifically who is demanded and whose form

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<sup>25</sup> Clement notes that there is some debate about Helen's actions in written accounts versus representative art forms. Euripides at *Andromache* 629 or Aristophanes at *Lysistrata* 155-156 both maintain that Menelaus dropped his sword after Helen uncovered herself before him, exposing her chest (Euripides's play, for instance, has lord Peleus charge Menelaus with the following: "When you took Troy, you failed to put your wife to death, though you had her in your power – on the contrary, when you looked at her breast, you threw away your sword and accepted her kiss..."). Clement, however, holds that this detail is absent from the Ibycus version of the meeting. All accounts include three main events – i) Helen's flight to the temple, ii) a conversation between Helen and Menelaus and iii) Menelaus dropping his sword – however, the written accounts as well as visual representations have varying depictions of Helen and her actions. Some show her simply raising her himation (a veil worn only around the head and shoulders, thus revealing only her face), others have her unveiling her entire figure to him, while several fourth century Italiote and Etruscan depictions show her completely unclothed (Clement 58). The erotic undertone, nevertheless, remains even in veiled representations.

<sup>26</sup> Atkins translates *Schaumbild* here as "counterfeit".

Faust retrieves, thus gradually enhancing her presence in the work. As the image of Helen emerges, it is again shrouded in a dense fog that emits from the tripod. The astrologer describes the thick fog in detail:

ASTROLOG

Der glühnde Schlüssel rührt die Schale kaum,  
Ein dünstiger Nebel deckt sogleich den Raum.  
Er schleicht sich ein, er wogt nach Wolkenart,  
Gedehnt, geballt, verschränkt, geteilt, gepaart.  
(6439-6442)

ASTROLOGER

His glowing key's no sooner touched the bowl  
than smokelike haze obscures the stage,  
first creeping in, then billowing like clouds  
swollen, condensed, entwined, divided, and joined.

In his commentary on these lines, Albrecht Schöne observes that the astrologer's terminology (specifically "swollen"/*gedehnt* and "condensed"/*geballt*) corresponds to Goethe's descriptions of stratus and cumulus clouds as inspired by Howard's cloud categories.<sup>27</sup> The wispy cirrus – reserved only for moments of divine ascent– is noticeably absent here, leaving only the denser forms to cover the shades of Helen and Paris.<sup>28</sup> Finally, when Helen fully appears in Act III, it is in a moment of unveiling. In Lynceus's account of her arrival (quoted in the previous section), he describes her emerging from the clouds at last: "the mists ebb, the fog wavers/ For this goddess now appears!" (9236-9237, "Nebel schwanken, Nebel schwinden/ Solche Göttin tritt hervor!"). The revelation is complete and in her unobscured beauty, she overwhelms Lynceus whose "keen eye" (9302, "den scharfen Blicken") targets her, again threatening to make her the object of another desiring male gaze. This motif of unveiling and paralyzation brings us back to the oft-

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<sup>27</sup> Schöne 486.

<sup>28</sup> Goethe's 1820 poetic cycle devoted to cloud formations will credit cirrus with lightness and heavenly ascent:

CIRRUS

Doch immer höher steigt der edle Drang!  
Erlösung ist ein himmlisch leichter Zwang.  
Ein Aufgehäuftes, flockig löst sich's auf,  
Wie Schäflein trippelnd, leicht gekämmt zu Hauf.  
So fließt zuletzt, was unten leicht entstand  
Dem Vater oben still in Schoß und Hand.

CIRRUS

Higher still climbs the noble drive!  
Salvation is a heavenly light compulsion.  
That which is piled up soon dissipates into fluff,  
Scurrying like little sheep lightly brushed into a pile.  
At last that which developed lightly below flows  
To the father above quietly into the fold and the hand.

The polarities in cloud imagery (cumulus and stratus: confusion, mystery, temptation / cirrus: lightness and divine inspiration) corresponds with the dual functions of the veil, both to obscure and reveal (see section *iii. The Paradox of the Veil*).

depicted recovery of Helen by Menelaus.<sup>29</sup> We recall that it is Helen's unveiling that causes Menelaus to drop his sword.

The veiling function of the clouds nevertheless is in tension with the treatment of an actual veil that is discarded upon Helen's departure at the end of the "Arcadia" scene of Act III. Before returning to Arcadia, Helen embraces Faust one last time, then vanishes: "*Helen embraces Faust and vanishes, leaving her robes and veil in his arms*" (following 9944, *Sie umarmt Faust, das Körperliche verschwindet, Kleid und Schleier bleiben ihm in den Armen*). The garments subsequently dissolve into clouds that raise Faust upwards: *Helen's garments, dissolving into clouds, envelop Faust, lift him up, and carry him away* (following 9954, *Helenens Gewande lösen sich in Wolken auf, umgeben Faust, heben ihn in die Höhe und ziehen mit ihm vorüber*). Although the garment is identified as Helen's *Schleier*, the term has various possible meanings. Llewellyn-Jones offers an exhaustive catalogue of various adornments worn by women in ancient Greece with unique names, all distinguished by their shape, length, and use, which would fall under the more general term "veil"/*Schleier*. Of this multitude, however, only a few seem to have been associated with Helen in artistic representations. One of the earliest and most influential depictions of Helen is the relief from a Mykonos vase dated around 675 in which Helen is shown wearing a *pharos*-veil.<sup>30</sup> This type of veil hung vertically from head to foot and covered the arms and torso. The other veil type prominently associated with Helen is the *shaal*-veil, which was more common in 520-420. This veil only partially covers the body, falling in folds around the neck and shoulders. Llewellyn-Jones also notes an Attic amphora circa 470

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<sup>29</sup> The moment may also allude to another event from Helen's mythos: the blinding of the poet Stesichorus. Known for his long narrative poems treating epic themes, Stesichorus's work addressed Helen's marriage to Menelaus and her abduction. Plato's *Phaedrus* alludes to the legend of Helen blinding Stesichorus for slandering her in one of his poems (Blondell 117).

<sup>30</sup> Llewellyn-Jones 51.

which displays a line drawing of Helen wearing a pleated *shaal*-veil.<sup>31</sup> Since Helen's veil is paired with a robe (*Kleid*) in this scene, it is likely that a *shaal*-type veil is intended here rather than a full-body veil. This veil type, more concerned with the face and head (divine features) than with the body (the earthly and sensual), presents a very different image of Helen from artistic representations which emphasize her erotic appeal. In this scene, the same veiling device that tempted the viewer with hints of the form below now shrouds divine mysteries.

Goethe's figuration of Helen dramatizes the instability of visual information in *Faust*. If Mephisto taught us to question the referential power of words, Helen's ephemerality fosters a similar skepticism of images. As Wilhelm Emrich observes, veil imagery is fundamental to Goethe's metaphors: "The veil is a fundamental image [*Urbild*] of Goethe's metaphors, because in it the paradox of the symbol – the duality of covering and revealing – are immediately visible and in [this image] emerges the problem of truth in the arts."<sup>32</sup> In this respect, the gestures of veiling and unveiling epitomize a game of signification inherent to representational media in Goethe's theory of art. Werner Keller offers a complementary analysis of Goethe's atmospheric imagery, likening the accumulation and dispersal of clouds to a veil-like covering and uncovering. The alternating revelations and obscurations are the product of the paradoxical "veil of poetry."<sup>33</sup> Returning to the categories and methods of deception defined in the introduction, we see that Helen's actions effectively precipitate a crisis of judgment in the viewer generated by the friction between truth and aesthetic representation.

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<sup>31</sup> Llewellyn-Jones 57.

<sup>32</sup> Emrich 50-51. "Der Schleier ist das Urbild von Goethes Metaphorik, weil in ihm die Paradoxie des Symbols, die Doppelheit von Verhüllen und Offenbaren, unmittelbar ansichtig wird und weil in ihm zugleich das Wahrheitsproblem in die Sphäre der Kunst tritt."

<sup>33</sup> Keller 208: "Der Schleier der Dichtung erfüllt die paradoxe Funktion von Verhüllen und Enthüllen."

### Tausch, Täuschung, and Aesthetic Representation

In attending to these moments of beguilement, trickery, or deception, I have considered the means by which Mephistopheles and Helen deceive victims by thoroughly subverting the faculties of reason. Mephisto's verbal manipulations and Helen's ephemeral appearances share a common activity of dual signification that contributes to moral confusion. To return to the initial observations about "deception," both the verbal and visual media of signification in Goethe's poetics are rooted in a type of exchange (the *Tausch* imminent in *Täuschung*). The nature of that exchange, whether pernicious or neutral, depends on the subjective view of the hero.

Ernst Osterkamp attributes the instability of Helen's appearances in Goethe's *Faust* to a mounting pressure to subscribe to literary realism that is at the root of the conflict between content (*Gehalt*), force (*Gewalt*), and form (*Gestalt*).<sup>34</sup> Faust's present proves unsuitable to hosting the visitor from antiquity and Helen retreats at the end of Act III. The question remains how to interpret Helen's influence throughout the text. One might consider the key difference between the two categories of veil-type objects. While the haze surrounding Helen seems incidental to her arrival (atmospheric occurrences, steam from the witch's brew, or smoke from a tripod), the veil is worn intentionally and manipulated at will. With this adornment, she can consciously conceal or cover her figure to varying effects. While Helen herself does not embark on the same project of deception as Mephistopheles, her various manifestations nevertheless overwhelm the viewer and demonstrate the subversive potential of the image. In considering atmospheric elements converging around Helen, we were able to establish the effects on the viewer of the concealment and revelation of her figure. It is precisely this oscillation between

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<sup>34</sup> Osterkamp 20. Osterkamp identifies instances in which these core concepts (*Gehalt*, *Gewalt*, *Gestalt*) are rhymed in Goethe's works. He identifies 11 times that *Gewalt/Gestalt* are rhymed in *Faust*, half of which relate to Helen (Osterkamp 30).

obscuration and clarity that has the strongest hold on the viewers. As an object used both to cover and bare the form beneath, the veil serves to reinforce Helen's suspension between states. The atmospheric shroud fosters the illusion of her presence and creates anticipation around her emergence. Form is exchanged for *Schein* and Faust's obsession with Helen distracts him from seeking the truths of the universe. Just as Mephistopheles is a negating force, Helen is an alluring void, a spectral reflection of an absent ideal. In this respect, she constitutes a competing distraction from the divine project of *Streben*. If inertia is the antithesis of striving, then Helen's paralyzing effect pulls Faust further from grace. Mephistopheles neatly summarizes Helen's overwhelming influence, declaring that "One who is paralyzed by Helen / won't easily regain his senses" (6568-6569, "Wen Helena paralysiert/ Der kommt so leicht nicht zu Verstande"). We recall that as Faust reaches for her beautiful image in the play of shadows, the scene explodes and leaves him unconscious (and actionless) for two scenes.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, we might read Helen's disruptions as a productive instability when considered in light of Goethe's observations about drama in *Poetry and Truth (Dichtung und Wahrheit)*: "The highest task of every form of art is to produce through its appearance the illusion [*Täuschung*] of a higher reality. It is a false ambition, however, to carry the appearance of the real to such a length that finally only a common reality remains" ("Die höchste Aufgabe einer jeden Kunst ist, durch den Schein die *Täuschung* einer höheren Wirklichkeit zu geben. Ein falsches Bestreben aber ist, den Schein solange verwirklicht, bis endlich nur ein gemeines Wirkliche übrig bleibt").<sup>36</sup> The observation seems appropriate to the encounter between idealized

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<sup>35</sup> Faust will remain unconscious throughout the first two scenes of Act II, "Hochgewölbtes Enges, Gotisches Zimmer"/ "A High-Vaulted, Narrow Gothic Room" and "Laboratorium"/"Laboratory", then return to consciousness in "Klassische Walpurgisnacht"/ "Classical Walpurgisnight".

<sup>36</sup> Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Buch XI. Emphasis mine.

antiquity and Faust's present. I read the final verses of the drama as a final reflection on the productive force of this instability of representation:

CHORUS MYSTICUS:  
Alles Vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;  
Das Unzulängliche  
Hier wird's Ereignis;  
Das Unbeschreibliche  
Hier ist es getan;  
Das Ewig-Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan. (12104-12111)

CHORUS MYSTICUS  
All that is transitory  
Is only an allegory;  
That which is deficient  
Here will be realized;  
The indescribable  
Here will be done;  
The Eternal-Feminine  
Draws us ever onwards.

The Chorus alludes to the chief agents of cognitive confusion deployed by Helen and Mephistopheles – word and image – which I read in the “indescribable” (*das Unbeschreibliche*) and “likeness” (*das Gleichnis*), respectively. In Part I of the drama, Mephistopheles is the purveyor of verbal confusion and, fittingly, enters the work just as Faust struggles with his translation of the Bible. The demon eschews any ready identification, preferring instead to don new epithets and identities along the way. His word games culminate in a final attempt to win Faust's soul on a technicality in his bad faith interpretation of the scholar's dying words. In this respect, I observe a strong resonance between Mephisto's semantic slippages and fraudulent verbal exchanges and the “indescribable” referenced by the Chorus. Just as Mephisto skirts the edge of meaning, so Helen exists on the periphery of vision. Appearing first in a hazy mirror then in a smoke-filled shadow play, the beautiful *eidolon* of myth is never fully in view. She is at most only a likeness subsisting in the realm of allegory (*Gleichnis*).<sup>37</sup> Her twilight existence between allegory and reality only further Faust's epistemological crisis. This final reflection on the ephemerality of aesthetic representations – the fleeting word and the changeable image – presents art as directed not at an object of representation or even at the subjects in representation,

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<sup>37</sup> This reading of *Gleichnis* encompasses both the possibility of parable as well as an image-based narrative.

but at the *exchange* that underlies both. Aesthetic media rely on unstable exchange, but any attempt to ground representation in pure action or pure visuality grasps at nothingness.



## Chapter 2: Metamorphoses of Flesh and Stone

Der erste, welcher die Malerei und Poesie mit einander verglich, war ein Mann von feinem Gefühle, der von beiden Künsten eine ähnliche Wirkung auf sich verspürte. Beide, empfand er, stellen uns abwesende Dinge als gegenwärtig, den Schein als Wirklichkeit vor; beide täuschen, und beider Täuschung gefällt.<sup>1</sup>

For the romantics, critical inquiry not only exorcized demons from nature, but also expelled divinities from poetry. In his “Gods of Greece,” Friedrich Schiller predicted that in the time of empirical research and skeptical inquiry the gods must return to the realm of poets and become useless in the world of the “lifeless” word.<sup>2</sup> While baleful legends once accounted for disease, storms, and astral events, scientific discoveries over the last two centuries have given names and explanations to these phenomena. But while we may rejoice at casting out the demon of superstition, who stomps and rends himself to pieces upon being given his proper name, the ruthless demystification of nature inspired lamentations by poets who foretold the disenchantment of literature itself. In this light, hermeneutic investigation constitutes a type of de-divinization that robs the text of charm or life. August Schlegel’s humorous observation in the *Athenäum* presents this type of detached investigation as both superfluous and grotesque, claiming that notes to a poem are on par with anatomical lectures read over a sausage.<sup>3</sup>

The challenge faced by German romantics at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was then how to write stories that could survive the analytical gaze of the skeptical reader. In the following analysis, I attend to romantic tales that reconcile tensions between narratological imperatives and

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<sup>1</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon*: “He who first compared painting with poetry was a man of fine feeling who perceived a similar effect upon himself from both artistic forms. Both forms, he sensed, put forth the absent as present, the illusory as reality; both deceive and the deception of both is pleasing.”

<sup>2</sup> “Die Götter Griechenlands.” In the original: “Müßig kehrten zu dem Dichterlande / Heim die Götter, unnütz einer Welt, / Die entwachsen ihrem Gängelbände, / Sich durch eignes Schweben hält.”

<sup>3</sup> August Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäum*: “Noten zu einem Gedicht, sind wie anatomische Vorlesungen über einen Braten” (#40).

empirical skepticism by suspending the narrative within a liminal state between these two poles. This decisive moment occurs at a point in the narrative when the real (the empirical, the phenomenal) meets with the supernatural (magic, the divine, the dreamlike). The ambiguity presents itself both to the reader and to the romantic hero, who is never quite sure if he has merely been dreaming or if there has indeed been some supernatural intervention. Rather than having access to an objective third-person description of the encounter, we have only subjective impressions that are guided by the will of the hero. He is a fallible witness, victim to both the limits of his senses and whatever whims or biases may influence his reason.

In this chapter, I will draw upon a selection of romantic texts that present the dynamics of deception/self-deception as a product of the shifting interplay of subjectivity within romantic texts. Specifically, each of the following texts treats the visual encounter as interpretive and subsequently intersubjective: as the hero gazes at the female figure, she reflects back a mesmerizing image that affects both reason and ethics. I argue that the *Täuschung* of the visual moment is rooted in a permeable subjectivity that is the product of an inherent duality of activity within the act of seeing. In one respect, seeing is a passive act in which the observer receives external visual information. However, the visual moment may also constitute an interpretive and subsequently subjective activity in which the viewer projects his subjective experiences (memory, understanding, expectations) onto the perceived object. With both activities at work, I argue that the act of seeing is inherently intersubjective and thus complicates the question of agency behind the moments of *Täuschung*. As we will see, this basic question of agency and perspective is at the root of aesthetic debates contemporary to the romantic texts.

## The narrative productivity of uncertainty: liminality in romantic narratives

From the second volume of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Nachtstücke*, we encounter a group of friends in "Das öde Haus" reflecting on whether sensational narratives of lived experience or fictional tales are more incredible.<sup>4</sup> Over the course of the discussion, Theodor calls for a more rigorous use of terms:

Aus Eberhards Synonymik muß du wissen, daß *wunderlich* alle Äußerungen der Erkenntnis und des Begehrens genannt werden, die sich durch keinen vernünftigen Grund rechtfertigen lassen, *wunderbar* aber dasjenige heißt, was man für unmöglich, für unbegreiflich hält, was die bekannten Kräfte der Natur zu übersteigen, oder wie ich hinzu füge, ihrem gewöhnlichen Gange entgegen zu sein scheint.<sup>5</sup>

The distinction thus acknowledges two categories: 1) *das Wunderliche*: events that are odd or highly improbable but still technically possible within the phenomenal world and in following with the laws of physics and 2) *das Wunderbare*: inconceivable events that transgress the known laws of nature. However, Hoffmann complicates these categories by exploring a third narratological possibility between these two poles in his *Die Serapionsbrüder* tales. This narrative device is explicitly addressed at the start of the collection as the storytellers debate the features of the "Serapionic principle." In following with Cyprian's tale of the mysterious monk Serapion, each storyteller attempts to relate a similar tale of an unusual, seemingly fantastic occurrence that is never fully explained by natural or supernatural forces. In the paradigmatic Serapionic tale, the reader is left uncertain of whether the incredible events of the narrative were

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<sup>4</sup> "The Deserted House" from *Night Pieces*. The opening line in which the topic of discussion is first articulated presents certain challenges to the translator: "Man war darüber einig, daß die wirklichen Erscheinungen im Leben oft viel wunderbarer sich gestalteten, als alles, was die regste Fantasie zu erfinden trachte." It is possible to read this initial use of "wunderbar" in the more colloquial sense of "incredible", meaning that the discussion focuses on whether fact or fiction is more surprising. It is only after Theodor's discussion of Eberhard's definition of "wunderbar" as indexing the supernatural that the term is applied more narrowly.

<sup>5</sup> Hoffmann 164. "You undoubtedly know from Eberhard's *Synonymik* that *wunderlich* identifies all expressions of knowledge and desire that cannot be attributed to any rational explanation. *Wunderbar*, however, is that which one holds as impossible, for incomprehensible, that which surpasses the known forces of nature or, as I would add, that which seems to go against the usual ways." Theodor cites the definition from Johann August Eberhard's *Versuch einer allgemeinen deutschen Synonymik in einem kritisch-philosophischen Wörterbuche der sinnverwandten Wörter der hochdeutschen Mundart*, B VI. Halle-Leipzig, 1795-1802, p. 91-94.

the product of unusual, but possible natural occurrences (*das Wunderliche*) or the product of supernatural intervention (*das Wunderbare*).

This curious dialectic of narrative liminality anticipates Tzvetan Todorov's theory of "the fantastic". While this liminality acts as a type of suspension in Hoffmann's works, Todorov describes this as a "hesitation" – characters and readers should reach the point of almost believing, but ultimately fail to choose between belief and incredulity.<sup>6</sup> The suspended narrative described by Hoffmann and Todorov is distinct from absolutist narratives. By this, I refer to narrative environments that are totalizing and preclude any uncertainty or incompleteness. In such narratives, events follow natural laws and all 'mysteries' or conflicts are explained clearly and unambiguously. The same absolutism is present in supernatural tales as well, only with a different set of laws. Whereas narratives were controlled and explained by natural/rational laws under an empiricist model, the events occurring within narratives describing a supernatural realm are similarly controlled and explained within this new frame. It is with respect to the narratological similarities between empiricist and supernatural accounts as well as the strict adherence to a set of rules (be they natural law, religious doctrine, or magical axioms) that I subsume both accounts under the category of *das Wunderliche*. In a world in which Schiller and Schlegel likened explanation to de-divinization, the Romantics reinvigorated storytelling by inserting a credible ambiguity into the epistemological status of their narratives. The following sections present exemplars of romantic narratives that present liminal subjects via three distinct narrative devices. Novalis's "The Novices of Saïs" advances mysticism as a transcendental force, bringing man and nature into communion. Joseph von Eichendorff's *The Marble Statue* presents aesthetic encounters as a stimulus for permeable subjectivity. E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale "The

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<sup>6</sup>Todorov 31. Despite their varied treatment of the fantastic, Todorov nevertheless draws on Hoffmann's tales to exemplify this concept.

Mines of Falun” offers theories of the divided subject informed by fringe sciences of the 1800s. Each text addresses a distinct narrative situation promoting a plausible convergence of the phenomenal and spiritual realm. I attend to the three selected texts to demonstrate a constellation of the Romantic devices of ambiguity.

### Two Accounts of the Myth of Isis

#### **Friedrich Schiller’s “Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais”**

I turn now to the legend of Isis by two contemporaries whose respective approaches reflect a shift from the absolutism of the aforementioned polarities (empiricism, the supernatural) to the fluid ambiguities embraced by the romantics. Friedrich Schiller offered one such absolutist reading of the legend in his 1795 poem “The Veiled Image at Sais” (“Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais”).<sup>7</sup> In this work, Schiller adopts an interpretation of the famed inscription etched alongside the statue of Isis at Sais. In Plutarch’s “Isis and Osiris”, the inscription is rendered: “I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered.”<sup>8</sup>

Although the figure is identified as “the truth” in the poem, Schiller’s adaptation adheres to the historical interpretation of Isis as the veiled image of Nature.<sup>9</sup> The content of the inscription, however, is reformulated by Schiller’s priest as an interdiction:

»Das mache mit der Gottheit aus,« versetzt  
Der Hierophant. »Kein Sterblicher, sagt sie,  
Rückt diesen Schleier, bis ich selbst ihn hebe.  
Und wer mit ungeweihter, schuld'ger Hand  
Den heiligen, verbotnen früher hebt,  
Der, spricht die Gottheit« –  
»Nun?«  
– »Der *sieht* die Wahrheit.« (27-32)

“It comes from the gods” the hierophant responds.  
“No mortal, she says, can  
shift this veil until I myself lift it.  
And he who with unholy, guilty hand  
lifts that which is hallowed and forbidden oversoon –  
he, says the goddess” –  
“Well?”  
– “He will *see* the truth.”

<sup>7</sup> See appendix, p. 143-145 for the full text of the poem.

<sup>8</sup> Hadot 56. Hadot notes that Wieland’s translation of the inscription, as rendered by Plutarch in his *Moralia* in book IX, terms Isis’s garment a “Schleier” (*ton emon peplos*) which more closely resembles a robe than a veil.

<sup>9</sup> See Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*: Ch. 1 explores Heraclitus’s maxim “Nature loves to hide” (p. 33). Ch. 3 elaborates on the notion of a secret of nature that intentionally conceals itself.

The hierophant's brief account of the goddess's immortal words reimagines the inscription as a divine interdiction complete with stipulations.<sup>10</sup> Whereas the original merely describes an action that has never been undertaken by any mortal hand, Schiller's goddess explicitly forbids the unveiling by any mortal. The transgression is further punishable by the transgressor *seeing* the truth – a sight that ultimately will drive the brash youth to insanity. Schiller invokes the inscription through the speech of the hierophant but the force of the pronouncement is nevertheless preserved as safely as the immortal words that Plutarch describes as etched in stone alongside the statue. The timeless and continued impact of this inscription is represented through the medium in which they are communicated. Stone is thus treated as the antonym to flesh (dead vs. living), a static surface juxtaposed with trembling living beings. Returning to the original inscription for a moment, the pronouncement occurs over a convergence of temporalities: I am all that has been/ is/ shall be. In this sense, the epitaph is both memorial and prophecy<sup>11</sup>. The text complements the medium in which it is etched by presenting a claim that is eternal and fixed. The same rigidity and immutability is imparted to the veil itself.

The composition of the poem ensures that the reader himself is compelled to adhere to the interdiction by consistently blocking the reader's own curious vision with the impenetrable veil. In a minor way, the title anticipates this intervention by inserting the modifier *verschleierte* (veiled) before *Bild* (image) as a seeming verbal shield before a term, which itself is notably vague. In the eyes of the youth, the veil is unequivocally a barrier, an impediment to vision and understanding:

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<sup>10</sup> The hierophant will later refer to these words as a *Gesetz* in line 38.

<sup>11</sup> A device that occurs in another notable Schillerian reflection on the continued force of antiquity over the ages: his 1795 "Der Spaziergang" in which the wanderer encounters the epitaph on the Cenotaph of Thermopylae: "Wanderer, kommst du nach Sparta, verkündige dorten du habest/ uns hier liegen gesehn/ wie das Gesetz es befahl" ("Wanderer, should you go to Sparta, tell them that you saw us lying here as we were ordered.") The epitaph similarly functions as both a memorial and an imperative to the reader.

[...] Verwundert  
 Blickt er den Führer an und spricht: »Was ist's,  
 Das hinter diesem Schleier sich verbirgt?« –  
 »Die Wahrheit,« ist die Antwort – »Wie?« ruft  
 Jener,  
 »Nach Wahrheit streb' ich ja allein, und diese  
 Gerade ist es, die man mir verhüllt?« (21-26)

[...] In amazement  
 He looks at the leader and says: "What is it  
 that conceals itself behind this veil?" –  
 "The truth," is the response – "How now?" he  
 cries, "Indeed I look only for truth and it is truth  
 itself that is enshrouded?"

Even after the youth pulls the veil aside, no moment of subjective vision is permitted to him or to the reader. The vision is lost to his insanity and never described. In this sense, the veil that *verbirgt sich* and *verhüllt* acts as a perfect barrier to subjective penetration as well.<sup>12</sup> In light of Schiller's lament of the de-divinization of nature through the destructive gaze of scientific inquiry, it is perhaps unsurprising that Schiller pathologizes the youth's search for truth. Having spent a sleepless night obsessing over the statue, he creeps guiltily towards the avatar of nature at night. With uncertain step and veins burning hot and cold, he reaches for the veil with his *freche Hand*.<sup>13</sup> Throwing aside the veil, he declares: "Ich will sie schauen!"<sup>14</sup> The sudden and delinquent disrobing of nature brings only suffering and, eventually, death. The poem thus culminates in the fulfillment of the prophesied punishment with juridical severity. The unusual events of the poem (i.e. the youth's sudden insanity and death) are readily explained by the system of rules that exist within the diegetic universe. The punishment is expected and inevitable.

### **Novalis's Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs**

Novalis's reworking of the Isis legend in his 1802 novelistic fragment *The Novices at Saïs (Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs)*<sup>15</sup> develops the Isis motif within a similar mystical framework that is immediately subverted by the novice's new reading of the inscription. Whereas Schiller's

<sup>12</sup> Conceals itself...enshrouds.

<sup>13</sup> Insolent hand.

<sup>14</sup> "I want to see it!"

<sup>15</sup> *The Novices at Saïs*. Composed from 1798 to 1799, then left as a fragment. Published posthumously in 1802.

reading established a binary (goddess who commands/mortal who must obey), Novalis's novice uncovers an interpretation that merges mortal and goddess, man and nature. The harsh interdiction dividing mortal from immortal is reimagined here as an invitation to strive towards immortality and become worthy of divine revelation.

The first-person narrator – a novice at Sais – reads in the goddess's eternal words not an interdiction but rather an inspiration to become something more than mortal:

Auch ich will also meine Figur beschreiben, und wenn kein Sterblicher, nach jener Inschrift dort, den Schleier hebt, so müssen wir Unsterbliche zu werden suchen; wer ihn nicht heben will, ist kein echter Lehrling zu Sais.<sup>16</sup>

The fragment develops across two sections – I. The Novice and II. Nature<sup>17</sup> – and relies more heavily on the statue's function as a metonym for nature than in Schiller's treatment. The treatment of subjectivity in Schiller's poem and Novalis's fragment highlight one of the main philosophical tensions between the two authors. "Das verschleierte Bild" describes a young man's greed for knowledge in an impertinent attempt to become more like the gods. Novalis's novice, however, is driven entirely by his desire to understand himself through nature with a powerful subjectivity that permeates his surroundings. Schiller's immutable stone and divine interdictions are traded here for fluidity and malleability. The two most formidable images from Schiller's poem – the veil and statue – are adapted accordingly in the romantic tale of "Hyacinth and Rosenblüthe" embedded in part II of the fragment.

The short tale, told to the novice during his travels, describes the adventures of young Hyacinth who similarly seeks an understanding of himself by traveling in search of the statue of Isis. Beginning with his childhood spent wandering the woods and caves, Hyacinth falls in love

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<sup>16</sup> Novalis 204. "I, too, wish to describe my figure thus and if, as the inscription says, no mortal can raise the veil, so must we seek to become immortal. Whoever does not wish to raise it is no true novice of Sais."

<sup>17</sup> I. Der Lehrling, II. Die Natur



with the beauty Rosenblüthe. All of nature witnesses their childhood courtship, with violets whispering to the strawberries and the tomcats chuckling at them. When a strange man in town tells Hyacinth of foreign lands and other wonders far from home, Hyacinth grows restless and melancholic. He is eventually told by the woman of the forest that the only cure is to leave home and seek the goddess Isis. Asking the flowers, the river, and others where to find the veiled maiden, he eventually comes to a small abode concealed by palms and lush overgrowth. He enters and sleeps, as it is only through dreams that he can be lead into the sanctum. Wandering through endless great rooms, the tale culminates in Hyacinth's encounter with the "ethereal virgin" (*himmlische Jungfrau*):

Es dünkte ihm alles so bekannt und doch in niegesehener Herrlichkeit, da schwand auch der letzte irdische Anflug, wie in Luft verzehrt, und er stand vor der himmlischen Jungfrau, da hob er den leichten, glänzenden Schleier, und Rosenblütchen sank in seine Arme.<sup>18</sup>

Stone, the eternal medium of Schiller's immutable goddess, is subverted in this tale. Rather than the fixed medium of ancient forces, Hyacinth pulls back the veil and sees Rosenblüthe herself in the flesh. Whereas the act of unveiling in Schiller constituted a moment of competing wills (the desire of the youth vs. the will of the goddess), Novalis's unveiling is wholly the expression of Romantic subjectivity. Within the brief romantic tale, Hyacinth's adventures reveal the divine immanent within mortals and posit a universal spirit that binds all beings. Already in this early romantic text, we see blurred boundaries between self and other, which leads to ambiguity of agency. Is Rosenblüthe a separate being or a product of Hyacinth's desire? This ambiguity only intensifies with later romantic texts.

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<sup>18</sup> Novalis 218. "Everything seemed so familiar to him and yet in a never before seen splendor. Then the last terrestrial vestige evaporated as if absorbed by the air and he stood before the ethereal virgin. He lifted the light glossy veil and little Rosenblüthe sank into his arms."

Joseph von Eichendorff – *Das Marmorbild*

Metamorphoses of flesh and stone certainly precede the German romantics, ranging back into antiquity. Cases of agalmatophilia (infatuation with statues) offer the most compelling evidence of strong emotions aroused by artistic creations. Athenaeus tells of Cleisopheus of Selymbria in Book 13 of his *Deipnosophists* who fell in love with a statue of Parian marble at Samos. Pliny the Elder records a similar case of a man who falls in love with the Aphrodite of Knidos, hiding in the temple at night to “embrace” the statue. Perhaps the most influential tale, though, is taken from Book X of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where we encounter the clever craftsman Pygmalion who carves the form of a beautiful woman from snow-white ivory. This figure, born of his own creative imagination, becomes the object of his daily attentions and Pygmalion finally prays for a bride like her on the day of Venus’s festival. When Venus hears his prayer and animates the ivory figure, so too does this motif of metamorphosis find new life for centuries to come. Jean Jacques Rousseau’s 1770 monodrama *Pygmalion* reintroduced the mythic tale to a European audience. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Pygmalion legend had been taken up by several romantic writers. In these romantic appropriations of the myth, the stone material of the hewn figure acquires a totemic function, imminent with historical and subjective memory. Joseph von Eichendorff’s quatrain “The Diving Rod” (“Die Wünschelrute”) effectively deploys this metaphor of imminent totemic memory to represent poetic activity:

Die Wünschelrute

Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen  
Die da träumen fort und fort,  
Und die Welt hebt an zu singen  
Triffst du nur das Zauberwort.

The Divining Rod

In all things which dream on and on  
There sleeps a song,  
And the world begins to sing  
If only you find the magic word.

Hidden within all things is a universal song, the *anima*, which is released only by the magic word of the poet. In describing this encounter between man and object, the poem extends the

interaction to uncover a parallel binary of the individual and the universal. A single word from the poet unlocks the song of the world and forms a communion that transcends individual subjectivity. This same activity of memory retrieval occurs in numerous romantic narratives in which the memory object is itself an embodied avatar of antiquity. The totemic quality is retained, but the figure is given a face and a name. These encounters depict a much more direct and personal interaction with history, although we will see that much of this historical memory is subjectively determined by the viewer or an outright fabrication.

### **Eichendorff and the Allure of the Past**

We will turn to Eichendorff's 1819 novella *The Marble Statue* (*Das Marmorbild*) to investigate further the romantic deployment of sculptural imagery. The work offers a paradigmatic encounter between the creative vision of the romantic poet-hero and the sculptural figure that is imbued with historical memory. In dissecting this visual moment, the dynamics of deception will also be considered as a function of aesthetic representation.

Eichendorff's *Das Marmorbild* is one of several "Venusberg-Dichtungen" – tales in which the hero is tempted by an ethereal Venus-type figure that resides in ancient ruins along a mountain or even beneath the mountain itself. The tales, rather formulaic in structure, present the hero's struggle to choose between a pagan vision of idealized antiquity and a Christian present, respectively represented by an eroticized ethereal woman of the forest/mountain and a virginal ingénue.<sup>19</sup> In reviewing several Venusberg-type tales, I have attended to the pivotal moment of *Augentäuschung*. It is a moment of fascination in which the romantic hero perceives a desirable figure through visual interferences or obstructions (smoke, fog, haze, veils, blinding light,

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<sup>19</sup> Other types of "Venusberg-Dichtungen" include Ludwig Tieck's *Der getreue Eckart und der Tannhäuser*, *Der Runenberg*, Joseph von Eichendorff's *Eine Meerfahrt*, Richard Wagner's opera "*Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg*."

fractured light). The visual obstructions in this moment reflect the hero's muddled reason while he is simultaneously confronted with a confluence of antinomies: Christian/pagan moralities, present/past temporalities, realities (natural world/supernatural or mystical world), and motions (movement/stasis). In *Das Marmorbild*, the pivotal moment occurs when the romantic hero, Florio, unexpectedly encounters a Venus statue late at night while strolling about an unfamiliar Italian landscape. As he stands captivated by the vision of feminine beauty, the moment is gradually cast as an encounter with the supernatural:

Florio stand wie eingewurzelt im Schauen, denn ihm kam jenes Bild wie eine lang gesuchte, nun plötzlich erkannte Geliebte vor, wie eine Wunderblume, aus der Frühlingsdämmerung und träumerischen Stille seiner frühesten Jugend heraufgewachsen. Je länger er hinsah, je mehr schien es ihm, als schlüge es die seelenvollen Augen langsam auf, als wollten sich die Lippen bewegen zum Gruße, als blühe Leben wie ein lieblicher Gesang erwärmend durch die schönen Glieder herauf. Er hielt die Augen lange geschlossen vor Blendung, Wehmut und Entzücken.<sup>20</sup>

This moment is intriguing not only for the sudden convergence of antinomies, but also for the profusion of visual obstructions that arise and compromise the vision of the romantic hero who now occupies a liminal space between the created worlds. When Florio encounters the figure near the pond, a shaky image of the statue is described within the quivering depths and placed against a background of efflorescent starlight: "...das Bild der eigenen Schönheit, das der trunkene Wasserspiegel zwischen den leise aus dem Grunde aufblühenden Sternen widerstahlte."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Florio stood gazing as though rooted, for the image appeared to him like a long-sought – now suddenly recognized – beloved; like a wondrous flower rising up from the spring twilight and dreamy stillness of his earliest youth. The longer he looked on, the more it seemed to him as though the soulful eyes slowly opened; as though the lips wished to move in greeting; as though life blossomed forth like a lovely warming song through the beautiful limbs. He long held his eyes closed from the blinding glare, wistfulness, and rapture." Eichendorff, *Marmorbild* 397.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. "...the image of unique beauty that the drunken watery mirror reflected between the quietly blossoming stars of the firmament."

Three visual disruptions are already present here: the darkness of night, the “drunken” reflection of the pond, and the glow of starlight. Contributing to this is the material of the statue’s surface which is so radiant that Florio is even forced to *close his eyes*: “Er hielt die Augen lange geschlossen vor Blendung, Wehmut und Entzücken.”<sup>22</sup> Whether these mystical apparitions are the product of his own fanciful *Sehnsucht* or illusions worked upon him by a supernatural force is the central ambiguity – an ambiguity of agency – that is at the heart of this moment of *Augentäuschung*. Here the *Augentäuschungen* prove to be occlusions that deceive Florio’s moral sensibilities by presenting a deceptively attractive vision of a mythological past. These deceptions are particularly alluring on account of his longing to escape the present. In this sense, the *Täuschung* articulates a visual dialectic: 1) the viewer’s self-deception under the influence of an external force and 2) the creative vision of a poet that unlocks the memory immanent within the sculpture. The animating activity works in both directions. The female figure has a muse-like function and inspires the poet to creative production, while the poet’s activity, in turn, animates the statue.

### **Aisthesis and Deception**

The use of statues as the central memory object is weighted with the complexities of 18<sup>th</sup> century debates on aesthetic perception. Beginning with Alexander Baumgarten’s first introduction of the term “aesthetics” in his *Meditationes philosophicae* of 1735 – drawing on the term’s Greek origins, “perception” (aisthesis) – he recognized the experience of artistic representations as a separate type of perception, warranting its own field of study. Johann Gottfried Herder refines this theory in his *Plastik* (1778) by construing the visual experience of

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<sup>22</sup> Eichendorff 416. “He long held his eyes closed from blindness, wistfulness, and rapture.”

an artistic work as essentially linked with beauty.<sup>23</sup> In his reflections on sculpture, he proposes that visual engagement with a sculpture opens the viewer to certain moral effects. This theory of vision as a medium for moral “infection” is clear in his assumed link between the term *Schönheit* (beauty), which he believes to be derived from *Schein* (appearance) and *schauen* (to look).

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe expands on this notion in his philosophical essay *Color Theory* (*Zur Farbenlehre*) in which he attempts a scientific account of the actual and direct influence of perceived lights and colors on an individual’s moral condition in his sixth section, “Die sinnlich-sittliche Wirkung der Farben.”<sup>24</sup> Vision, light, and color are treated as potent media with varying effects. His analysis considers the moral effects of partial or refracted light, colors of varying shades, mixed color, and other visual stimuli.<sup>25</sup> The work elaborates a much more explicit connection between the eye’s perception of color/light and moral influence beyond Herder’s

*Plastik*:

...so werden wir uns nicht wundern, wenn wir erfahren, daß [Farben] auf den Sinn des Auges, dem sie vorzüglich zugeeignet ist, und durch dessen Vermittelung auf das Gemüt in ihren allgemeinsten elementaren Erscheinungen, ohne Bezug auf Beschaffenheit oder Form eines Materials, an dessen Oberfläche wir sie gewahrt werden, einzeln eine spezifische in Zusammenstellung eine teils harmonische, teils charakteristische, oft auch unharmonische, immer aber eine entschiedene und bedeutende Wirkung hervorbringe, die sich unmittelbar an das Sittliche anschließt.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Sculpture* (1778). Herder posits an etymological link between *Schönheit* (beauty), *Schein* (appearance), and *schauen* (to look), although this is generally regarded as a false etymology.

<sup>24</sup> “The Sensual-Ethical Impact of Colors.” Several of Goethe’s works (including poetry, prose, and scientific writings) demonstrate a keen interest in vision as a medium for both divine inspiration and moral corruption. From the *Goethe Lexikon*: “AUGE: für G[oethe], das wichtigste Sinnesorgan des Menschen, über das Mensch und Welt miteinander in Beziehung treten.” (“EYE: for G[oethe], the most important of the human senses by means of which man and world come into contact with one another.”) In addition to his 1809 *Zur Farbenlehre*, Goethe’s *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, written concurrently with his theory of colors, is also deeply concerned with the moral effects of occluded, fragmented, or mirrored vision. Fittingly, Goethe’s heroine of the novel, Otilie, presumably can be traced to St. Othilia of Alsace – the patron saint of vision, invoked against eye disease (Weninger 747).

<sup>25</sup> The extent to which Goethe literally ascribes moral values to colors as they are perceived and transmitted to the observer via the eye is clear in his detailed valuative spectrum of specific colors, ranging from yellow (the pole of the “highest purity”) to blue (which gives the impression of “earnestness and worthiness” as well as “grace and charm”). (VI.765-800).

<sup>26</sup> Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre* VI.758. “...we will not wonder, when we realize that [colors] always bring about a uniquely decisive and significant, yet characteristic and also unharmonious, effect on the eye’s sense – to which they

The affective and illusory nature of artworks eventually culminated in the eighteenth-century term “ästhetischer Schein” which enters through art theory. *Schein* would eventually acquire the following three meanings: 1.) “Splendor”/ “lumen”, 2.) “appearance” (related to “apparentia”; comes to mean “to become visible” to both the senses and to reason), and finally 3.) deception (*Täuschung*), the creation of an appearance. Friedrich Schiller’s epistolary reflections on aesthetics, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man (Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen)*, can be read as supporting a similar division in aesthetic *Schein*. For Schiller, the distinction is between man’s physical and spiritual experience of an object, with *schöner Schein* accessible only on a spiritual level.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s contribution in *Laocoön: On the Limits of Painting and Poetry. (Laokoon: Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Kunst)* addresses this complex affective dynamic of vision by reflecting on the moral impact of the imminent semiotic potential in aesthetic creations. In a brief illustration taken from the foreword, Lessing begins with the perspectives of three different observers: a dilettante (*Liebhaber*), philosopher, and an art critic (*Kunstrichter*). The naïve experience of the first man is related as follows:

Der erste, welcher die Malerei und Poesie mit einander verglich, war ein Mann von feinem Gefühle, der von beiden Künsten eine ähnliche Wirkung auf sich verspürte. Beide, empfand er, stellen uns abwesende Dinge als gegenwärtig, den Schein als Wirklichkeit vor; *beide täuschen, und beider Täuschung gefällt.*<sup>27</sup>

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are advantageously suited – and by means of which it is immediately associated in the mind with the Moral in its general, elementary appearances without reference to constitution or the form of a material on whose surface we become aware of it.”

<sup>27</sup> “He who first compared painting with poetry was a man of fine feeling who perceived a similar effect upon himself from both artistic forms. Both forms, he sensed, put forth the absent as present, the illusory as reality; *both deceive and the deception of both is pleasing.*” Emphasis added. A quick review of existing translations reflects different interpretations of Lessing’s use of *täuschen* in the final two sentences of this quotation (my emphasis in bold): see Robert Phillimore’s 1874 translation [London: MacMillan and Co.]: “Both, he felt, placed before us things absent as present, appearance as reality. Both **deceived**, and the **deceit** of both was pleasing”; William A. Steel’s 1930 translation [London: Dent]: “Both, he realized, present to us appearance as reality, absent things as present; both **deceive** and the **deceit** of either is pleasing” and Edward McCormick’s 1984 translation [Baltimore:

The experience of this naïve viewer is curious in that he is deceived and yet pleased by the deception. While my rendering of “täuschen” as “to deceive” is in accordance with existing translations of this section, the German term connotes less malice than the English. Instead, the lexical-semantic field of “täuschen” allows for not only intentional deception but also deception through disorientation or confusion.<sup>28</sup> We are left to question whether artistic productions deceive the senses or merely confuse them as well as whether the viewer desires the deception.

In the works considered in this chapter, it is exactly this semantic ambiguity that can be seen to herald a uniquely liminal moment. In this moment, the hero is suddenly struck by a vision of a being that acts as a threshold object, triggering a profusion of antinomies (past vs. present, Christian vs. pagan, stasis vs. motion, animate vs. inanimate). In this crucial moment his vision is compromised. Thus the moment of *Augentäuschung* is the central impetus of the narrative which develops from this moment of moral uncertainty. A tension emerges when the mirror world erupts into reality and relocates the narrative somewhere between these two worlds. The agency at the heart of this moment is comprised by the decision to either yield to the lures of the past – the hero’s *Sehnsucht* that is oriented towards an idealized and finalized past – or to resist the lure and remain within the ever-developing present.

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Johns Hopkins University Press]: “Both, he felt, represent absent things as being present and appearance as reality. Both **create an illusion**, and in both cases the **illusion** is pleasing”.

<sup>28</sup> Dönninghaus’s analysis of the subcategories of “Täuschung” support this distinction by identifying two possible meanings: 1.) attempts at active deception through disinformation (Section 4.9 “Versuchte Täuschung durch Desinformation”, which encompasses *lügen, verleumden, ver-/schweigen, konstruieren, Unsinn reden, erfinden, entstellen, übertreiben, prahlen, untertreiben, scheinen, simulieren, fälschen, künstlich, sich verstellen, heucheln, schmeicheln, kriechen, verführe, and Illusion (Selbsttäuschung)*) and 2.) attempts at deception through disorientation (Section 4.10 “Versuchte Täuschung durch Desorientierung”, which includes *irreführen, ablenken, and Obscuration*).



## Petrification: E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Die Bergwerke zu Falun" (1819)

### **"Fringe Sciences"**

E.T.A. Hoffmann's Serapiontic principle inspired a closer look at the narrative suspension that has been identified as a central trait of romantic tales. As we have seen in the previous sections, identity confusion is the foremost device employed to produce uncertainty of agency and thus complicate the dynamics of deception. Novalis's *Lehrlinge* engages the permeability of subjectivity in following the adventures of Hyacinth who discovers his subjectivity through his investigations in nature. Rather than embracing Schiller's Heraclitean vision of nature, Novalis challenges the absolutist binary of mortal vs. divine by positing that nature and man are mutually permeable and interdependent. The boundaries of the subjective self were further challenged in Eichendorff's *Das Marmorbild* by investigating the figuration of nature and the materiality of stone. My investigation explored the artistic appropriation of this natural medium as a metonym for an absolutist vision of antiquity. The associative properties of stone (rigidity, endurance) are extended to the content of the representation (i.e. antiquity). In this sense, the medium itself lends credibility to the statue as a preserved artifact or memorial to an historical time. Florio's encounter disrupts this category by revealing the subjective vision of idealized antiquity immanent within the statue. Our analysis of the visual moment as vulnerable to deception and moral subversion revealed the complex interplay of subjectivities within this moment. Here we see vision as a product of desire. The negotiation of the immutable medium and the natural obstructions that obscure it speak to the topic of historical categories. Eichendorff, however, never resolves the question of agency in the visual act. By the end of the novella, it transpires that Florio may very well have imagined the Venus-like animation of the statue and her castle, which turns out to be merely an abandoned ruin atop a mountain.

While presenting a similarly permeable notion of identity, Hoffmann's works reject ethereal mysticism in favor of "scientific" accounts of the unconscious connections between man and the universe. A few years before writing his *Nachtstücke* collection, Hoffmann read G. H. Schubert's *Views on the Night Side of Science (Ansichten von der Nachtseiten der Naturwissenschaften)* in 1808. These *Nachtseiten* of Schubert's analysis were comprised of various unconscious states that seldom fell within the scope of conventional scientific research, such as animal magnetism (mesmerism), somnambulism, clairvoyance, and others. Sheila Dickson attributes the Romantic interest in the fringe sciences to an attempt to legitimize man's irrational side, claiming that "the irrational and unconscious had already been introduced into literature in the *Sturm und Drang* period, but whereas these writers had merely emphasized the irrational side of man, the Romantic analysed it as a science."<sup>29</sup> Instead of dismissing incomprehensible behavior or abilities as merely "irrational" (i.e. outside the realm of logic), these exceptional behaviors, ideally, would be analyzed and considered as empirical evidence of a different plane of existence – one that may in fact constitute the "centre of all existence, providing higher insights into oneself and the world."<sup>30</sup> Despite the treatment received in Hoffmann's earlier works, animal magnetism was actually considered to be a means of treating patients for a variety of psychological complaints. In Franz Anton Mesmer's doctoral thesis *Dissertatio Physico-medica de Planetarum Influxu*, he posited the existence of a magnetic fluid that flows throughout the universe and gives vital force to matter and spirit.<sup>31</sup> In this model, physical and psychical complaints stem from obstacles in the body that obstruct the flow. His proposed treatment was to "magnetize" patients, initially with the help of passing iron magnets

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<sup>29</sup> Dickson 31.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Bryson 242-243.

across the body. His methods later involved less physical contact with patients, such as making sweeping movements with one's hands in "magnetic passes" before the patient.<sup>32</sup> In France and Germany, Mesmer's theory of the "magnetic fluid" was defined more broadly as a "force that could expand one's consciousness, create a 'sixth sense,' or allow the soul to roam through other worlds while the body remained fixed on earth."<sup>33</sup> Finally, the Marquis de Puységur hypothesized that a single person could eventually direct these forces. His work theorizes a "magnetizer" who would be able to induce a state of "magnetic somnambulism" in his patients.<sup>34</sup> The work of Schubert, Mesmer, Puységur, and their followers established magnetism as a niche field within the medical profession and essentially legitimized the irrational and unconscious as science. While the principles of magnetism and second-sight were on the fringe of conventional science, their research was nevertheless oriented towards earthly explanations for these activities rather than attributing such phenomena to any extra-human intervention.

In this respect, by invoking fringe phenomena as a plausible occurrence within the natural world, Hoffmann discovers a productive space in which *das Wunderbare* can plausibly exist. While human agency is always involved, the events themselves appear to transcend the known capabilities of humans and exceed the possibilities of human agency. However, since no third party (beyond the agent and subject) is identifiable, the singular events of the tale cannot be relegated entirely to the fanciful rules of the fantastic, such as in a fairy tale, or to a demonic or divine intervention beyond human understanding. Hoffmann's skillful device of overextending human actions to drive the narrative establishes a precarious balance that tantalizingly situates the text just beyond the grasp of human knowledge, thereby extending the interpretive

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<sup>32</sup> Bryson 243.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

possibilities of the work by evading completeness. Within the *Serapion* collection, Hoffmann includes his own Venusberg tale which offers a productive comparison with Novalis's metamorphic statue of Isis and Eichendorff's marble Venus.

### **Hoffmann's "Die Bergwerke zu Falun"**

In Schubert's thirteenth lecture on the topic of animal magnetism and related phenomena in *Ansichten an der Nachtseite*, he recalls the extraordinary case of a Swedish miner, Fets-Mats Israelsson, who disappeared in 1677 while working in the copper mines of Falun. Nothing was known of his fate until his body was found in 1719 in a seldom-used tunnel that had apparently collapsed. Although 42 years had passed since the fatal accident, the recovered body was so perfectly preserved that Fets-Mats's fiancée, still living close to the mine, identified him on sight. News of the "the petrified miner" spread quickly and the body was put on display. After viewing the display in person, the naturalist Carolus Linnaeus attributed the remarkable preservation of the body to the fact that it was covered in vitriol. Once the body was exposed to air and the vitriol evaporated, the body eventually decayed. Nevertheless, the unusual case attracted fictionalizations by several German Romantic writers, of which E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Mines of Falun* (*Die Bergwerke zu Falun*) is the most recognized fictionalization of the peculiar tale.

The struggles of Hoffmann's mariner-turned-miner, Elis Fröbom, occur across two irreconcilable realms: above ground, Elis courts Ulla Dahlsjö, a perfect model of Christian chastity. Yet despite his love for Ulla, he is mesmerized by visions of the Queen who calls to him from the sunless caverns of the mountain. Hoffmann thus contributes to the collection of Romantic Venusberg tales, but with a more pronounced division in settings. Such a deliberate

juxtaposition of day life and the “night side” of existence establishes an explicit divide between metaphysical and moral realms.

Much of the narrative again relies on challenging material absolutes, beginning with the perceived durability of stone. After returning to shore, Elis seeks new employment and it is mining that is presented to him as reliable and lucrative. Ore is plentiful and Elis ultimately comes to rely on his talent for finding the richest deposits to build a solid foundation for his new life in the small town. In trading the sea for stone, Elis abandons a life of caprice for the steady routine of domesticity.

The metonymic function of stone extends beyond mere lifestyle choices, however, and comes to represent nature herself. Whereas the unveiling of Schiller’s stone goddess stood for the brash revelation of nature’s secrets, Hoffmann intensifies the image by presenting a more literal tearing into nature with the forceful excavation of ore as an expression of violent desire. The mysterious old miner who persuades Elis to leave for the mines of Falun articulates this connection:

»So ist«, rief der Alte erzürnt, »so ist nun das Volk, es verachtet das, was es nicht zu erkennen vermag. Schnöder Gewinn! Als ob alle grausame Quälerei auf der Oberfläche der Erde, wie sie der Handel herbeiführt, sich edler gestalte als die Arbeit des Bergmanns, dessen Wissenschaft, dessen unverdrossenem Fleiß die Natur ihre geheimsten Schatzkammern erschließt.«<sup>35</sup>

Yet while the mountain yields her gifts to all, the greatest secret is offered only to Elis. It is through his dreams that the principle of transformation enters the tale and heralds a suggestive fluidity of states throughout. In accordance with Schubert’s theories, this new modality is unlocked only after the Queen accesses Elis’s “night side” – the secondary self that shares a little understood magnetic connection with universal forces. Dreams form the bridge between the

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<sup>35</sup> Hoffmann 214-215. “So it is”, cried the elder irately, “this is how people are now. They scorn that which they do not like to recognize. Vile profit! As if all cruel suffering on the surface of the earth brought about by business is finer than the work of a miner whose science, whose tireless work is to unlock nature’s most secret treasures.”

rational present and the improbable transcendental. His prophetic dream and the subsequent realization of his vision culminate in an encounter articulated in the modality of

*Augentäuschung:*

Der Boden war so klar, daß Elis die Wurzeln der Pflanzen deutlich erkennen konnte, aber bald immer tiefer mit dem Blick eindringend, erblickte er ganz unten – unzählige holde jungfräuliche Gestalten, die sich mit weißen glänzenden Armen umschlungen hielten, und aus ihren Herzen sproßten jene Wurzeln, jene Blumen und Pflanzen empor, und wenn die Jungfrauen lächelten, ging ein süßer Wohlklang durch das weite Gewölbe, und höher und freudiger schossen die wunderbaren Metallblüten empor. Ein unbeschreibliches Gefühl von Schmerz und Wollust ergriff den Jüngling, eine Welt von Liebe, Sehnsucht, brünstiges Verlangen ging auf in seinem Innern. – »Hinab – hinab zu euch«, rief er und warf sich mit ausgebreiteten Armen auf den kristallinen Boden nieder. Aber der wich unter ihm, und er schwebte wie in schimmerndem Äther.<sup>36</sup>

Material absolutes become malleable in Elis's dream world. Much of the dream imagery draws on substitutions of stone and organic matter. The stone walls of the caverns become transparent and permeable. Just as stone softens, flesh hardens in this new modality and is exchanged for metal and stone.<sup>37</sup> The image of the maidens beneath the ground providing organic roots to metals underscore the central conflation of stone and flesh that will culminate in Elis's petrification. In this tale, the key visual moment intensifies the subjective exchange that occurred in *Marmorbild* to extend the metamorphic state change to the viewer, Elis, as well. At the center stands yet another stone avatar of the mountain which continues the line of hewn goddesses already identified in the preceding sections. Hoffmann's contribution underscores the fragility of subjectivity by showing his hero undergo his own change of state. As Elis stares at the stony-faced avatar of the mountain, we see him begin his eventual petrification:

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<sup>36</sup> Hoffmann 216-217. The ground was so clear that Elis could clearly see the roots of the plants, but looking even further in the depths, he saw far below – countless graceful virginal figures that clasped themselves with white shining arms and from their hearts sprang forth the roots, flowers, and plants. And whenever the maidens laughed, a sweet sound went through the great vault. And the wonderful metal blossom shot higher and ever more joyfully forth. An indescribable sense of pain and joy gripped the young man; a world of love, longing, sharp longing went through him. – “Down – down to you”, he cried and threw himself with open arms onto the crystal floor. But it gave out below him and he floated in the swimming ether.

<sup>37</sup> The “metal blossoms” refer to the ore within the mine, which would be refined to produce metal. I include this within the stone/flesh metamorphosis since the ore is extracted from the mountain in rock clusters.

Sowie nun aber der Jüngling wieder hinabschaute in das starre Antlitz der mächtigen Frau, fühlte er, daß sein Ich zerfloß in dem glänzenden Gestein. Er kreischte auf in namenloser Angst und erwachte aus dem wunderbaren Traum, dessen Wonne und Entsetzen tief in seinem Innern wiederklang. —<sup>38</sup>

Elis eventually seeks out the Queen in the mountain and the dream is realized. Every detail anticipated by the dream appears before him within a secluded cavern, yet Elis experiences the encounter through a haze:

Doch als er fester und fester den Blick auf die wunderbare Ader im Gestein richtete, war es, als ginge ein blendendes Licht durch den ganzen Schacht, und seine Wände wurden durchsichtig wie der reinste Kristall. Jener verhängnisvolle Traum den er in Göthaborg geträumt, kam zurück. Er blickt in die paradiesische Gefilde der herrlichsten Metallbäume und Pflanzen, an denen wie Früchte, Blüten und Blumen feuerstrahlende Steine hingen. Er sah die Jungfrauen, er schaute das hohe Antlitz der mächtigen Königin. Sie erfaßte ihn, zog ihn hinab, drückte ihn an ihre Brust, da durchzuckte ein glühender Strahl sein Inneres, und sein Bewußtsein war nur das Gefühl, als schwämme er in den Wogen einer blauen, durchsichtig funkelnden Nebels.<sup>39</sup>

Visual obstructions again index a moment of moral confusion. The same blinding light that flashes before Eichendorff's hero when he first stumbles upon the marble figure strikes Elis here. Once Elis's vision is compromised, his subsequent encounter with the supernatural is potentially a function of his subjective desire. Again the moment of fascination is mediated by a hazy, formless cloud. We are presented with another intensely ocularcentric moment that is curiously dissipated. Following the vision, Elis's transformation accelerates. When he is found, it is with his face pressed to the stone: "Sie fanden ihn wie erstarrt stehend, das Gesicht gedrückt in das

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<sup>38</sup> Hoffmann 217-218. Yet just as the young man looked again into the rigid face of the powerful woman, he felt that his "I" dissolved in the glowing stone. He shrieked in nameless fear and woke from the incredible dream whose pleasure and horror still resonated deep within him.

<sup>39</sup> Hoffmann 231-232. Yet the harder he stared at the incredible vein in the stone, it was as though a blinding light went through the whole of the tunnel and its walls became transparent like the purest crystal. His fateful dream in Göthaborg came back to him. He looked into the paradisiacal realm of the most splendid metal trees and plants on which fiery stones hung like fruit, blossoms, and flowers. He saw the maidens, then peered into the high face of the powerful Queen. She grasped him, drew him up, and pressed his chest. A glowing stream quivered through him and his consciousness was now only a sensation as though he swam in the waves of a blue, transparent, shimmering cloud.

kalte Gestein.”<sup>40</sup> Reflecting on the encounter, his transformation is more explicitly attributed to the Queen by invoking the figure of medusa:

Es war, als verschlöße ihm eine unbekannte Macht mit Gewalt den Mund, als schaue aus seinem Innern heraus das furchtbare Antlitz der Königin, und nenne er ihren Namen, so würde, wie bei dem Anblick des entsetzlichen Medusenhaupts, sich alles um ihn her versteinen zum düstern schwarzen Geklüft!<sup>41</sup>

The stark division in diegetic realms is now internalized within Elis himself. Approaching the end of his transformation, Elis struggles between the persistent memory of domestic mortal concerns and his new longing for the eternal life metonymically represented by his gradual petrification. He reflects in a moment that echoes Faust’s own lament of the “zwei Seelen” that fight within him:

Die herrlichsten Gänge lagen offen ihm vor Augen, er arbeitete mit verdoppeltem Eifer, er vergaß alles, er mußte sich, auf die Oberfläche hinaufgestiegen, auf Pehrson Dahlsjö, ja auf seine Ulla besinnen, er fühlte sich wie in zwei Hälften geteilt, es war ihm, als stiege sein besseres, sein eigentliches Ich hinab in den Mittelpunkt der Erdkugel und ruhe aus in den Armen der Königin, während er in Falun sein düsteres Lager suche.<sup>42</sup>

Elis is a divided subject, caught between his conscious mortal self and the inclinations of his “night side”. The link with the Queen manifests clear aspects of a type of magnetism that gains access through this secondary shadowy side of Elis’s divided self. On a much broader scale, Hoffmann treats stone (in the form of the mine and the Queen) as a memory object similar to Eichendorff’s conception in “Wünschelrute”: the earth and stones themselves function as capsules imminent with historical memory and universal meaning. Elis’s petrification is effectively a transformation from an historical being to an achronological self, memorializing the

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<sup>40</sup> Hoffmann 232. They found him standing as though frozen, his face pressed into the cold stone.

<sup>41</sup> Hoffmann 234. It was as though an unknown force shut his mouth with violence; as though the terrible face of the Queen looked out from within him and if he were to give her her name, so would everything around him turn to the stone of the cheerless, dark mine, as if by the glance of terrible Medusa.

<sup>42</sup> The most splendid paths lay open before his eyes. He worked with doubled effort and forgot everything. Having climbed to the surface, he remembered Pehrson Dahlsjö, Ulla as well, and he felt as though he were split into two. It was as though his better and true self rose up into the middle of the Earth and found peace in the arms of the Queen while in Falun he sought his gloomy mine.



past while still bearing meaning for an imminent future. The shifting temporalities emerge once Elis's transformation is complete. Returning to the mine the night before his wedding in search of a brilliant gem to present to his bride, Elis is caught in a cave-in and his body is held within the rock for 42 years before it is discovered:

Da geschah es, daß die Bergleute, als sie zwischen zwei Schachten einen Durchschlag versuchten, in einer Teufe von dreihundert Ellen im Vitriolwasser den Leichnam eines jungen Bergmanns fanden, der versteinert schien, als sie ihn zutage förderten.<sup>43</sup>

The transformation is complete and Elis becomes a memory object, memorializing not only his own life but also a specific moment in time 42 years past.

Juxtaposed with the aestheticized female figures of antiquity cited in the previous sections, male statues possess noticeably different semiotic properties in romantic texts. The female avatars of antiquity that I have cited throughout the chapter represent historical memory on a broad scale. The female figure is coded in each text as an aesthetic object and thus depersonalized. Consider Goethe's Helen, Eichendorff's Venus, the Isis of Schiller or Novalis, Heine's Diana, Tieck's Venus figures, and countless others. In each figure, mythic forms are invoked and idealized. The female identity is unfocused and motivated largely by symbolic value. By contrast, male statues mimetically represent a single ego, possessing individual memory. In essence, the gendered semiotic discrepancy is a product of variable exterior/interior divisions. Male statues often memorialize the recently deceased, such as in Don Juan tales. The exterior correlates directly with the individual himself, his memory, and his wishes. The interior holds only the immanent recollection of past deeds. Once these individualized memories of the recent past are realized or understood by viewers, the statue is abandoned or destroyed, having served its purpose. For Elis, the sequence of transformation is thus complete only when Ulla

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<sup>43</sup> Hoffmann 238. It so happened that miners seeking to create a pass between two mine shafts found the corpse in vitriol water of a young miner at a depth of 300 cubits that appeared petrified once they brought it into the daylight.

arrives to view the body of her long lost fiancé. Having identified him, she throws herself across the body:

Die Bergleute traten hinan, sie wollten die arme Ulla aufrichten, aber sie hatte ihr Leben ausgehaucht auf dem Leichnam des erstarrten Bräutigams. Man bemerkte, daß der Körper des Unglücklichen, der fälschlicherweise für versteinert gehalten, in Staub zu zerfallen begann.<sup>44</sup>

The stony gaze of the Queen had frozen Elis and inducted him into the realm of the eternal, the ahistorical. Ulla's return released him, however, having unlocked the individualized recollection of Elis's life, allowing him to complete the transformation from flesh to stone to dust.

### Ambiguity and Metamorphosis

In each of these metamorphoses of stone, we see literary investigations into the narrative potential of ambiguity. A tale that is readily explained by religion or science discourages any further engagement from the reader. Each paradigmatic example of romantic liminality instead stimulates curiosity and thus encourages active participation from the reader to explain or interpret the text. I read these moments of *Augentäuschung* as moments that invite interpretation, both from the hero and the reader. This key moment of fascination is possible only through combined visual possibilities: functional vision (seeing as a means to receive information) and aesthetic vision (vision that is motivated and subjective). The latter type is a gaze available only to those sensitive to symbols and their semiotic potential. In short, the gaze of a poet whose "magic word" alone can unlock the song sleeping within all things, to borrow Eichendorff's image. In this chapter, I have attempted to unite the romantic notion of universal transcendental forms with a concept of memory objects. Within this framework, we can analyze the content of the information "unlocked" by the poet's gaze and learn to see each memory object as imminent

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<sup>44</sup> Hoffmann 239. The people of the mine stepped forward, wishing to raise Ulla's arms, but she had breathed her last across the stiffened corpse of her bridegroom. One could see how the body of the unfortunate, which had falsely been presumed petrified, began to fall to dust.

with intersecting temporalities. The liminality that I identify as central to the romantic imagination is thus a function of a fluid historicizing consciousness. In each interaction with a memory object (stone avatars or ruins), we see a crisis of whether to perceive the object aesthetically (actively and subjectively) or historically (passively, objectively, literally).

### Chapter Three: Demon of the Land and Sea

By 1820, the mists of Romanticism settled over Russia, bearing subtle currents from Jena and Weimar. Inspired by the German turn toward folk genres in the nineteenth-century, Russian romantics produced imitations of popular ballads, poems, and short stories. These textual revivals revitalized Slavic folk tales, but with the impress of Germanic romantic forms. A particularly important figure was the *rusalka* – a water demon from folklore – who made a transition from Slavic folktales into nineteenth-century literary tradition. By tracing the influence of German legends on this figure, I argue that the altered narrative function and context of the *rusalka* reveals the sedimentation of a German Romantic aesthetic of radical indeterminacy.

The *rusalka* stands at the intersection of conflicting moralities, modes of perception, and even theories of existence, similar to the Classical avatars of flesh and stone considered in chapter two of this dissertation.<sup>1</sup> Perceptual ambiguity emerged as the chief device in fostering narrative uncertainty, largely as a product of aesthetic visual deception through acts of metamorphoses or substitution. In considering liminality in German Romantic works from a narratological stance, this chapter arrived at a Romantic poetics of uncertainty, which I have termed *Augentäuschung*, referring specifically to a moment of visual confusion. The following analysis will trace the *rusalka*'s transition into literary tradition in representative works by Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and Nikolai Gogol', revealing the subversive aesthetic of indeterminacy fostered by *rusalka* narratives as indicating the emergence of the fantastic as a mode of critical reason in Russian Romanticism.

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<sup>1</sup> Key texts included Joseph von Eichendorff's novella *The Marble Statue*, Novalis's novella *The Novices at Saïs*, and E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story "The Mines of Falun" from *The Serapion Brothers* collection. The texts describe encounters with female figures of voyeuristic fascination who unaccountably shift between a statue-like form and flesh.

## Double Faith – The *rusalka* in Slavic Folklore

Legends of demons and spirits flourished among the peasantry who still harbored a lingering faith in the old pagan gods long after the widespread Christianization of Kievan Rus' after the year 988. Folk tales tell of pagan figures creating mischief in a Christian world, revealing a persistent *dvoeverie*, or “double faith”, in the minds of the Russian peasants.<sup>2</sup> The following brief tale selected from a collection of folk narratives is characteristic of this unusual correspondence:

They tell that formerly the pond in the hollow was not large, but mighty deep. Well, and a certain woman drowned in it. Even now she walks about the hollow crying in a thin voice, clad in a white shift with her tresses hanging loose. As soon as she sees anyone, she beckons him to her.

It's clear that she's not at peace. You see, a funeral office wasn't sung for her and she died without confession. It was during Lent she drowned. And when the flood waters came, they swept the entire pond into the river, and they didn't find her. And it still happens that she climbs out onto the edge of the hollow, sits, and weeps. Many of us have seen her. Even dogs tuck their tails between their legs and begin to yelp and howl at her, only they don't go near her. On account of her the hollow is a bad place for us. You're seized with fright if you go by on nightly business.<sup>3</sup>

The mournful wanderings of the *rusalka* are intimately linked with the violation of Christian death rites: no funeral office was sung for her and she died without giving a final confession of sins. Because of these omissions, she is forced to wander the earth as an unclean spirit.

Compared to other pagan figures who feature in folk legends set within a Christian universe, the *rusalka* figure is exceptionally flexible in acquiring a number of semiotic layers. The liminality inherent in the *rusalka*'s origins is evident even at the level of her designation. Typically, demons' names in Slavic mythology derive from their habitat: the *domovoi* (house demon) is

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of *dvoeverie* (“dual faith”), see V.M. Zhivov's chapter “Двоеверие и особый характер русской культурной традиции” in *Разыскания в области истории и предыстории русской культуры* (2002), an article by Iu. M. Lotman and B.A. Uspenskii on the role of dual modeling in the dynamics of Russian culture which places emphasis on dual faith: “Роль дуальных моделей в динамике русской культуры (до конца XVIII века)” (1977), and A. V. Карпов's *Язычество, христианство, двоеверие: религиозная жизнь Древней Руси в IX-XI веках* (2008).

<sup>3</sup> Ivanits 188.

found in the home (*dom*); the *leshii* (wood goblin) lives in the forest (*les*); the *vodianoi* (water demon) lurks in the water (*voda*); and the *polevoi* (field demon) stalks the field (*pole*).<sup>4</sup> In following with this convention, some have proposed that the term *rusalka* derives from *rusa/ruslo* (stream), thus emphasizing only her watery environment.<sup>5</sup> However, the etymology favored by ethnographers maintain that the term *rusalka* derives from the week leading up to and including Pentecost, termed the *rousal'skaia sedmitsa* (rosalia week).<sup>6</sup> In his analysis *Die Rusalien*, Franz Miklosich explains the seasonal emergence of demons that was believed to be concurrent with this week in Slavic folklore: “The ancients proclaimed that *rusalki*, or female demons with flowing hair, appeared on Thursday of that week, known as a *semik*, and on this day they appear in folk games and songs with curling hair of crowns in birch trees. In dialect, *rousalka* (роусалка) is equivalent to *semik* (семикъ) which, according to the Lexicon of the Russian Academy, refers to the seventh Thursday after Easter which is celebrated by the people with song and games.”<sup>7</sup> In this account, Miklosich offers an early epithet for this unusual figure, *semik*, which identifies her by the time of year in which she departs from the water for the forests to dance, tumble in tree branches, and lure young men to their deaths.<sup>8</sup> Within the paschal cycle of moveable feasts in the Eastern Orthodox Church, this week would fall in late May or early June.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, the term originally designating the week leading up to Pentecost,

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<sup>4</sup> Zelenin is credited as the first to clarify the dual environment of the *rusalka* in detail. See also Linda Ivanits’s chapter on “Spirits of the Forest, Waters, and Fields” in *Russian Folk Belief* (1989).

<sup>5</sup> Miklosich 19-20. In polemicizing with such interpretations, Miklosich cites Pavel Jozef Šafárik’s theory that the *rusalka* is a goddess of the river and thus the name is derived from the proto-Slavic word *rusa*, meaning river.

<sup>6</sup> Max Vasmer’s *Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language* likewise links the term to the rosalia week. He traces the term from *русалия*, denoting the “pagan festival of Spring,” the “Sunday before Pentecost,” and the relevant “celebratory games.” Aleksandr Veselovskii’s *Explorations in the Field of Russian Sacred Verse (Razyskaniia v oblasti russkogo dukhovnogo stikha, XI-SVII)* also contains an extended discussion supporting this etymology.

<sup>7</sup> Miklosich 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Semik* (семикъ) from *sem’* (семь), alluding to her emergence on the seventh Thursday after Easter.

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, this relation of the *rusalnaia* week to Pentecost is disputed by some accounts which maintain that the *rusalnaia* week actually begins on Pentecost rather than ending with it. Miklosich cites Zakrevskii, who by way of Bantys-Kamenskii claims that the “*rusalki* lived in rivers and traipsed through forest and field from Pentecost

*rousalka/rusalka*, was applied to the demon herself.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, the *rusalka*'s very name codifies the "double faith" at the heart of the unusual correspondences she attracts.

In some respects, my investigation engages with the literary critic Vissarion Belinskii who asks in his essay "Literary Reflections" ("Literaturnye mechtaniia") whether Russian literature is a reflection of society or perhaps a reflection of the spirit of the people.<sup>11</sup> Belinskii's own response is predicated upon a historical stance in following with his belief that in order to understand a society and its people, one must first review the history of Russian literature and the history of society's progression since Peter the Great. In framing literature as a reflection of a specific people associated with a geographic place, his methodology chafes against the French critical stance on literature as a mirror of society without these restrictions.<sup>12</sup> In essence, each society has its own character that reflects one side of human life through their literature. I draw upon this definition in this chapter to demonstrate how literature absorbs cultural sedimentations upon admitting forms such as the *rusalka*.

As we will see in selected works from Russian Romanticism, endemic to the figure of the *rusalka* is the unification of antinomic realities as she hovers between the natural and supernatural. By suspending the narrative between these two realms, the *rusalka* figure serves as a tool by which Russian romantic authors foster narrative uncertainty. While the *rusalka* shares many similarities with Germanic mermaids and other metamorphic figures of legend, I argue that

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Sunday up until the Feasts of Saints Peter and Paul" ["die Rusalki wohnten in Flüssen, und durchliefen vom Pfingstsonntage an bis zum Peterstage Wald und Feld."] Miklosich 17.

<sup>10</sup> Miklosich 17. The first to understand "rusalki" as a supernatural being rather than a designation for the festival was Tatischev followed by A. von Kaysarov in an 1804 lecture on Slavic mythology that aligned them with nymphs and naiads.

<sup>11</sup> Belinskii, *Literaturnye mechtaniia*, 43

<sup>12</sup> Belinskii, *Literaturnye mechtaniia*, 35-36

the underlying aesthetic of radical indeterminacy generated by *rusalka* narratives constitutes the strongest evidence of inheritance from the German Romantics.

### The Literary Life of the *Rusalka*

Seven years before Aleksandr Pushkin began his dramatic fragment *Rusalka*, he wrote a curious poem that has become known under the same title in 1819. At the age of 20, the young writer thumbed his nose at religious convention in a ballad that drew attention for its allegedly anti-clerical theme, resulting in censors delaying the poem's publication for seven years.<sup>13</sup> The moral situation of the poem centers around three encounters between a pious monk and a pagan *rusalka* at the water's edge.<sup>14</sup> The ballad immediately invokes this dual environment, setting the action "[a]bove the lake, in dense oak woods" (*[n]ad ozerom, v glukhikh dubrovakh*). The precarious setting between land and sea reifies the *rusalka*'s folkloric setting with imagery that heralds the meeting of antinomic forces. As the *rusalka* is remarkable for her mischievous acts in two environments, the opening lines reinforce her Slavic identity by hearkening to this distinguishing feature without explicitly labeling her a *rusalka* within the poem. Pushkin draws further inspiration from Slavic folklore to endow his *rusalka* with telltale behaviors. What follows is a thorough performance of identity in the sixth stanza:

Глядит, кивает головою,  
Целует из дали шутя,  
Играет, плещется волною,  
Хохочет, плачет, как дитя,  
Зовет Монаха, нежно стонет . . .  
«Монах, Монах! Ко мне, ко мне!...»  
И вдруг в волнах прозрачных тонет;  
И все в глубокой тишине. (41-48)<sup>15</sup>

She looks, nods her head,  
Jokingly blows kisses from afar,  
Plays, splashes in the waves,  
Laughs, and cries like a child,  
Calls the monk, moans tenderly...  
“Monk, monk! Come here, come here!...”  
And suddenly drowns into the transparent waves;  
A deep silence follows.

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<sup>13</sup> Etkind 528.

<sup>14</sup> The poem can be found in its entirety on p. 143-144 of the Appendix.

<sup>15</sup> All translations of German and Russian texts are my own unless stated otherwise.



Her playfully seductive overtures toward the monk align with the behavior attributed to *rusalki* in ethnographic accounts: sitting beside the shore, shouting, laughing, singing, and combing their hair.<sup>16</sup> Pushkin’s reliance on characteristic actions reflects the historical emphasis on the *rusalka*’s deeds and behaviors over her environment, unlike her fellow demons. These behaviors are so central to her identity that several were used as epithets long before the term *rusalka* became more common in the eighteenth-century. Russian ethnographer Dmitrii Zelenin offers the most wide-ranging list of epithets, including: *kupalka*, *vodianitsa*, *leshachikha*, *shutovka*, *chertovka*, *khitka*, and *loskotukha*.<sup>17</sup> The first term, *kupalka* (“bather”, from *kupat’* – to bathe), simply alludes to her primary environment in water. Both *vodianitsa* and *leshachikha* speak to her dual environments, with the former casting her as a relation to the water demon (*vodianoi*) and the latter as a relation to the forest demon (*leshii*). Both *shutovka* and *chertovka* highlight her close association with evil forces by linking her with the devil (*chert*).<sup>18</sup> Finally, *khitka* (from *khitit’* – to abduct, kidnap) refers to the *rusalka*’s penchant for abducting small children and *loskotukha* (“tickler”) to her reputation for luring handsome men to the forests and tickling them to death. Pushkin’s *rusalka* is likewise a creature of action as she jokes from a distance (*iz dali shutia*, 42), plays and splashes in the waves (*igraet, pleshchetsia volnoiu*, 43), and laughs (*khokhochet*, 44).

The playful coquette of the sea hides darker motives, however. The tales involve women who suffered unnatural or unholy deaths, often maidens who drowned themselves, women who died during the *rusal’naia* week, unbaptized children, and similar cases.<sup>19</sup> As an evil spirit

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<sup>16</sup> Pomerantseva 70, 75.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Ivanits concurs with Zelenin’s catalogue of behaviors and epithets (see Ivanits 78).

<sup>18</sup> A common epithet for the devil is *shut* (“joker”); *shutovka* is the female equivalent.

<sup>19</sup> Zelenin 148. The causes and circumstances of death vary among Zelenin’s accounts. While most agree that women who drown themselves are doomed to return as soulless *rusalki*, this fate is sometimes extended to unbaptized children or suicides who are cursed by their parents. In some accounts, it is only women who drown

(*nechistaia sila*) born of young drowning victims and suicides, the *rusalka* is thus a composite of misguided innocence and the satanic. The emergence of Pushkin's *rusalka*'s during Pentecost – one of the holiest weeks of the liturgical calendar – thus complicates her motives. In Pushkin's ballad, all three encounters feature subtle atmospheric suggestions to allude to a darker side beyond her overt coquettishness. After catching an unexpected glimpse one night through a forest of oaks, the monk sees her appear twice more as she sits combing her flowing hair and beckoning to him from the shore. Each vision occurs in dark, heavily obscured environments:

Дубравы делались черней; Туман над озером дымился, И красный месяц в облаках Тихонько по небу катился. (12-15)	The oak woods grew darker; A mist over the lake grew dusky, And the red moon amongst the clouds Quietly glided across the heavens.
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In this first encounter, twilight brings a veil of shadows and mist, heralding the emergence of the 'night side' of consciousness. The figure that emerges is "light as a nocturnal shadow" (*legka kak ten' nochnaia*, 21), a description which conveys not only the slowness of her figure but also draws on a secondary idiomatic understanding of *ten'* as "spirit", rendering her "light as a dark spirit/shade." This hazy and foreboding setting is reprised before her second appearance:

Дубравы вновь оделись тьмой; Пошла по облакам луна, И снова дева над водою Сидит, прелестна и бледна. (37-40)	The oak woods again clothed themselves in darkness The moon glided across clouds, And again the maiden above the water Sits, charming and white.
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By the third vision, Pushkin heightens the monk's erotic fascination into an almost hypnotic obsession. Pushkin's verse roots the monk's crisis of faith not in the actual sight of the *rusalka*, but in his recollection of her. In her absence, it is unclear whether the monk's obsession is the product of her influence over him or motivated by his own desire.

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themselves during the *rusal'naia* week who return as *rusalki*. Zelenin cites A. Trotskii (1892), S. M. Solov'ev (1876), and A. N. Afanas'ev (1869).

Shrouding each encounter is an uncertainty of agency. When the monk first beholds the *rusalka* in the moonlight – naked, with skin glowing white as snow – he is fearful and wary. Yet after catching a glimpse of her one night in the waves, he becomes increasingly preoccupied with the memory of the vision of demonic beauty. The memory overwhelms him, suppressing faith along with any connection to the phenomenal world. At first glance, the monk appears to be the victim of a hypnotic vision, forsaking both sleep and prayer. Yet her absence from such moments of obsessive reflection allow for the possibility that the monk’s sinful reflections are motivated by his own desire. Contributing to this dynamic is Pushkin’s use of the language of enthrallment to describe the monk’s involuntary obsession with the *rusalka*. Against his will, he sees visions of her during the day – a memory wrapped in shadow: “Before him in an involuntary thought / He ever saw the shade of the strange maiden” (*Pered soboi s nevol’noi dumoi / Vse videl chudnoi devy ten’*, 35-36). The second day, she blows kisses, laughs, and again beckons to him only to “suddenly dive into the clear waves/ down into deep silence” (*I vdrug v volnakh prozrachnykh tonet; / I vse v glubokoi tishine*, 47-48). By the third day, the “ardent hermit” (*otshel’nik strastnyi*, 49) seeks her out by the shore. Shadows fall across the forest, marking the passage of time and heralding a third visit:<sup>20</sup>

<p>На третий день отшельник страстный          Близ очарованных берегов          Сидел и девы ждал прекрасной,          А тень ложилась средь дубров...          Заря прогнала тьму ночную:          Монаха не нашли нигде,          И только бороду седую          Мальчишки видели в воде. (49-56)</p>	<p>On the third day, the ardent monk          Sat near the enchanted banks          And waited for the beautiful maiden          But a shadow fell in the oak forest...          Sunrise chased the nocturnal gloom;          The monk was nowhere to be found,          And only the grey beard          Did young boys spy in the water.</p>
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<sup>20</sup> As I have suggested, the term *ten’*, meaning shadow, may also be understood as a “spirit”, thus implying a third visitation or continuous presence by the *rusalka*. The ominous atmospheric changes that preceded the first two appearances correspond with the shadow falling across the forest and support reading this stanza as her final visitation.

Although the poem subtly alludes to a third visitation, the *rusalka* remains overtly absent in this final stanza. Pushkin challenges the reader to draw upon the established imagery and behaviors that herald the *rusalka*'s appearance to deduce her presence in this final encounter. By avoiding an overt description of her, Pushkin creates uncertainty that culminates in the monk's ultimate disappearance into the watery depths, raising the question of whether the monk leapt into the lake or was lured. Edits to the final two verses of poem track an intentional decision to foster this ambiguity. The original manuscript version read:

И только бороду седую  
Русалки дергали в воде.

And the *rusalki* tugged  
The grey beard in the water.

The published version omits any mention of the *rusalki* or the violence towards the monk and instead hints ambiguously at his fate by leaving only the beard as a physical object open to interpretation:

И только бороду седую  
Мальчишки видели в воде.

And only the grey beard  
Did young boys spy in the water.

This published version adheres closely to the ending of an 1818 ballad by Vasilii Zhukovskii, "The Fisherman" ("Rybak"), which scholars consider a significant influence on Pushkin's "Rusalka."<sup>21</sup> The ballad constitutes a stylized translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1778 ballad "The Fisherman" ("Der Fischer"), relating the unexpected encounter between a fisherman and a mermaid in four octaves of alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter.<sup>22</sup> Goethe's ballad

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<sup>21</sup> Scholarship supporting a link between Zhukovskii's "Rybak" and Pushkin's "Rusalka" includes: M. Katz, *The Literary Ballad in Early Nineteenth-century Russian Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1976. 149-151; Chapter eight of Efim Etkind's *Bozhestvennyi glagol. Pushkin pročitannyi v Rossii i vo Frantsii* discusses metatranslations of Pushkin's work. Etkind acknowledges Zhukovskii's 1818 "Rybak" published in his "Für wenige" collection is a translation of Goethe's "Der Fischer" and that Pushkin was quite familiar with the collection. He notes moments in which Pushkin's poem follows Goethe's original more closely than Zhukovskii's translation;

Zhukovskii's "Rybak" can be found in its entirety on p. 148 of the Appendix.  
<sup>22</sup> Goethe's "Der Fischer" can be found in its entirety on p. 147 of the Appendix.

explicitly portrays both the fisherman and mermaid as equally culpable by relating both actions as two “halves” of a joint effort:

Sie sprach zu ihm, sie sang zu ihm;  
Da war's um ihn geschehn:  
Halb zog sie ihn, halb sank er hin  
Und ward nicht mehr gesehn. (29-32)<sup>23</sup>

She spoke to him, she sang to him;  
It was over for him:  
She half pulled him in, he half sank down,  
Never to be seen again.

Despite various lexical flourishes, Zhukovskii's translation remains close to the resolution of Goethe's "Fisherman":

Она поет, она манит –  
Знать, час его настал!  
К нему она, он к ней бежит...  
И след навек пропал. (29-32)<sup>24</sup>

She sings, she beckons –  
His hour had come!  
She heads towards him; he runs to her...  
Lost without a trace forever.

The mermaid tempts the fisherman, heightening his desire with her song and beckoning.

Whereas Goethe's mermaid drags down the fisherman, who in turn willingly sinks into the water, Zhukovskii only describes their movement toward one another, leaving the reader to speculate what actions are concealed within the ellipsis.

Pushkin's revisions to the final stanza thus reflect the permeation of German romantic motifs via translation. In the manuscript version of the *rusalka* encounter, the monk is ultimately dragged into the lake, thus framing the encounter as a cautionary tale. Rather than repelling the demon with the sign of the cross or placing a crucifix upon the *rusalka*, the monk seeks her out and is punished. The narrative events follow a clear formula devised around codes of behavior regulating Christian devotion. The revised ending, however, allows for the possibility that the seduction is not wholly uninvited and fosters moral ambiguity. The revision testifies to a critical shift from formulaic folkloric prohibitions to an aesthetic of indeterminacy. The moral

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<sup>23</sup> Goethe 303.

<sup>24</sup> Zhukovskii 136.

didacticism of the original ending is replaced with an uncertainty that subverts epistemological imperatives. Certainly, the ending hints at the monk's demise when the boys spot his grey beard in the lake, suggesting a corpse beneath the waves. Yet Pushkin's restrained description leaves the reader to form his own conclusions, allowing for a more fantastic, perhaps whimsical, interpretation of the events. While verse 54 proclaims the monk's disappearance – "The monk was nowhere to be found" (*Monakha ne nashli nigde*) – the observation is refined by the concluding verses that the boys saw "only a grey beard" in the water (*I tol'ko borodu seduiu*).<sup>25</sup> The beard serves a metonymic function, standing in for the monk while also suggesting that this last physical connection with the phenomenal world was cast aside in crossing over to the fantastic realm of the *rusalka*. This final version dramatizes the cleric's encounter with the supernatural, reworking the apparent crisis of faith into an epistemological crisis. For the Romantics, critical of epistemological absolutism, religious faith constituted a type of dogmatic 'knowing.' Vision itself as a means of epistemological investigation in this moment is converted into an act of faith. In this light, visual deception is on par with total epistemological subversion. By the end, Pushkin challenges the reader to surrender to "double faith": just as we must accept the coexistence of the pagan demon in a Christian world, so must we allow for the improbable interaction of competing realities. This precarious compromise between the improbable and the impossible is Pushkin's Germanic inheritance.

The comparison is strengthened by the *rusalka*'s similarities to liminal avatars of antiquity invoked by the German romantics, as discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. The monk peers through the dusky haze at the *rusalka*, recalling similar misadventures of twilight wanderers in German romanticism who spy a supple statue of white

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<sup>25</sup> Emphasis mine.

marble in the moonlight. This association is suggested in the figuration of the *rusalka* as “white, like the fresh snow of the hills” (*bela, kak rannii sneg kholmov*, 22), suggesting an affinity with the “flashing white marble” of German romantic divinities.<sup>26</sup> In Pushkin’s literary appropriation of folklore, the *rusalka* is similarly construed as a fragmented memory object. Crafted to invoke a paradigmatic figure of an essentially Slavic past, she is nevertheless presented with Western mannerisms and contexts.

The genre of Pushkin’s “Rusalka” stems from a sudden revival of literary ballads in the eighteenth-century. The earliest imitations emerged in England with the publication of a fifteenth-century ballad in 1707, “The Nut-browne Maid”, inspiring imitations by Thomas Percy, Matthew Prior, and others. Germany saw a similar revival with the publication of an anthology of folk texts under the title *Volkslieder (Folk Songs, 1778-79)* by Johann Gottfried Herder, who challenged the nation’s poets to compose their own ‘authentic’ imitations. Several leading voices took up this challenge, inspiring hundreds of original ballads and translations. The movement produced iconic works such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s “Erlkönig” (Elf King, 1782) and Friedrich Schiller’s “Der Taucher” (“The Diver”, 1797). Eventually, these ballads reached Russian romantic authors through the works of Vasili Zhukovskii, whose translations and original poems established the ballad as a genre in Russia and greatly contributed to its popularity.<sup>27</sup> Of the forty ballads he wrote between 1808 and 1833, twenty-two were taken from

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<sup>26</sup> Recall Ludwig Tieck’s fulsome description of the Woman of the Forest in his *Runenberg* who glides about on marble-like “glistening white limbs” (*glänzende weiße Glieder*), the white marble limbs of Heinrich Heine’s Diana in *Florentinische Nächte*, the blinding whiteness of Joseph von Eichendorff’s Venus statue in *Das Marmorbild*, and countless others. In an analysis of Zhukovskii’s most common epithets, Michael Katz observes that *belyi* (“white”) commonly occurs in works in which Zhukovskii attempts to imitate the language of folklore and that the epithet “acquires overtones of sanctity and mystery, and occurs in religious contexts.” In Zhukovskii’s description of white a canvas/sheet (*polotno*), dress (*plat*), darling (*golubochek*), and swan (*lebed’*), Katz sees a conscience imitation of folk descriptions (Katz 220).

<sup>27</sup> See Michael Katz, Ch. 3 “Zhukovsky’s Literary Ballads” in *The Literary Ballad in Early Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*.

German sources. In addition to translations of ballads by Goethe and Schiller, Zhukovskii also translated works by Gottfried August Bürger and Ludwig Uhland. The remaining translations include eleven from English sources (including Thomas Gray, Thomas Moore, Robert Southey, Lord Byron, and Walter Scott) and one French source (F.A. de Moncriff).<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the German, French, and English recovery of an existing folk genre, Russian romantic ballads foster creative nostalgia for a wholly imagined past. Folk ballads as such did not exist in Russian literature until fairly recently, with the first ballads appearing in Russian periodicals only in the 1790s.<sup>29</sup> In Russian adaptations, authors relied on folk material from oral narratives to lend a sense of authenticity to this imported genre. In featuring *rusalki*, nineteenth-century authors invoked a figure intimately linked with Russian culture and the land itself.<sup>30</sup> Ancient pagan rituals associated with *rusalki* root her firmly in Slavic culture while Russian authors assert her tie with the land as she emerges from the Dnieper, Dnestr, Volkhova, Aragva, the Kura, and the Bashkirian lake Aculu.<sup>31</sup> Yet despite the cultural and nationalistic aspects of her various figurations, the environment and moral situation are nevertheless European. The *rusalka* thus acquires an additional semiotic layer in poetic appropriations.

One direct point of transfer contributing to the westernization of the Slavic *rusalka* more broadly is the influence of the legend of Lorelei, a siren associated with the Rhine. The legend originally focused on a prominent cliff along the Rhine which sailors and locals dubbed the *Lurelei* – a compound of the Rhinelander word for “cliff” (*Lei*) and the root verb *luren* (*lauern* in

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<sup>28</sup> Katz 50.

<sup>29</sup> Katz 18.

<sup>30</sup> See Inna Naroditskaya’s chapter on “Russian *Rusalkas* and Nationalism” in *Music of the Sirens* (2006).

<sup>31</sup> *Rusalki* haunt these bodies of water in the works of Gogol and Somov (Dnieper), Rimsky-Korsakov (Dniester and Volkhova), Lermontov (Aragva and Kura), and Dal’ (Aculu).



New High German) meaning “to lurk.”<sup>32</sup> The earliest legends surrounding this cliff from the mid-thirteenth-century note the remarkable echoing effect created by the cliffs at this point on the Rhine that can be heard even today. These murmurs were attributed to mountain dwarves rumored to have hidden treasure deep within the rock. Such was the legend until 1801 when Clemens Brentano published the second part of his novel *Godwi oder das steinerne Bild der Mutter* (*Godwi, or the Mother’s Stone Image*), which features the poem “Zu Bacharach am Rheine” (“At Bacharach along the Rhine”).<sup>33</sup> Brentano’s ballad is the first to personify the cliffs as a siren-like sorceress and incorporate the curious echoing effect into her legend. In his reinvention, Brentano tells of a maiden whose song and beauty lure men to their deaths at the cliffs of the Rhine. Events center around an encounter between a nameless bishop and Lorelei, who confesses her “evil witchcraft” (*böse Zauberei*, 16) that leads men to their deaths when they see her: “Because all must go to ruin / Who see my eyes” (*Weil jeder muß verderben, / Der meine Augen sieht*, 19-20). Her beauty and alluring voice ensnare men with hypnotic force:

Die Augen sanft und wild,  
 Die Wangen roth und weiß,  
 Die Worte still und milde  
 Das ist mein Zauberkreis. (45-48)

Eyes soft and wild,  
 Cheeks red and white,  
 Words both calm and mild,  
 That is my magic circle.

In a final demonstration of this erotic enthrallment, the knights are compelled to follow her as she climbs the high cliffs along the Rhine to see the castle of her beloved. Reaching the top with

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<sup>32</sup> Karl Hessel, “Die Echtheit der Lorelei Sage”, p. 481. Hessel links the seeming visual emphasis of this etymology (literally the “lurking mountain”) with the characteristic echo: “Allein lauert nicht nur mit dem Auge, sondern auch mit dem Ohr, und das Lauschen auf das Echo war seit uralten Zeiten nachgewiesenermaßen so gebräuchlich, das Echo überhaupt eine so auffallende und bezeichnende Eigenschaft dieses Felsen, daß die Annahme naheliegt, der Berg sei so von den Schiffern und Umwohnern genannt worden, die gewohnt waren, immerwährend das Echo herauszufordern” (“One “lurks” not only with the eyes, but also with the ear. The hearkening to the echo proved so useful since time immemorial (the echo being such a remarkable and distinctive characteristic of the cliffs) that it was accepted that the mountain was thus called by sailors and locals who were accustomed to note the echo”).

<sup>33</sup> The ballad is also known by the title “Lore Lay.” The rock from the eastern bank of the Rhein has born the names *lorberg*, *lorleberg*, *lurlenberg*, *Lurley*, *Lureley*, or *Lorlei*. Brentano’s “Lorelei” can be found in p. 149-151 of the Appendix.

the knights in pursuit, she sees a small boat bearing her lover away from her. In despair, she casts herself into the water, followed by the three mesmerized knights:

Die Ritter mußten sterben,  
Sie konnten nicht hinab,  
Sie mußten all verderben,  
Ohn Priester und ohn Grab. (93-96)

And so the knights must perish,  
They could not flee from there,  
All must go to their end,  
Bereft of priest or grave.

The Lorelei legend presents several points of interest that emerges in Russian *rusalka* tales. At the water's edge, Brentano's siren encounters a priest, thus juxtaposing Christian piety with satanic eroticism. Returning to the dynamics of vision explored in moments of *Augentäuschung*, the central figures of voyeuristic fascination ensnare the male viewer in a kind of hypnosis.<sup>34</sup> The language of compulsion is invoked to convey this seemingly involuntary enthrallment: The knights "must perish" (*mußten sterben*), they "could not" flee (*sie konnten nicht*), all "must" go to their end (*sie mußten*).

In essence, Pushkin's ballad itself is a hybrid, neither fully Slavic nor Germanic in nature. He deploys identifiable tropes from Slavic demonology to construct a representation of the *rusalka* that aligns with her characteristic environment, seasonal emergence, and fundamental origin in folklore. Yet, beyond these lexical and thematic features, Pushkin's ballad nevertheless digresses noticeably from the unambiguous moral didacticism prominent in many subgenres of Russian folklore. By fostering moral ambiguity in this now familiar twilight setting developing out of a visual dialectic of deception, this ballad explores the liminal narrative space so characteristic of the *Augentäuschung* motif. Rather than adhering to logical precepts or religious principles, the tale promotes the fantastic as a mode of critical reason. Only by acknowledging

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<sup>34</sup> Brentano's priest cannot curse her because he has already been bewitched by her: *Ich kann dich nicht verdammen, / Bis du mir erst bekennt, / Warum in diesen Flammen / Mein eigen Herz schon brennt* (25-28) ("I cannot condemn you, / Now that you are known to me, / Because in those flames / My own heart already burns"), referring to the flames of her eyes (*Die Augen sind zwei Flammen*, 21).

the unusual principles governing the realm of the fantastic surrounding the *rusalka* could Pushkin's cleric have survived the encounter.

### Nikolai Gogol: Prose Dreams and the Mists of Nostalgia

By the 1840s, poetry gradually yielded to the reign of prose as the nostalgic gaze of Romantic authors again drew upon folktales for inspiration. The narrative quality of Romantic ballads eased the transition to prose appropriations of *rusalka* tales in the nineteenth-century, with authors adding lyric digressions, characterizing devices, and psychological motives to develop a more explicit representation of the *rusalka*. Nikolai Gogol's tale, "A May Night, or The Drowned Maiden" offers a representative prose adaptation of the *rusalka* legend.<sup>35</sup> First published in 1831, "A May Night" is the third tale of Gogol's collection *Evenings on a Farm near Dikan'ka* in which he constructs a narrative frame rooted in Ukrainian folklore.

To produce a more authentic imitation, the young author solicited information on traditional tales, common tropes, and Ukrainian dialect from friends and family. Writing to his mother in April of 1829, Gogol eagerly requested cultural information, including details on spirits and demons of folklore:

Еще несколько слов о колядках, о Иване Купале, о русалках. Если есть, кроме того, какие-либо духи или домовые, то о них подробнее с их названиями и делами; множество носится между простым народом поверий, страшных сказаний, преданий, разных анекдотов, и проч. и проч. и проч.<sup>36</sup>

Also, [send] a few words about carols, Ivan Kupala Day, and *rusalki*.<sup>37</sup> Besides this, if there are any spirits or house demons, then I'll tell about them in more detail with their various names and activities; the simple folk have a lot of beliefs, terrible tales, legends, various anecdotes, and so on.

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<sup>35</sup> "Майская ночь, или утопленница" from *Вечера на хуторе близ Диканьки*.

<sup>36</sup> Gogol "Perepiska 1820-1834" in *N.V. Gogol' Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v semnadtati tomakh*, 97-101.

<sup>37</sup> Ivan Kupala Day or Kupala Night is the Feast of St. John the Baptist, celebrated on June 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> during the summer solstice.

“A May Night” reflects this dutiful research, including several motifs from popular folk legends. The worlds of the *Dikan’ka* tales all follow the unusual logic of folklore, adhering to various codes inherent to interactions with familiar supernatural figures. In these tales, the boundaries of the diegetic world suddenly exceed beyond the realm of the possible. The transgressions occur abruptly and without comment, leaving the reader uncertain as to how the boundaries of reality are defined in this fluctuating world. The suddenness of the breaks from the reader’s own reality are dramatized by Gogol’s initial creation of a world that would have seemed familiar to his readers. To employ a recognizable example, Gogol’s “The Nose” begins in a perfectly ordinary world of barbers and petty clerks, all working and fretting over the same social worries that might afflict the reader. Kovalev’s astonishment at waking one morning to discover his nose now replaced by a smooth, empty space suggests that the narrative realm, however odd, corresponds with the reader’s own understanding of nature: astonishment at the unexplained disappearance of an appendage is only appropriate. We thus comprehend such moments of astonishment or fascination as indicative of events that transgress the “normal” and constitute an unusual occurrence. The reader’s trust in the familiarity of this diegetic world is frustrated, however, when Kovalev finds his nose walking about town, dressed in the uniform of a state councilor. This second moment of astonishment indicates another transgressive occurrence. However, the cause of Kovalev’s astonishment signals to the reader that the fictional world of “The Nose” indeed differs significantly from his own world: rather than marveling at how his nose became animate and self-sufficient, Kovalev instead wonders at seeing his nose dressed as a gentleman and is even flummoxed at its having achieved a rank higher than his own. Although the reader is seldom on stable ground in these narratives, the only reliable method to identify absurdity is to first establish what constitutes a familiar situation, as aberrations can only be measured against

the norm of the familiar. The reader then must rely on characters' reactions (amazement, horror, fascination) to pinpoint moments of defamiliarization. We will use this framework to consider the irregularities inherent to Gogol's depiction of a *rusalka* in "A May Night" ("Maiskaia noch").

The main narrative follows the Cossack, Levko, in his courtship of a young maiden, Hanna, in a tale remarkable for the devices by which the diegetic folkloric world is alternately asserted and subverted. Supernatural figures initially enter the narrative as exceptional subjects, existing only in local legend. This skeptical frame arises in chapter one when Hanna asks Levko about a small hut only a short distance from her home. Levko reluctantly tells the short tale of a widower who lived in the hut with his young daughter. One day the man took a young wife, promising his daughter to treat her to the same paternal attention as before. However, her new stepmother was disdainful and greeted her with a terrible look and silence. When the daughter found a black cat slinking through her room one night, the creature seized her throat and tried to choke her. In her terror, the daughter grabbed her father's sabre from the wall and struck the animal, severing a paw. The next day, her stepmother did not leave her room and reemerged only three days later with her hand bandaged. The daughter concluded that her stepmother was a witch and had attacked her in the form of a cat. On the fifth day, her father cast her from the house, barefoot and without food. She left her home in despair, climbed a high bank, and leapt into the deep pond below. From then on, all maidens who drown in the pond have emerged at night to warm themselves in the moonlight, led by the neglected daughter. Finding her stepmother beside the pool one night, the girl dragged her screaming into the depths. The witch managed to assume the form of one of the drowned maidens, however, and escape further

punishment. It is said that every night the daughter gathers together the maidens and stares at their faces, trying to unmask the stepmother who caused her such grief.

In this brief embedded narrative, Gogol includes several common folkloric motifs. Chief among these is that of a witch transforming into an animal or inanimate object.<sup>38</sup> Identification is also thematized, particularly moments in which hapless wanderers are challenged to find a face within a crowd.<sup>39</sup> The central characters of the story – an evil stepmother and the drowned maiden – are also readily recognized as established folktale personalities. Levko thrice casts doubt on the veracity of this tale, deeming it a story told only by “old women and silly people.”<sup>40</sup> He follows this with incredulous interjections even as he relates the legend, decrying it as “old women’s tales” and concluding, “There, my Galia, this is how old people tell tales!”<sup>41</sup> By depicting the main character as skeptical towards the supernatural occurrences of folk tales, the narrative signals to the reader that the diegetic world does not contain this type of supernatural intervention. This assumption is reinforced by the suggestion that encounters with the *rusalka* occur only within dreams. As Hanna struggles to recall the tale of the stepdaughter, she remembers “as though through a dream.”<sup>42</sup> The intangible fog of memory anticipates the atmospheric occlusions that surround Levko’s encounter with the *rusalka* in chapter five. This sudden appearance of the supernatural creates instability in the reader’s assumptions regarding the narrative world. Without fully understanding what constitutes the “familiar” in this new world, the reader can no longer determine whether supernatural intervention is typical or

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<sup>38</sup> Chudakov 14.

<sup>39</sup> Chudakov 15-16. Chudakov sees similarities between this tale and the folk tale “Ivashka belaia rusalka” in which a young man is compelled to determine which is the eldest of twelve identical sisters or be killed. He correctly identifies the eldest and, after he is challenged to identify her a second time, wins her hand in marriage.

<sup>40</sup> Gogol 130. “Мало ли чего не расскажут бабы и народ глупы”

<sup>41</sup> Gogol 131. “Верь бабам”, “Вот, моя Галю, как рассказывают старые люди!” *Galia* is a nickname for Ganna.

<sup>42</sup> Gogol 130. “Я помню будто сквозь сон.”

aberrant. The meeting occurs in a suitably hazy nightscape, saturated with brilliant moonbeams and silver clouds:

Величественно и мрачно чернел кленовый лес, обсыпаясь только на оконечности, стоявшей лицом к месяцу, тонкою серебряною пылью. Неподвижный пруд подул свежестью на усталого пешехода и заставил его отдохнуть на берегу. Всё тихо; в глубокой чаще леса слышались только раскаты соловья. Непреодолимый сон быстро стал смыкать ему зеницы; усталые члены готовы были забыться и онеметь; голова клонилась... «Нет, эдак я засну еще здесь!» — говорил он, подымаясь на ноги и протирая глаза. Оглянулся: ночь казалась перед ним еще блистательнее. Какое-то странное, упоительное сияние примешалось к блеску месяца. Никогда еще не случалось ему видеть подобного. Серебряный туман пал на окрестность. Запах от цветущих яблонь и ночных цветов лился по всей земле. С изумлением глядел он в неподвижные воды пруда...<sup>43</sup>

The oak forest grew dark, majestically and gloomily. Only the tip of the forest facing towards the moon was sprinkled with a light, silver dust. The still pond breathed freshly upon the tired wanderer and persuaded him to rest upon the shore. All was silent; in the great copse of the forest only the twitters of nightingales was heard. An overwhelming sleep started to close his eyes. Weary limbs were ready to doze off and grow numb. His head drooped... “No, or else I might fall asleep here!” – he said, standing and rubbing his eyes. He looked around: the night before him seemed to sparkle. Some kind of strange, flowing radiance mixed with the splendor of the moon. Never again did he see anything like it. A silver mist settled around him. The scent of blossoming apple trees and of night flowers flowed across the earth. In amazement, he looked upon the still waters of the pond...

Levko stumbles through fields and forest before succumbing to the surreal setting sprinkled with silver dust. Like Pushkin’s monk beset with daytime visions of the *rusalka*, Levko’s encounter begins with an involuntary invasion of the senses. As he yields to the strange influence of the dreamlike setting, Gogol uses the language of compulsion: the fresh breeze of the pond “forces” him to lie upon the bank and he is “overwhelmed” by sleep that forces his eyes shut.<sup>44</sup>

Atmospheric irregularities and stimuli further compromise his perception. The night glows with strange flashes of moonlight as a thick silver cloud settles about him. The heavy scent of night blossoms fills his lungs. Experiencing this total saturation of his senses, Levko looks “in amazement” (*s izumleniem*) upon the pond where he will soon catch a vision of the *rusalka*. This

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<sup>43</sup> Gogol 147.

<sup>44</sup> Заставил – I have translated this in the block quote as “persuaded”, but “forced” is more literal. Непреодолимый – “overwhelming.”

expression of amazement is at last an affective indication that the following encounter is unusual, unfamiliar, and thus constitutes an aberrative event within the narrative space. Levko's reaction is consistent with his skepticism towards the tale of the drowned stepdaughter and indicates that this is not a world in which supernatural interference is common or expected.

The scene thus suggests an encounter with the supernatural by drawing upon familiar cues: Levko introduced the tale of the forsaken daughter in chapter one and returns to the fabled site of her demise. Although neither Levko nor the narrator ever term her a *rusalka*, the environment, figuration, and the circumstances of her death all suggest this designation. Every moment of her tale involves two inseparable environments: the forest and pond, starting with Hanna looking out at the small hut: "the forest, embraced with shade, threw upon it a wild gloom. The walnut grove split at its base and ran towards the pond."<sup>45</sup> When Levko encounters the forsaken daughter in chapter five, he sees a girl with an oddly captivating beauty that invokes several traits of the *rusalka*:

Притаивши дух, не дрогнув и не спуская глаз с пруда, он, казалось, переселился в глубину его и видит: наперед белый локоть выставился в окно, потом выглянула приветливая головка с блестящими очами, тихо светившими сквозь темно-русые волны волос, и оперлась на локоть. И видит: она качает слегка головою, она машет, она усмехается...<sup>46</sup>  
[...]

Длинные ресницы ее были полуопущены на глаза. Вся она была бледна, как полотно, как блеск месяца; но как чудна, как прекрасна! Она засмеялась...<sup>47</sup>

[...]  
Голос ее, который вдруг было возвысился, остановился. Ручьи слез покатались по бледному лицу. Какое-то тяжелое, полное жалости и грусти чувство сперлось в груди парубка.<sup>48</sup>

Holding his breath, not moving and not taking his eyes from the pond, he seemed to drop into the depths and look: before him a white elbow was placed in the window, then a welcoming head looked with brilliant eyes, quietly glowing beneath dark auburn wavy hair as she leaned on her elbow. And he sees her lightly turn her head, wave, and smile.  
[...]

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<sup>45</sup> Gogol 130. "...лес, обнимая своею тенью, бросал на него дикую мрачность; ореховая роща стлалась у подножия его и скатывалась к пруду."

<sup>46</sup> Gogol 148.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Gogol 149.



Her long eyelashes were half lowered over her eyes. She was entirely white like a sheet, like moonlight. But how strange, how beautiful! She laughed...

[...]

Her voice, which was suddenly raised, stopped. Trails of tears ran across the pale face. Some sort of heavy feeling full of pity and sadness pierced through the heart of the young man.

Her pale skin, “palid as a sheet, like moonlight” (*bledna, kak polotno, kak blesk mesiatsa*) is again emphasized here along with her “dark auburn wavy hair” (*temno-rusyie volny volos*).<sup>49</sup> Beyond physical features, her activities also correspond with typical behaviors: she “lightly turns her head, waves, and smiles” (*Ona kachaet slegka golovoiu, ona mashet, ona usmekhaetsia*). In recounting the tale to Hanna, Levko says that after drowning herself in the pond, she would appear on moonlit nights leading a group of other drowned maidens who bathe in the moonlight and dance the *khorovod* – a round dance typically associated with *rusalki*.<sup>50</sup> This again alludes to the popular folk belief that *rusalki* are the transformed spirits of women who have drowned themselves.

The encounter unfolds within a recognizable motif of a midnight wanderer arrested by a *rusalka*, yet certain aspects of this encounter perpetuate a narrative of instability that prevents the tale from fully resolving in favor of the phenomenal or the supernatural. Levko’s own easy familiarity with the codes and rituals of *rusalki* undermines his open skepticism of the tale of the forsaken daughter. Despite being so dismissive of the tale in chapter one, he immediately accepts her presence and identity in chapter five. When charged with unmasking the stepmother who is masquerading as a *rusalka*, Levko readily accepts the task and even identifies the witch quite

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<sup>49</sup> The description of her hair may also allude to a divergent account of the *rusalka* that attests to her red-tinted hair (rather than green) and is sometimes proposed as yet another potential etymology for the unusual name (*rusalka* as derived from *rusyi* (auburn)).

<sup>50</sup> Gogol’s *rusalki* also play a game called “crow” (*voron*). He includes a note on this game in his encyclopedia of Ukrainian dialect and culture: “У ворона: Одна, взявшись за другую, вереницею кроется под начальством передней, защищающей их от одной, представляющей ворона. Когда ворону удастся поймать которую-нибудь из них, выключая предводительствующей, он становится в ряд, а пойманная представляет уже ворона.” (“One, holding onto another, in a row are hiding themselves behind the first in line, the one protecting them from the one playing the crow. When the crow succeeds in catching one of them, with the exception of the leader, she will then stand in line and the captured player becomes the crow.”) (Gogol commentary 556).

easily. Levko's incongruous reactions of amazement followed by familiarity foster uncertainty regarding the role of the *rusalka*. After the sudden and unexpected introduction of the supernatural into the tale, the chapter ends by casting doubt on the encounter, further muddying the existential waters:

Белая ручка протянулась, лицо ее как-то чудно засветилось и засияло... С непостижимым трепетом и томительным биением сердца схватил он записку и... проснулся.<sup>51</sup>

The small white arm extended, her face somehow strangely glowed and shone... With incomprehensible hesitation and torturous beating of his heart, he took up the note and... awoke.

As she hands a note to Levko, he takes it with “incomprehensible” (*nepostizhimi*) hesitation, underscoring the epistemological uncertainty surrounding his interactions with her. The final line suggests that Levko's unusual experience was nothing more than a dream, brought to an end when he awakens. The ruse continues in chapter six, titled “The Awakening” (*Probuzhdenie*), when he wonders aloud, “Did I really sleep?”<sup>52</sup> The enchanted pond and hut now revert to their previous stagnation, stripped of any suggestion of the supernatural. Yet, looking down into his hand, he finds the note. This single material artifact subverts the dream frame and fosters uncertainty about the narrative events.

Gogol's appropriation of the *rusalka* legend thus develops out of a confrontation between conflicting realities of the folkloric and the fantastic. The *rusalka* tale, as it exists in Levko's retelling of local legend, follows the typical formula and codes of folklore. Yet the fantastic episodes of the narrative subsequently develop against this expectation. When Levko actually encounters the *rusalka*, she is far from the “evil spirit” of folklore. She is instead presented sympathetically as a neglected daughter who ultimately aids Levko in exchange for his help. Yet the encounter is predicated upon indeterminate conditions of vision that compromise Levko's

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<sup>51</sup> Gogol 150.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

judgment. Overwhelmed by flashes of moonlight and the silver shimmer of the forests, he succumbs to the *rusalka's* reality. When Levko gazes steadily into the pond, seeming to “drop into the depths” and catch his first sight of her, the moment marks a crossing into the *rusalka's* realm of the fantastic. In a shift reminiscent of the development seen in Pushkin's ballad, the improbable unfolds against a backdrop of the fantastic.

In Gogol's prose adaptation of the *rusalka* legend and in others of the period, the demon's origin is explained and she is humanized with a sympathetic tale.<sup>53</sup> Although the character is rounded out with psychological motivations and a biography, she retains the same sedimentations as the *rusalki* of poetry: the moonlit wanderings, forest *khorovery* dances, and her ethereal pale beauty. Besides these rituals, the *rusalka's* entire existence is reduced to a phantom echo of her mortal sin – the act of suicide. Despite the biographical information Levko provides at the start of the tale, the forsaken daughter nevertheless appears before him as a beautiful enigma stripped of any humanizing details. As he beholds her white arm, flowing hair, and beautiful face, the characterizing biographic details yield to the purely imagistic quality of her figuration in these scenes of encounter. Turning again to Belinskii, his observations in his essay on Aleksandr Griboedov's play “Woe from Wit” offer insights into the persistence of poetic images:

Поэт мыслит образами; он не *доказывает* истины, а *показывает* ее. Но поэзия не имеет цели вне себя – она сама себе цель; следовательно, поэтический образ не есть что-нибудь внешнее для поэта или второстепенное, не есть средство, но есть цель: в противном случае он не был бы образом, а был бы символом.<sup>54</sup>

The poet thinks in images. He does not *prove* the truth, but rather *shows* it. But poetry does not contain a goal beyond itself – poetry itself is its own goal. Consequently, a poetic image is not

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<sup>53</sup> Representative works include Pushkin's *Rusalka* dramatic fragment of 1829 in which the main character, Natasha, is jilted by her lover and drowns herself in the Dnieper to become Tsarina of the *rusalki* below. Gogol presents another sympathetic *rusalka* in “*Strashnaia mest'*” (A Terrible Vengeance, 1831-32) in which the daughter takes on characteristics of a *rusalka* as a result of the dark machinations of her sorcerer father. See also Orest Somov's “*Rusalka*” (1829) and Vasilii Zhukovskii's verse translation of Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's novella *Undine*.

<sup>54</sup> Belinskii, *Gore ot uma*, 293.

anything external to the poet or anything secondary; it is not a means, but is a goal. If it were otherwise, it would be a symbol and not an image.

Belinskii's axiom applies equally to Romantic prose as to poetry: both styles are demonstrative rather than explanatory. In Gogol's story, we find no laborious articulation of every detail, fact, or logical connection between events. Narrative events unfurl without explanation, placing the interpretive burden upon the reader. The *rusalka* consequently retains her function as an inviolate image (*obraz*) – not a means but an end unto itself with no symbolic potential. She invokes a complicated and irrational truth without testifying to it.

#### Mikhail Lermontov – Affirming and Subverting the *rusalka*

Mikhail Lermontov's work is an important contribution to the literary life of the *rusalka* for asserting and later subverting these tales. In his 1829 ballad "Rusalka," the poem concretizes established *rusalka* tropes including sedimentations of Germanic motifs. Similar to Pushkin's ballad, Lermontov opens on a scene between environments:<sup>55</sup>

Русалка плыла по реке голубой,  
Озаряема полной луной;  
И старалась она доплеснуть до луны  
Серебристую пену волны.

A rusalka swam along the river blue,  
Illuminated by a full moon;  
And she tried to splash to the moon  
By means of the silver foam of the waves.

И шума и крутясь колебала река  
Отраженные в ней облака;  
И пела русалка – и звук ее слов  
Долетал до крутых берегов. (1-8)

And, crashing and swirling, the river shook  
The clouds above reflected in it;  
And the *rusalka* sang – and the sound of her words  
Reached the steep mountains.

Her words draw us from the waters to the steep cliffs: "And the rusalka sang – and the sound of her words / Reached the steep mountains" (*I pela rusalka – i zvuk ee slov / Doletal do krutykh beregov*, 7-8). Lermontov's *rusalka* differs from her sisters of legend in her longing for seaside cliffs rather than tumbling in branches or through fields.<sup>56</sup> Her mournful song instead stirs

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<sup>55</sup> See p. 152-153 in the appendix for the full text of Lermontov's "Rusalka."

<sup>56</sup> See the second stanza of the first canto of Pushkin's narrative in verse *Руслан и Людмила*: "Там чудеса: там леший бродит,/ Русалка на ветвях сидит" ("Such wonders there: there the forest demon stalks,/ and the *rusalka*

memories of Lorelei atop a cliff with its characteristic echo. For Lermontov and other late-Romantic Russian writers, Heinrich Heine's own "Lorelei" ballad was more widely recognized in Russia than Brentano's initial adaptation of the legend.<sup>57</sup> Heine's version places greater emphasis on Lorelei's song which brings about the demise of the nearby mariners:

Ich glaube, die Wellen verschlingen  
Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn;  
Und das hat mit ihrem Singen  
Die Lore-Ley gethan (21-24)

I believe the waves will engulf  
Both mariner and boat in the end;  
And that with her singing  
Lorelei has brought this about

Lermontov's warrior (*vitiaz'*) suffers a similar fate, falling prey to the "jealousy of the waves" (*dobycha revnivoi volny*) and ending in the arms of the rusalka below. Her mournful siren song, comprising three of the seven stanzas, rises to the heights of the cliffs as if in search of another victim. Considered as a whole, Lermontov's mournful siren is a *rusalka* in name only, appearing within a Germanic topos in a Lorelei-type motif – seated at the water's edge with her siren-song echoing against the cliffs. While the water spirits of both traditions present similar motivations and behaviors, Lermontov's realization of these tropes in this early ballad resonates more strongly with Germanic sirens and undines. In this poem, the crisis of faith common to encounters with *rusalki* of folklore is replaced with sentimental attention to the *rusalka*'s lament – a song that is both mournful and erotic in its description of her kisses and caresses of the fallen warrior. Whereas the *rusalka* of folklore appears unexpectedly to challenge the moral convictions of pious wanderers, Lermontov's poem yields to the *rusalka*'s lyric voice. Shifting from the periphery, the *rusalka* stands at the center and holds the reader's attention. This foregrounding offers another link to the careful positioning of liminal female figures in moments

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sits in the branches"). See chapter 5 on "Rusalki" and chapter 6 on "Rusal'skie obriady" in Zelenin's *Ocherkii russkoi mifologii* which cite several tales mentioning *rusalki* appearing in fields.

<sup>57</sup> Although referred to generally as "Lorelei", the title of Heine's ballad is "Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten" ("I know not what it could mean"), (1824). This poem can be found on p. 152 of the Appendix.

of *Augentäuschung*. The allure of an idealized past takes the shape of an eroticized female figure that draws the male gaze.

Ten years later, Lermontov completed his novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, which offers a final ironic look at the inheritance of German forms. Completed at what is arguably the end of Russian romanticism, this work reflects on this influence as it yields to the dominance of realism. The chapter “Taman” demonstrates Lermontov’s own awareness of these influences as he deliberately ironizes established tropes. Upon arriving in Taman’, Pechorin’s mental excitement predisposes him to read supernatural influence into his surroundings, which are cast in familiar romantic clichés: “A full moon shone upon the reed roof” (*polnyi mesiats svetil na kamyshovuiu kryshu*) – and “a precipice dropped down towards the sea” (*Bereg obryvom spuskalsia k moriu*). Soon the moon’s rays are broken by clouds and a mist gathers: “In the meantime, the moon began to clothe itself in clouds and fog rose over the sea” (*Mezhdu tem luna nachala odevat’sia tuchami i na more podnialsia tuman*).<sup>58</sup> This romantic *Stimmung* stays with Pechorin and colors his twilight encounter with an enigmatic young woman whom he spies beside the sea with flowing hair and an impish manner. To him, she is a “true *rusalka*” (*nastoiashchaia rusalka*), “my undine again runs in skips” (*bezhit opiat’ vpripryzhku moia undina*), “there she was, my undine” (*to byla ona, moia undina*), and “my *rusalka*” (*moiu rusalku*).<sup>59</sup> This fanciful notion complements the setting in creating the expectation of an encounter with the supernatural:

...передо мной тянулось ночью бурю взволнованное море, и однообразный шум его, подобный ропоту засыпающего города, напомнил мне старые годы, перенес мои мысли на север, в нашу холодную столицу. Волнуемый воспоминаниями, я забылся... Так прошло около часа, может быть и более... Вдруг что-то похожее на песню поразило мой слух. Точно, это была песня, и женский, свежий голосок, — но откуда?.. Прислушиваюсь — напев старинный, то протяжный и печальный, то быстрый и живой. Оглядываюсь — никого нет кругом; прислушиваюсь снова — звуки как будто падают с неба. Я поднял

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<sup>58</sup> Lermontov 226-7.

<sup>59</sup> Lermontov 230, 231, 232, 234.

глаза: на крыше хаты моей стояла девушка в полосатом платье с распущенными косами, настоящая русалка. Защитив глаза ладонью от лучей солнца, она пристально всматривалась в даль, то смеялась и рассуждала сама с собой, то запевала снова песню.

Before me stretched the sea, agitated by the storm of the previous night, and its monotonous roar, like the murmur of a town over which slumber is beginning to creep, recalled bygone years to my mind, and transported my thoughts northward to our cold Capital. Agitated by my recollections, I became oblivious to my surroundings... About an hour passed thus, perhaps even longer. Suddenly something resembling a song struck upon my ear. It was a song, and the voice was a woman's, young and fresh—but, where was it coming from?... I listened; it was a harmonious melody—now long-drawn out and plaintive, now swift and lively. I looked around me—there was nobody to be seen. I listened again—the sounds seemed to be falling from the sky. I raised my eyes. On the roof of my cabin was standing a young girl in a striped dress and with her hair hanging loose—a regular *rusalka*. Shading her eyes from the sun's rays with the palm of her hand, she was gazing intently into the distance. At one time, she would laugh and talk to herself, at another, she would strike up her song anew.<sup>60</sup>

Beside the stormy sea, he hears the woman's eerie song from above. The setting, her appearance, and her charming song create the expectation of a Lorelei-type encounter. Whatever fanciful expectations the reader may form of an ethereal siren luxuriating atop a cliff are thwarted once she appears on the roof of a peasant's cabin. Lermontov subverts the typical moment of wonderment by framing her with banalities. In place of a flowing veil or glistening unadorned limbs, Pechorin's *rusalka* wears a simple striped dress. The hidden grotto and sharp cliff are traded for a peasant's cabin; her siren-song is a jumble of murmurs and nonsense. Pechorin later relates his impression of the girl with eyes veiled by romantic associations: “long auburn hair, a sort of golden glow to the lightly burned skin of her neck and shoulders, and an especially straight nose” (*dlinnye rusye volosy, kakoi-to zolotisty otliv ee slegka zagoreloi kozhi na shee i plechakh i osobenno pravil'nyi nos*).<sup>61</sup> Her flowing hair and luminescent skin “captivate”

Pechorin, who continues to read a supernatural influence in her very movements and bearing. In

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<sup>60</sup> Lermontov 230. English translation from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/913/913-h/913-h.htm>.

<sup>61</sup> Lermontov 231. Recall that in some folktales, *rusalki* have auburn (*rusyi*) hair which prompted some to believe that her name was taken from this feature.

her smile, he sees something undefined (*v ee ulybke bylo chto-to neopredelennoe*) and he marvels at her “enigmatic talk” (*zagadochnye rechi*) and “strange songs” (*strannye pesni*).<sup>62</sup>

Pechorin advances a German context for his mythological associations by comparing her to Goethe’s character Mignon from *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. While Mignon does not belong to the class of Germanic mermaids or water nymphs, the association nevertheless places her within a context of ethereal German maidens. A more subtle association occurs in Pechorin’s use of *undina*, which he uses interchangeably with *rusalka* to describe the girl. The term is antecedent to *rusalka*, most likely borrowed into Russian either by way of French (*ondine*) or German (*Undine*). Tales of German *Undinen* (mermaids) were already popular in Russia, due in part to Vasilii Zhukovskii’s translation efforts. By 1839, Zhukovskii’s translation of Friedrich de la Motte Fouque’s novella *Undine* was known and contributes to the term’s Germanic association. In the end, however, the atmosphere of mystery and strong suggestion of otherworldly influence are deflated by the banality of the girl’s secret – Pechorin has only stumbled upon a hapless band of minor smugglers with an eccentric young woman as their lookout. Lermontov’s story is the final word in this chapter as it no longer seeks to advance the *rusalka* legend but instead assumes its existence in the cultural imagination. The assumption itself, supplemented by his conscious ironization of established tropes finding their origins in Germanic tales, completes the trajectory of the *rusalka*’s transition into the world of letters.

#### “Double Faith” and the Indeterminacy of *Augentäuschung*

In tracing the *rusalka*’s transformations as she moves from oral tradition into the nineteenth-century literary space, we find a figure weighted with cultural accretions that further complicate Belinskii’s question that has focused our literary investigation, lending it social and

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



historical relevance: is Russian literature a reflection of society and of the spirit of the people? Belinskii responds to his own literary-historical musings seven years later in an 1841 essay reflecting on Russia's literary bounty of the previous year, declaring: "Literature is the consciousness of the people. In it, as in a mirror, spirit and life are reflected."<sup>63</sup> If we accept this premise, we nevertheless must wonder which people and what life is reflected? In drawing on representative Romantic works from Pushkin, Gogol, and Lermontov, we have observed the various deployments of the *rusalka* figure as a site of negotiating intersecting social and cultural influences. Poetic and prose appropriations alike infuse figurations of the *rusalka* with folk imagery and rituals to endow the figure with the authority of cultural authenticity and tradition that is nevertheless in tension with demonstrable sedimentations of Germanic motifs. Despite the inclusion of essentially Slavic characteristics, the *rusalka*'s function as a threshold figure catalyzing a moment of ethical and subjective confusion reveals the impress of *Augentäuschung* on Russian romantic figurations. Yet the Russian Romantic evolution of the *Augentäuschung* motif is distinct from its Germanic predecessors. Rather than straining against the intersection of conflicting realms, Russian authors preserve them with equal standing in the cultural imagination. This differs from the Goethean skepticism of moments of visual confusion observed in chapter one of this dissertation which manifested as aesthetic deception. The German Romantics remained wary of perceptual confusion in the representative works analyzed in chapter two. Each text directly juxtaposed a pagan avatar of antiquity against Christian counterparts, eventually resolving in favor of one or the other. These central figures fulfilled a

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<sup>63</sup> Belinskii, *Literature* 1840, 473. "Литература есть сознание народа: в ней, как в зеркале, отражается его дух и жизнь."

totemic function as temporal artifacts saturated with historical and subjective memory that was undermined by an unresolved question of agency in the critical moment.

I argue that the Russian development preserves sedimentations of indeterminacy while unfolding comfortably in the culturally inherited space created through a vestigial “dual faith.”<sup>64</sup> The *rusalka*'s composite nature creates an affinity with the figures of flesh and stone from the German romantics, linking past with present, Christian with pagan, and heralding moral confusion. This selection of texts testifies to a mode of critical reasoning observable in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature that is created by the fantastic, which renders overlapping realities with permeable layers. In the Russian manifestation of narrative indeterminacy, I have noted a significant evolution from the mutually exclusive realms observed in German texts – Eichendorff's Florian can remain in his present or escape to the idealized past, but not choose both. Gogol's Levko, however, moves easily between the realities of his present (a world skeptical of magic) and the sudden eruption of a spiritual realm created by the *rusalka*. This malleability anticipates the Symbolist poetics of unlikely correspondences in the twentieth-century considered in the following chapter.

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<sup>64</sup> See Lotman and Uspenskii's “Rol' dual'nykh modelei v dinamike russkoi kul'tury (do kontsa XVIII veka)” for an extended discussion of polarity preserved in Russian culture beginning in the Middle Ages.

## Chapter Four: Symbolist Poetics of Correspondence

Valerii Briusov, still relatively unknown by 1895, caught critics' attention with a single verse poem published in the third installment of *Russian Symbolists (Russkie simvolisty)*, a publication for the nascent Russian Symbolist movement. "Oh, cover your pale legs!" ran the monostich, igniting a flurry of interpretation and indignation.<sup>1</sup> Foremost among his detractors was renowned critic, poet, and novelist Vladimir Solov'ev, who offered a humorous reading of the "most perfect poem ever written by Briusov," suggesting that "for the sake of clarity, [he] add 'for otherwise you will catch a cold'; without this, Mr. Briusov's advice, apparently addressed to a person suffering from anemia, is the most meaningful product of all Symbolist literature."<sup>2</sup> Yet in this flippant dismissal of the Symbolist project and Briusov's own early contribution, Solov'ev's interpretation nevertheless demonstrates the wealth of semantic possibilities fostered by Symbolist poetics of elision. Although the verse contains no clues as to the identity of the addressee or the context, Solov'ev fills in these details to create a facetious situation that would resonate with readers. As Iurii Tynianov noted in his analysis of Briusov's poetics in *Archaists and Innovators (Arkhaisty i novatory)*, the omissions were perhaps more provocative than the content: "'Why only one line?' was readers' first question...and only then did they ask 'what are these legs?'"<sup>3</sup> Briusov's skillful play with ambiguity of content and form develops the radical indeterminacy that was the hallmark of romantic poets of the nineteenth-century.

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<sup>1</sup> Briusov, *SS* vol. 1, 36. "O, zakroi svoi blednye nogi!" December 1894. First appeared in the third installment of *Russkie Simvolisty*.

<sup>2</sup> Solov'ev 152-153: "Для полной ясности следовало бы, пожалуй, прибавить: „ибо иначе простудишься“, но и без этого совет г. Брюсова, обращенный очевидно к особе, страдающей малокровием, есть самое осмысленное произведение всей символической литературы."

<sup>3</sup> Tynianov 526.

In the first two chapters, I considered the ways in which the German Romantics challenged man's faith in empiricism. Beginning with Goethe's poetics of deception, we followed the fallible perceiver's experience of threshold figures, caught between forms and realities, which muddled the boundary between deception and misinterpretation. In the metamorphoses of statuesque figures, goddesses and ephemeral water demons – veiled in linens and fog – the romantics rendered the divine mystery visually. To return to Briusov's monostich, the work effectively furthers this device, but by shifting the locus of indeterminacy. In the pale legs of the subject spied by the poet, one sees the inheritance from Diana-type statues of the Romantics, pale and exposed to the wandering poet's gaze. While drawing loosely on a similar image, Briusov underscores the instability of the figure by omitting context and rendering her only partially. In following the thread of indeterminacy into twentieth-century Russian literature, this chapter will demonstrate the shift from a poetics of deception to a poetics of mystification.

The nascent Symbolist movement of the early twentieth-century thus turns to Romantic forms to combat literary precepts. Resisting pressure by Realist authors and critics to limit art to moral didacticism, the Symbolists reimagined the role of art in revolutionary poetic forms. By investigating the varied poetic representations of the divine feminine in Parnassian Decadent verse and the Dionysian cohort of second generation Symbolists, I reveal a shared preoccupation with moments of *Täuschung*.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Romantic authors crafted moments of aesthetic deception to sow skepticism of the authority of empirical experience, the Symbolist deployment of mystical ambiguity worked to explode the limits of artistic expression. Both movements advanced a function for art beyond mere description by presenting polysemous mystical situations that demonstrated the ambiguity of lived experience. The aesthetic challenge concentrated within

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<sup>4</sup> Ger. "deception." The term includes self-deception, deception worked by a foreign agent upon a subject, or substitution/exchange. See an extended discussion in chapter 1.

moments of *Augentäuschung* in Romantic literature thus reemerges as a tool for the Symbolists to promote poetry as a vehicle between the phenomenal and the supernatural. In my proposed exploration of the manifold deployments of mystical imagery that testify to the reemergence of Romantic literary forms in Russian Symbolism, I consider the various engagements featured in the lyric verse of Valerii Briusov, Aleksandr Blok, and Viacheslav Ivanov.

### Valerii Briusov

The 1840s marked a renewed interest in sociological topics with Russian authors turning toward the peasantry, the urban poor, and the merchant class for inspiration. In the growing tide of realist prose, awe of the fantastic was replaced by a fascination for nature and realistic description. A major proponent of the genre was the critic Nikolai Chernyshevskii, whose 1855 *Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality* (*Esteticheskie otnosheniia iskusstva k deistvitel'nosti*) proposed principles for critics to assess literary masterpieces. He advocated a materialistic aesthetic that developed from the tenet that “the beautiful is life” and art therefore is inferior to reality. In following with this assertion, art could never be superior to life. This theory relegated art exclusively to reminding man of the beauty in life as he understands it. In fulfilling this utilitarian purpose, art thus should serve a didactic role as a “textbook on life.” Lev Tolstoy would further advance the didactic function of art in his *What is Art?* (*Chto takoe iskusstvo?*), which would elicit a response from the budding Decadent movement in Moscow and inspire a response to shape their aesthetic agenda.

## Decadent Verse and “Free Art”

The movement from a materialistic aesthetic of realism towards a ‘decadent’ verse of indeterminacy is largely due to the efforts of Valerii Briusov.<sup>5</sup> Known less for his poetry and prose than for his organization of the Symbolist project, Briusov played a critical role in championing a movement that would shape future developments in Russian modernist literature. As the son of cork manufacturers, only two generations removed from the bonds of serfdom, Briusov was an unlikely leader for a movement that would eventually attract Russia’s literary elite. In the early stages, however, the existence of a growing movement was Briusov’s own illusion worked on the reading public by founding a literary journal, *The Cliffs (Skaly)*, with Symbolist contributors of his own invention. He later published the controversial anthology *The Russian Symbolists (Russkie Simvolisty)* in 1894 in which he modeled the ‘new poetry,’ offering examples of verse libre, lexical instrumentation, and the intentional obfuscation of meaning in the spirit of Mallarmé.<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Solov’ev’s criticism of the anthology inadvertently brought Briusov’s work to the attention of the literary public and reinforced the illusion of a growing Symbolist movement. Briusov built on this momentum to produce a second installment of *Russkie Simvolisty* which had increased to ten contributors, although these too were his own pseudonymous creations.

Briusov originally founded a literary movement that emphasized form and treated versification as a skilled craft, rejecting any pretensions to sudden inspiration (mystical or

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<sup>5</sup> As Joan Grossman notes in her chapter “Symbolism or Decadence?” in *Valery Bryusov and the Riddle of Russian Decadence*, the terms “Symbolism” and “Decadence” were used interchangeably in Russia and generally as pejoratives. She notes that Bryusov’s diary entries show him using the terms almost interchangeably before eventually growing to distinguish decadence as a “larger phenomenon relating to world outlook and lifestyle” whereas Symbolism would designate the artistic method itself.

<sup>6</sup> Tynianov 524.

supernatural) that would emerge in the subsequent generation.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the new Decadent poetics preached art as an autonomous creation.<sup>8</sup> Briusov's literary secularism was undoubtedly the product of his youthful "realistic education" in which he, by his own description, was "zealously protected from fairy tales and all 'devilry.'" Needless to say, there was no mention of religion and belief in God [to him] seemed the same kind of superstition as belief in house demons and *rusalki*.<sup>9</sup> This fierce pragmatism invariably motivated the aesthetic battles that would bracket the Parnassian period of early Symbolism. The early years of the Decadent movement were occupied struggling against positivist, materialist philosophy and the epigones of naturalism. The battle took form in Briusov's 1898 essay *On Art (O iskusstve)* and a 1903 lecture "Keys to Mysteries" ("Kliuchi Tain") in which he responded to Lev Tolstoy's extended reflection on the function of art in *What is Art? (Chto takoe iskusstvo?)*.<sup>10</sup> Briusov's response is focused largely on the second section of Tolstoy's book, which promotes didactic clarity and the moral functions of art. Far from explicating moral precepts, Briusov instead construes art as representing a moment preserved for all time. The artist can only express his individual soul and this is what gives art life.<sup>11</sup> In brief, "art in the name of purposeless Beauty (writ large) is dead art."<sup>12</sup> Radical, individual expression is the life force of art which Briusov sees as a fundamental link between romanticism, realism, and symbolism:

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<sup>7</sup> See Erlich 93-94. Victor Erlich dubs Briusov the "tireless literary toiler", noting his enthusiasm for the Soviet regime's praise of work and productivity. Erlich further notes Briusov's unusual figuration of his poetic vision as a "faithful ox": "Вперед мечта, мой верный вол! / Неволей, если не охотой, / Я близ тебя, мой кнут тяжел, / Я сам тружусь, и ты работай!" ("Forward my dream! My faithful ox! / Forward, willingly or unwillingly! / I am walking beside you, my whip is heavy, / I am toiling myself, so do not lag behind.").

<sup>8</sup> Rice 69-70.

<sup>9</sup> "Нечего и говорить, что о религии в нашем доме и помину не было вера в Боге мне казалось таким же предрассудком, как вера в домовых и русалок" (Mochul'skii 375).

<sup>10</sup> Briusov gave a lecture on aesthetics in 1903 at the Historical Museum in Moscow and again in April of the same year in Paris. The lecture would come to be published under the title "Kliuchi tain" ("Keys to Mysteries").

<sup>11</sup> Briusov *O iskusstve*, SS, vol. 6, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Briusov, "Kliuchi tain", SS vol. 6, 86. "Искусство во имя бесцельной Красоты (с большой буквы) – мертвое искусство."

История нового искусства есть прежде всего история его освобождения. Романтизм, реализм и символизм – это три стадии в борьбе художников за свободу. Они свергли наконец цепи рабствования разным случайным целям.<sup>13</sup>

The history of modern art is, first and foremost, the history of art's liberation. Romanticism, realism, and symbolism – these are three stages in artists' struggle for freedom. They at last cast off the chains of slavery to various arbitrary goals.

Although seemingly contradictory, “silence” was a critical tool for expressing the artist's soul.

This left the poet free to rely on poignant images, suggestion, and productive contrasts rather than extended description or further elaboration on moral points. One of the guiding stars in this impulse towards elision was the romantic poet Fedor Tiutchev. In his 1829 “Silentium!” early

Decadents saw confirmation of the ineffectiveness of literal description:

Как сердцу высказать себя?  
Другому как понять тебя?  
Поймет ли он, чем ты живешь?  
Мысль изреченная есть ложь.”

How can the heart express itself?  
How can another understand you?  
Will he understand what drives you?  
A thought, once spoken, is a lie.

When read through the aesthetic intervention of the Decadents, Tiutchev's poem describes the inadequacy of words in expressing the soul. Briusov's infamous one-line poem best exemplified this device by withholding context and identification. In this single verse, Briusov carefully selects a representative moment to express a particular mood. He reasons that most readers, when asked what they found especially striking about a poem, will quote a single verse that best captured the poem's meaning for them. Thus, “is it not clear that the ideal for the poet should be a single verse that would tell the reader what he wanted to tell him?”<sup>14</sup> Yet Briusov's coy omissions allow for conflicting interpretations that equally insinuate the supernatural and the banal. Despite Briusov's self-avowed secularism, he cites the Romantics as one source of inspiration. From his *Stephanos* collection, he turns to the familiar topos of the Lorelei:

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<sup>13</sup> Briusov, “Kliuchi tain”, *SS* v. 6, 93.

<sup>14</sup> Briusov, *SS* vol. 6, 568 commentary. “Не ясно ли отсюда, что идеалом для поэта должен быть такой один стих, который сказал бы душе читателя все то, что хотел сказать ему поэт?” From an interview with Briusov in “Новости”, 1895, Nov. 18, No. 318.



Помню вечер, помню лето,  
Рейна полные струи,  
Над померкшим старым Кёльном  
Золотые нимбы света,  
В этом храме богомольном –  
Взоры нежные твои...

I remember an evening, remember a summer,  
The full streams of the Rhein,  
Above old, fading Cologne were  
Golden nimbuses of light,  
In this sacrosanct temple –  
Your tender gazes...

Где-то пели, где-то пели  
Песню милой старины.  
Звуки, ветром тиховойным  
Донесенные, слабели  
И сливались, там, над Рейном,  
С робким ропотом волны.

Somewhere they sang, somewhere they sang  
A song of dear old times.  
The strains brought by a lightly blowing  
Breeze, dwindled  
And poured out across the Rhein,  
With the reluctant murmur of the waves. (1-12)

The poem unambiguously invokes the legend of the Lorelei as the poet reflects on the siren's familiar haunt, the Rhine river. At times the poem contains near quotations from Heine's Lorelei ballad.<sup>15</sup> Compare Briusov's "Где-то пели, где-то пели/ Песню милой старины" ("Somewhere they sang, somewhere they sang/ a dear, ancient song") with Heine: "Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten / kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn" ("A tale of ancient times/ will not leave my mind"). Similar to Heine's poet, Briusov's wanderer is drawn to the woman's eyes: "В этом храме богомольном - / Взоры нежные твои" ("In this devout temple - / Your tender glances"). Along with these thematic and lexical allusions to Heine's ballad is a much more overt invocation of Heine himself in the final two verses: "Но когда-то Heinrich Heine / В стройных строфах пел про нас!" ("But there was a time when Heinrich Heine / in solid verses sang about us!"). Without actively advancing Romantic philosophy, he draws on an almost nostalgic revival of Romantic images and devices. His work recreates slippages between fantasy and reality common to Romanticism and aligns this with the Symbolist investigation of unusual, often contradictory, correspondences. In his appropriation of this device, Briusov retains the female figure of fascination as the threshold between realities. Briusov's continuation of siren-like descendants of

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<sup>15</sup> From Heine's Lorelei ballad "Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten..."

the Lorelei is prevalent in his *Stephanos* collection which thematizes the precarious balance between reality and alternate realms.

### Valerii Briusov's "Tuman": A Pragmatic Poetics of the Supernatural

Briusov deploys this aesthetic of subtle suggestion and gesture in "Tuman" ("Mist", 1904) from *Stephanos*, his fifth collection of poetry.<sup>16</sup> His treatment of supernatural material particularly highlights divergent views on the function of art contemporary to his work on the collection. The hazy environment of "Tuman" creates ambiguity around the events that hover between the supernatural and the banal:

#### Туман<sup>17</sup>

Вдоль тихого канала  
Склоняют ветви ивы.  
Дорога льнет к воде,  
Но тени торопливы,  
И чу! ночная птица  
Кричит привет звезде.

Вдоль тихого канала  
Проходит вереница  
Поникших белых дев.  
Они идут устало,  
Закрыв вуалью лица  
И стан фатой одев.

Из тихого канала,  
Как белые громады,  
Встают ряды коней,  
И всадники их рады  
Дышать вечерней влагой,  
Спешат скорей, скорей!

Вдоль тихого канала  
Летят лихой ватагой  
И манят дев с собой,  
Им руки простирают –  
И белый плащ свивают  
С их белою фатой!

#### Mist

Along a quiet canal  
Ivies bend their branches.  
The road leans towards the water,  
But the shadows are impatient  
And oh, the nocturnal bird  
Cries its greetings to the star.

Along a quiet canal  
Proceeds a line  
Of drooping white maidens.  
They go forth wearily,  
Having covered their faces with a veil  
And standing covered in robes.

From the quiet canal,  
Like white masses,  
Rises a row of horses,  
And their riders, glad to  
Breathe the evening dew,  
Hurry faster and faster!

Along a quiet canal,  
They fly in a dashing crowd  
And beckon to the women  
Holding their hands out to them –  
And the white cloak swirls  
With their white robes!

<sup>16</sup> Στεφανος (Stephanos – Gk. wreath). Also published under the Russian *Venok* (wreath).

<sup>17</sup> Briusov, *SS* vol. 1, 373.

Briusov plays with the mystical without actually relying on it, leaving the burden of recognition/determination to the reader. He shrouds the scene in layers of obscurity, creating uncertainty at the visual level and serving as familiar heralds of the supernatural: veils (вуаль, фата), cloaks (плащ), fog (туман), and branches of ivy (ветви ивы) obscure the figures. Despite the obstructions, we may still recognize the familiar figure of the *rusalka* in a few subtle allusions throughout the work. By opening on a twilight scene beside the water, there is an underlying gesture towards the folkloric: a natural setting is emphasized with an unusual sympathy between the ethereal women and the environment. In the personification of the road that bows towards the water and birds crying to the stars, there is the suggestion of an imminent encounter with the supernatural. The figuration of the women themselves offers a substantial link with the traditional descriptions of *rusalki* while still leaving room for ambiguity. To return to the ethnographic information presented in chapter three, *rusalki* manifest as pale, beautiful women, often dressed in white garments. Beyond characteristics and setting, the activities of the women further suggest links with their folkloric sisters. As they proceed in a line along the canal, one may see a connection with the highly organized procession of the *khorovody* of the *rusalki* who dance at night. The veiled eroticism central to the poem is perhaps the strongest connection with the *rusalka* figure whose allure is central to folklore. As is clear in a 1907 poem titled “Rusalka” from the *Vse Napevy (All Songs)* collection, Briusov was quite familiar with these figurations and themes of *rusalki* from Russian folklore.<sup>18</sup> This poem figures the *rusalka* more explicitly, first with a clear identification in the title followed by her memories of *khorovody* and the songs of her fellow *rusalki*:<sup>19</sup>

Она любила хороводы

She loved *khorovody*

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<sup>18</sup> Briusov SS 1, 502 – 503.

<sup>19</sup> In the manuscript, Briusov originally titled the poem “Naiada” (“The Naiad”), but replaced it with “Rusalka” later. Briusov SS 1 commentary, 645.

И песня дев издалека,  
Когда ложилась мгла на воды  
И стыла темная река.

And the songs of the women from a distance,  
When darkness fell across the water  
And the dark river grew cold.

Following a similar formula as the *rusalka* poems of Pushkin or Lermontov, Briusov's poem culminates in an encounter between the water demon and young men:

Но, видя проходящих парней,  
Вечеровой порой, в тиши,  
Еще нежней, еще коварней  
Смеялась, зыбля камыши.

But, seeing a few lads walking past  
In the silence of the evening hour,  
She, ever more tenderly, ever more stealthily,  
Laughed, blowing about the reeds.

Breaking off her attempts to lure a group of children into the water, she turns her attention in this last stanza to a few men passing by the reed-lined river at night. In her predatory stance and clever smile, the *rusalka* appears to fulfill the traditional role of the preying demon. The strolling women of Briusov's "Tuman", in sharing key characteristics with the *rusalka*, gain a similar potentiality. Once the "dashing crowd" ("likhaia vataga") of men approaches, they are immediately drawn to the women. The men's cloaks and the women's veils intertwine.

Nevertheless, "Tuman" is far less explicit than "Rusalka" and leaves room for interpretive ambiguity. If the heavy fog is given a more sinister import – the heavy cloud that obscures the sins of the city – then the nighttime encounter could easily become recontextualized as prostitutes lingering along the canals soliciting passersby. The poem is descriptive with no emotional participation by the poet in the veiled eroticism. The poem thus allows for equal readings of the supernatural and the banal. The reader is engulfed in a haze and left to determine a context for the events.

In a 1906 review of Briusov's *Stephanos* collection, Aleksandr Blok remarked on the antinomic nature of Briusov's early writing – a relationship that he describes as a type of "doubling":

Исходная формула, я думаю, очевидна для всех читателей Брюсова за последние года: это Любовь и Смерть. Две зеркальные бездны бесконечно углубляют одна другую.”<sup>20</sup>

I believe that the primary formula is evident for all readers of Briusov in the past few years is Love and Death. Two mirrored abysses eternally deepening one another.

Blok thus sees the central confrontation between mutually exclusive realities in Briusov’s poetry as one in which both planes extended one another in a moment of reciprocal definition in equal but opposite directions. Blok’s observations support my reading of Briusov’s ‘pragmatic poetics’ which present situations that contain the potential to be viewed as common or supernatural occurrences. The crisis of perception can never reach fulfillment in the same moment and is determined by the reader. In this environment, the existential plane of Briusov’s poetic worlds rests on the precarious fulcrum of his female threshold figures, as much depends on their erotic address: is she predatory (a demon seeking to destroy the unwitting wanderer) or solicitous (a prostitute who requires the knowing participation of the other)?

Briusov’s carefully constructed perceptual crises are the product of his poetics of elision which grant the reader “freedom” of interpretation. “Tuman” allows for radically divergent fulfillments tending towards the fantastical and the banal similar to Briusov’s “O zakroi svoi blednye nogi.”<sup>21</sup> Noticeably absent are lyric emotions or divine inspiration in the supernatural fulfillment of the poem. As Iurii Tynianov observes, Briusov’s poetics of radical individual expression is nevertheless rooted in a workmanlike secularized methodology:

Слово, бывшее неприкосновенным сгустком, окруженным ореолом «вдохновения» предшествующей литературной теорий и практики, было изменяемо с почти

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<sup>20</sup> Blok SS 7, 180. *Stephanos* review, Moscow 1906.

<sup>21</sup> While many readers assumed the verse described a woman’s legs, such as in Vladimir Solov’ev’s humorous reading of the poem, the critic A. Izmailov read divine inspiration in the verse, asking Briusov: “What meaning is there in your one-verse poem on “pale legs?”...Is it not true that it is related to Christ’s cross?” “Какой смысл могло иметь Ваше одностиишие о «бледных ногах»? ...Правда ли, будто оно относилось к снятому с креста Христу?). From Briusov SS vol. 6, p. 568 commentary. Citation: A. Izmailov. *Literaturnyi Olimp*, Moscow, 1911, p. 395.

математической дерзостью. Вместо эмоциональной неприкосновенности «вдохновения» - нагой интеллектуальный подступ к слову вплотную. Вместо «поэта» - *пытатель*.<sup>22</sup>

The word, formerly an inviolable unit, surrounded by an aura of “inspiration” by preceding literary theory and practice would be changed with almost mathematical precision. Instead of the emotional inviolability of “inspiration”, there was the naked intellectual approach to the word. Instead of the “poet” – the “investigator.”

This stance would find ardent adversaries in the second generation of Symbolists of St.

Petersburg and incite the second aesthetic battle that would bracket the Decadent movement.

Viacheslav Ivanov

### ***Klaristy and Mistiki***

Despite Briusov’s continued literary and organizational involvement, the Symbolist movement eventually developed a schism along a chronological-geographical divide. In Moscow, several poets continued to pursue the tenets of ‘decadent’ art as theorized by Briusov. This group, comprised of the first generation of Symbolists, maintained that Symbolism (and poetry in general) should not be in the service of mysticism or metaphysics.<sup>23</sup> Instead, they advocated extreme individualism against the “slavery” of external inspiration. The second generation of Symbolists, concentrated mainly in St. Petersburg, instead sought to overcome individualism, largely seeking inspiration from a higher power. The Neo-Christians were the first to distance themselves theoretically from the Moscow Symbolists and seek to overcome individualism in the church.<sup>24</sup> For this new group of Symbolists, their works reflected a type of “God-seeking” mysticism. In a letter to P.P. Pertsov in March of 1910, Briusov characterizes the schism as “*klaristy*” (those who seek clarity) versus the “mystics”:

В нашем кругу, у ех-декадентов, великий раскол: борьба “кларистов” с “мистиками. Кларисты - это “Аполлон”, Кузмин, Маковский и др. “Мистики” – это московский “Мусагет”, Белый, Вяч[еслав] Иванов, Соловьев и др. В сущности, возобновлен дряхлый-предряхлый спор о свободном искусстве и тенденции. “Кларисты” защищают ясность

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<sup>22</sup> Tynianov 525.

<sup>23</sup> Rice 100.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

мысли, слога, образов, но это только форма, а в сущности они защищают “поэзию, коей цель - поэзия” <...> Мистики проповедуют “обновленный символизм”, была бы ancilla theologiae. Недавно у нас в “Свободной Эстетике” была великая баталия по этому поводу. Результат, кажется, тот, что “Мусагет” решительно отложился от “Скорпиона” в идейном отношении. Я, как Вы догадываетесь, всей душой с “кларистами.”<sup>25</sup>

In our circle, there is a great schism among the ex-Decadents: the battle between the “Clearists” and “Mystics.” The Clearists – this is “Apollo”, Kuzmin, Makovskii, and others. “The Mystics” – these are the Moscow “Musaget”, Belyi, Viacheslav Ivanov, Solov’ev, and others. In essence, an ancient quarrel over free and agenda-driven art has been renewed. The “Clearists” defend the clarity of thoughts, style, images; but this is only form whereas they, in essence, defend “poetry whose goal is poetry” [...] The Mystics promote the “renewed Symbolism”, as the ancilla theologiae [handmaiden of theology]. Not long ago in “Svobodnaia Estetika” (“Free Aesthetics”), we had a dispute on this topic. The result, it seems, was that “Musaget” differentiated itself decisively from “Skorpion.” As you can imagine, I am whole-heartedly with the “Clearists.”

Championing the new Petersburg-based movement was the scholar-poet Viacheslav Ivanov. In

his response to Briusov’s “Kliuchi tain”, he underscores the divide between the two schools.

Whereas Briusov’s quarrel is with new tendencies in style and form, Ivanov frames the debate as a fundamental dispute over the main *function* of art: “‘Kliuchi tain’ assumes the mystery to be some truth that is capable of being an object of cognition. Myth-making imposes its own truth [...] it gives material form to postulates of knowledge and, by affirming, creates. That is why art, for me is first and foremost a creative act [...] an act and not a means of cognition.”<sup>26</sup> For

Ivanov, the poet is the bearer of divine messages that cannot be communicated in everyday language. This notion of the inexpressible language of the divine necessarily posits two planes – the noumenal and the phenomenal – with only the poet to unite them. In this respect, Ivanov’s poetics is distinct from Briusov’s secular-leaning style, which merely allows for the supernatural.

In the poet’s communication of divine messages, Ivanov’s poetry assumes the existence and influence of the divine. Whereas in Briusov’s poetics the divide lies within the viewer through a bias of interpretation (or in his terminology, the *freedom* to see two fulfillments), Ivanov posits

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<sup>25</sup> Blok SS vol. 8, 404. The term “klaristy” taken from the movement of “Klarizm” promoted by M. Kuz’min in his article “О прекрасной ясности” in Apollon, 1910 #4.

<sup>26</sup> Pyman 180.

overlapping worlds of the noumenal and divine whose coexistence is not persistent, but rather occurs in exceptional moments of convergence external to the viewer. In many ways, Ivanov's notion of aesthetic confusion – an experience that is mystical and occurs on a plane beyond an individual's comprehension – is closely aligned with the German Romantic activity of *Täuschung*. As identified in the first two chapters of this dissertation, the central characteristics of this activity of *täuschen* are exchange, trade, or substitution. The decisive moment marking existential breaks is again triggered by a mystical female figure. If Briusov's threshold figures function as a fulcrum between mutually exclusive realms, Ivanov's women act as a catalyst that insert the mystical divine in critical moments. Ivanov's cycle "Serebrianyi Bor" offers an intriguing demonstration of this new theurgic ideal in Symbolist poetics.

### **Viacheslav Ivanov's "Serebrianyi Bor"**

Viacheslav Ivanov's final collection of poems, *Svet vechernii* (*Evening Light*), was composed from 1912 to 1944 and has not received the same scholarly attention as his earlier collections. Ivanov wrote the cycle "Serebrianyi bor" ("The Silver Forest") in August and September of 1919 in the "Gabai" sanatorium which was located within the Silver Forest park to the west of Moscow.<sup>27</sup> Unfolding over ten cantos, the cycle leads the reader in peregrinations through four basic topoi – city, river, sky, and forest. The second and third cantos are of particular interest for our analysis as they immerse the reader in a nightscape radiant with the immanent and all-encompassing divine.<sup>28</sup> Ivanov's verse supplements our exploration of the Symbolist relationship with aesthetic deception /mystical confusion by presenting an alternative

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<sup>27</sup> See the full text of "Serebrianyi bor" on p. 153-158 of the appendix.

<sup>28</sup> First published in the "Московский альманах" (1923) with the subtitle "лирический цикл" ("lyrical cycle") and the date: "Серебряный Бор. Август – сентябрь 1919 г." ("The Silver Forest". August-September, 1919"). From the commentary by R. E. Pomirchii in Ivanov's collected works, *Stikhotvoreniia, Poemy, Tragedia* (Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1995), p. 340.



to Briusov's exclusive realities. In "Serebrianyi bor", Ivanov presents a world in which the mystical universe radiates powerfully behind the quotidian mask of the noumenal. The divine – clothed in mythic forms, speech, and temporalities – penetrates the poet's reality, leaving a secondary impress of the supernatural that the poet glimpses in his environment.

Ivanov turns to Schiller's parable of "Die Teilung der Erde" to affirm the existential shadowing of the divine behind the empirical in his "Testaments of Symbolism." Schiller describes a poet who climbs Olympus to commune with the gods, then returns to earth only to see language co-opted into everyday use so that he must speak the language of the divine instead, only to be misunderstood by the crowd.<sup>29</sup> The poet is the sole linkage between the two worlds and "all that was left to the poet was to recall the language he had been granted to converse with the heaven dwellers, and in this way, he became temporarily inaccessible to the understanding of the crowd."<sup>30</sup> In a variation on Briusov's poetics of omission (avoiding overt description to allow for the full spectrum of meaning to arise in the mind of the reader), Ivanov instead sees poetic communication as fundamentally flawed translation. The subtle radiation of mythic forms first saturates the temporality of the cycle as the poet moves from the city towards the forest. In contrast to the continuous chronology of the city, the temporality of the natural environs narrated by the poet is isochronous. These temporal recurrences can be attributed to the cyclical reemergence of mythological entities that occur throughout the cycle.

The lyric poet draws us beyond the city limits in the first canto, finally landing upon a river beside the silver copse at night in the second canto. The move away from daylight and the town towards the eventide idyll is marked with a change in meter, switching to a ternary meter from the binary meters that dominated the Solo and first canto. As the traveler gazes into the

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<sup>29</sup> Ivanov, *Testaments*, 40-41.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* 41.

river, the second canto unfolds in a series of doubled images, echoes, and repetitions.<sup>31</sup> Unlike Briusov's mutually defined and opposing abysses, reflection and doubling in Ivanov's verse illuminate the trace of a divine presence hidden in the empirical world. The first stanza presents two instances of mirror-like reflections, beginning with the inverted trees of the forest visible in the water:

Лес опрокинут в реке.	The forest overturns in the river.
Веспер в ночном челноке	Vesper, in the eventide bark
Выплыл, — и вспыхнул алмаз	Surfaced, — and a diamond flashed
Где-то в бездонной реке.	Somewhere in the bottomless river.

Beyond the trees, Vesper, the evening star, emerges into the night and a corresponding “diamond” flashes in the river. The simple correspondence draws attention to the mirroring of the abyss of the sky in the bottomless river (бездонная река). In Ivanov's vertical aesthetics, the heavens are the home of the divine. To invert this space toward the earth is to suggest a complement in the opposing trajectory. In this initial image of the mirrored star, reflection is a device heralding the meeting of the inverse force of the divine and the terrestrial.

The subsequent acts of reflection extend beyond the visual to include temporal repetitions in the second stanza:

Видел я в жизни не раз	Not just once in my life did I see
В сей вечереющий час,	At this evening hour,
Как выплывал он и гас,	How he surfaced and extinguished,
Веспер на сонной реке:	Vesper, in the somnolent river:
Что же в старинной тоске	So why, in ancient melancholy,
Слезы струятся из глаз?	Do tears flow from my eyes?

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<sup>31</sup> Ivanov, *Svet Vechernii*, 28-29 cantos 2 and 3.

The poet has seen Vesper on many occasions at this twilight hour. As the star surfaces and extinguishes above the somnolent river, the evening setting is thematized.<sup>32</sup> The prominent invocation of twilight settings in “Evening Light” reflects a preoccupation with moments of divine communication. As an avid translator and interpreter of the works of German romantic author Novalis, Ivanov develops a similar catalogue of syncretic symbols around twilight which function as a threshold between the phenomenal and divine.<sup>33</sup> As the darkness settles around the poet, his nighttime visions digress from the quotidian and suggest a subtle communion with the “world spirit.”<sup>34</sup> As Ivanov observes in “Testaments of Symbolism”, Novalis’s nighttime world “grants direct participation in ‘life divinely universal.’”<sup>35</sup> The language of longing in the final two verses intensifies the Novalisian resonance of this canto: “Chto zhe v starinnoi toske / slezy struiatsia iz glaz?” (“So why, in ancient melancholy / Do tears flow from my eyes?”). Translated here as “melancholy”, *toska* carries the same nostalgic longing as Romantic *Sehnsucht*. Thus, in the evening, the lyric poet experiences an encounter with the divine feminine that is framed as a memory of an irretrievable past:

Словно приснилось лицо  
Милой моей вдалеке;  
Словно кольца на руке  
Верное ищет кольцо.

As if I dreamed the face  
Of my distant beloved;  
As if the ring on hand  
Seeks the other faithful ring.

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<sup>32</sup> The second canto was first published under the title “Вечерняя звезда” (“Evening Star”) in “Современные Записки” (Paris, 1939) with Ivanov marking this as the first canto in the cycle (see O. Deschartes’s commentary to *Svet Vechernii*, p. 187).

<sup>33</sup> See Michael Wachtel’s chapters on “Ivanov’s Translations from Novalis: Stylistic and Semantic Preconceptions”, “Beyond Translation: Novalis as a Source for Ivanov’s Poetry”, and “Metrical Semantics and the “Hymns to the Night”” in *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov*, 128 – 142, 157 – 180, 181 – 209.

<sup>34</sup> Ivanov, “Goluboi tsvetok” *SS* 4, 739. Мирровая душа – Ivanov’s rendering of Novalis’s “Weltseele” (world spirit).

<sup>35</sup> Ivanov, “Testaments” 37.

In his rumination on the tears in the second stanza, he pivots to his own sorrows and recalls the face of his absent beloved. The final two verses join related “reflections”: the pair of rings that seek each other in the night are the central image and are metonymic of the lovers who long for each other. This imagery, which was originally inspired by the reflection of the star in the “somnolent river,” links back to the imagery from the first stanza in which a diamond – the reflection of Vesper – surfaces in the water. The second canto culminates in a dreamlike vision of the absent feminine, suggesting yet another analogue with Novalis in a shared impulse toward ‘theurgic art.’<sup>36</sup> Michael Wachtel describes Ivanov’s theurgy within the ideal of *zhiznetvorchestvo*: a Symbolist ideal understood as a) a synthesis of life and creation/work and b) the creation of life (divine creation).<sup>37</sup> In the former definition, the poet’s life offers ready material to be converted into verse. The latter definition further refines this activity as an act of divine creation that exceeds the poet. For Ivanov, the nostalgic image of the absent feminine divine suggests links to his departed wife Lidiia.<sup>38</sup> The romantic bond that allows access to the divine feminine is indexed in the repeated ring/circle imagery which was presented in the language of faith (“vernoe kol’tso”, the “faithful ring”). Ivanov thus draws on his biography to forge an affective link that supplies the bond between the lyric poet (the individual) and the divine (the universal). Just as the divine touches the earth through the twilight threshold, the moment disrupts time to unite the past and the present. The third canto elaborates the watery topos linked with night, dreams, and nostalgia:

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<sup>36</sup> Wachtel 145. Wachtel cites Ivanov’s essay of 1914 which considers theurgy as a concept that set Novalis apart from Goethe. See also Ivanov’s “Goluboi Tsvetok” (“The Blue Flower”) which describes Novalis as “и идеалист, и реалист. Он называет свое мировоззрение *магическим идеализмом*. Его идеал – *теургический идеал*” (“both an idealist and a realist. He calls his world view a *magical idealism*. His ideal is a *theurgic ideal*.”) (Ivanov, “Goluboi Tsvetok” SS 4, 740).

<sup>37</sup> Wachtel 144.

<sup>38</sup> See Wachtel’s chapter on “Zhiznetvorchestvo” for further examples of Lidiya’s continued influence in Ivanov’s writing, 143 – 156.

Ловлю в реке тускнеющей  
Жемчужно-бледный знак,  
Лишь в небе пламенеющий  
Затеплится маяк.

In the fading river I seize upon  
A pearl-pale sign,  
As the lighthouse  
Flickers in the flaming sky.

Just as Vesper's light stirred memories of the poet's beloved, so does the lighthouse invoke her memory. The poet construes the reflection of the lighthouse beacon as holding deeper signification beyond warning ships of their proximity to shore. In the twilight waters, all objects are submerged in the mystical semiotic realm – Vesper turns to diamond and the beacon summons a link with a mythic past:

Уж сумраки древесные  
Слились в вечерней мгле,  
И призраки небесные  
Склонили взор к земле;

And so the forest gloom  
Poured in the evening haze,  
And the celestial spirits  
Lowered towards the earth their gaze;

И быль воскресла маревом,  
И вновь пловца зовет  
Любовь обетным заревом, —  
И вновь Леандр плывет.

And the past was resurrected as a mirage,  
And again love summons the swimmer  
By means of a faithful glow, —  
And again Leander swims.

“Celestial spirits” emerge from the evening haze and bend their gaze towards the earth. This subtle gesture underscores the moment as an encounter between the phenomenal and the divine when read using Ivanov's aesthetic principles. Of the three principles outlined in his “Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles” (“Simvolika esteticheskikh nachal”), Ivanov identifies Descent as a divine good: “The charm of the beautiful is first drawn to us by the downward turn of the ascending line,” he declares, further refining the principle as complementary to the joy of Ascent: “We are captivated by the sight of ascent being resolved in descent. The firmament kisses and graces us with the universal good news of beauty.”<sup>39</sup> In this vertical convergence of earthly and divine, Ivanov achieves a delicate correspondence that is a distinguishing mark of

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<sup>39</sup> Ivanov, “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles”, 8.

Symbolism.<sup>40</sup> In his “Testaments of Symbolism” (“Zavety simvolizma”), he describes the Symbolist project as striving to achieve a parallel between the phenomenal and the noumenal. This harmony works to achieve “correlations between the phenomenon (which is only “nur ein Gleichnis”) and its intellectual and mystically envisioned essence, which throws before itself the shadow of the visible event.”<sup>41</sup> The mythological framing of the final stanza complicates the relationship between the divine and the poet. The dynamic of the poet and his absent beloved is codified using the tale of the young man, Leander, who falls in love with the priestess Hero. Every evening at dusk, Hero summons her lover with a lamp and he swims to her across the Dardanelles and returns in the morning. Yet Hero’s lamp is a polyvalent symbol, representing faithful dedication while also serving as a beacon that summons Leander to his death in the stormy waves. This is one of several unusual juxtapositions that converge in the third canto. The first stanza introduces a contrast in elemental imagery, juxtaposing “in the fading river” (“v reke tuskneiushchei”) against “in the flaming sky” (“v nebe plameneiushchii”). The stanza is carefully constructed to relate the two topoi that comprise the central correspondence by their position in the verse and as rhyming pairs. Just as the two contrasting environments are united in the mirrored gaze of the starry abyss in the water, Ivanov further links them rhythmically and

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<sup>40</sup> See Victor Terras, “The Aesthetic Categories of *Ascent* and *Descent* in the Poetry of Vjačeslav Ivanov” for an analysis of Ivanov’s vertical aesthetic categories applied to various poems in the *Svet vechernii* collection. Terras claims that these categories are also gendered in Ivanov’s poetics, citing Ivanov’s claim in “Simvolika esteticheskikh nachal” that “our sensation of Beauty is composed at once of a sensation of a winged victory over earthly heaviness and a sensation of return to the womb of the Earth.” Terras concludes that “ascent is linked with the male principle, descent with the female, Apollo and Aphrodite respectively” (Terras 395). Such a gendered reading of the encounter between the lyric poet and the nostalgic vision of his beloved would further support a correlation between the divine feminine of that vision and the “celestial spirits” in the second stanza of the third canto who bend their gaze towards the earth.

<sup>41</sup> Ivanov, “The Testaments of Symbolism”, 44. “Nur ein Gleichnis” (Ger. “only a likeness”). Ivanov alludes to the concluding verses of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust*: “Alles Vergängliche / Ist nur ein Gleichnis; / Das Unzulängliche / Hier wird’s Ereignis; / Das Unbeschreibliche / Hier ist getan; / Das Ewig-Weibliche / Zieht uns hinan.” (“All that is transitory / Is only an allegory; / That which is deficient / Here will be realized; / The indescribable / Here will be done; / The Eternal-Feminine / Draws us ever onwards”). Ivanov draws on Goethe’s own aesthetics of ascent which is correlated by an existential striving onwards, motivated by God whose will is executed by a mystical divine force figured as the “Eternal Feminine.”

grammatically. The realms of the terrestrial and the heavenly divine are further emphasized in the second stanza which juxtaposes “sumraki drevesnye” (“forest gloom”) with “prizraki nebesnye” (“celestial spirits”). The unlikely correlation is again effected using position, rhyme, meter, and grammatical form.

The final juxtaposition occurs in the third stanza and departs from the earth/sky theme to emphasize the catalyst for the correlation, rhyming “marevom” (“by means of a mirage”) with “zarevom” (“by means of a glow”). Light, both natural and artificial, is the stimulus that motivates the poet’s association of earth and sky, phenomenal and divine. This particular motif is of interest to us as a familiar romantic motif explored in chapters two and three of this dissertation. In a similar twilight encounter with the divine feminine (the priestess Hero), the midnight wanderer is drawn to the radiant vision only to be lead to his demise. Within the greater context of the cycle, this stanza seems to recover the image of faithful lovers from this tale whose union is repeated “again summons the swimmer”, “by means of the faithful glow”, “again Leander swims.”<sup>42</sup> Again she summons and again he swims. The image of love that is constant and true mirrors the theme of faithful repetition from the second canto in Vesper’s repeated nightly appearance. Yet the fatal ending of the tale complicates the relationship between the divine and the phenomenal. In omitting any allusion to the tragic resolution of this tale, Ivanov again plays with the force of silence. By alluding to the myth of Hero and Leander but omitting the fatal resolution, Ivanov draws on cultural memory to prompt readers to draw on the mythological context with a cultural legacy that will be relevant to the readers.<sup>43</sup> Ivanov’s deployment of “suprapersonal” poetics<sup>44</sup> drawing on external matrices of meaning offers an

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<sup>42</sup> “ВНОВЬ ПЛОВЦА ЗОВЕТ”, “ОБЕТНЫМ ЗАРЕВОМ”, “ВНОВЬ ЛЕАНДР ПЛЫВЕТ”

<sup>43</sup> Bird 72.

<sup>44</sup> Ivanov, “Symbolics” 10. Translation of “сверхличное.”

interesting contrast to Briusov in that the ambiguity lies not within the viewer (the impulse towards self-deception or a susceptibility to external machinations); instead, Ivanov's poetics affirms an experience that exceeds the self in which the burdens of judgment and distinction do not rest solely on the viewer.

### Aleksandr Blok

In the post-1905 development of Symbolist poetics, the work of Aleksandr Blok further contributed to the changing dynamics of the divine feminine. An avid follower of Briusov's work, Blok later distanced himself theoretically, aligning himself with the neo-Christian Symbolists. Blok's mystical verse offers a third relationship between the divine and empirical, positing a poetic universe built upon thesis and antithesis. As Zhirmunskii observes in his "Aleksandr Blok's Poetry" ("Poeziia Aleksandra Bloka"), Blok begins with a similar binary of the empirical and supernatural:

Теперь каждое стихотворение Блока развивается в двух различных планах: первый план – бытовой, реальный, «действительность», второй план – сверхреальный, в котором происходят душевные события, единственно для поэта важные и интересные.<sup>45</sup>

Now every one of Blok's poem develops in two different planes: the first plane – the quotidian, the real, the "actual"; the second plane – the 'supranatural' in which spiritual events important and interesting only to the poet occur.

For Blok, it is the absent beloved who often bridges the two realms. Several of Blok's works hold a steady fascination with the Eternal Feminine, most notably his *Stikhi o Prekrasnoi Dame* of 1901-1902. She is an unstable figure, equally capable of destruction and salvation. From Part I of the collection, the penultimate poem offers a characteristic interaction with the mystical muse/temptress, beginning:<sup>46</sup>

Кто-то шепчет и смеется  
Сквозь лазоревый туман.

Someone whispers and laughs  
Through lavender mist.

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<sup>45</sup> Zhirmunskii 9-10.

<sup>46</sup> Blok, SS 1, 58.



Только мне в тиши взгрустнется –  
Снова смех из милых стран!

Should I become despondent in the silence –  
Again laughter from dear lands!

The poet's articulation of the mystical figure is riddled with ambiguity. Masked in lavender mist, a mysterious "somebody" (кто-то) whispers and smiles. The purple veil obstructing the poet's vision draws upon color symbolism with roots reaching back to the German romantics. In "Goluboi Tsvetok," Viacheslav Ivanov promotes the mystical potential of certain colors in his analysis of the blue flower from Novalis's 1800 novel fragment *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*:

Но у Новалиса Голубой Цветок уже мистический символ, имеющий определенное значение. Это уже не несбыточное мечтание, но символ, скрывающий целую религиозную систему. Было бы слишком сложно сейчас разбирать, откуда произошел это символ; но мы знаем, что синий цвет – цвет мистиков.<sup>47</sup>

But Novalis's Blue Flower is a mystical symbol with a definite meaning. This is no longer an unrealizable dream, but a symbol hiding an entire religious system. It would be too difficult to analyze now from whence this symbol came forth, but we know that the blue color is the color of mystics.

The "mystical color" employed in Symbolist verse seems to have some variability, encompassing related shades including light blue and dark blue (such as the "goluboi" that Ivanov uses to describe the flower and later in the same paragraph, "sinii") as well as lavender (the archaic "lazorevyi" used by Blok in verse 2 of the cited stanza). Blok, an enthusiastic follower of Ivanov's poetry and theory, incorporates this image into his own observations in his 1910 essay "On the Current State of Russian Symbolism" ("O sovremennom sostoianii russkogo simvolizma"). In describing the theurgic duty of the poet, he articulates the divine secrets of his trade as a "treasure, upon which grows the flower of a fern in the June night and [the poet] will pick it in the blue night – the 'blue flower.'"<sup>48</sup> The essay steadily maintains the mystical import of blue/purple throughout, describing the "purple-burgundy gloom," "purple shade" of the world,

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<sup>47</sup> Ivanov "Goluboi Tsvetok", *SS* vol. 4, 739.

<sup>48</sup> Blok, "O sovremennom", *SS* vol. 8, 124. "он видит в ней клад, над которым расцветает цветок папоротника в июньскую полночь, и хочет сорвать в голубую полночь – "голубой цветок"."

and the “blue-purple world gloom.”<sup>49</sup> Novalis’s color symbolism thus finds new life in Blok’s poetics via Ivanov, creating a new instantiation of the gendered “earth spirit.” What ensues in the poem is a fragmented vision shrouded in a haze in an uncertain state between reality and dream. The woman’s interactions are restrained (communicating only in whispers, smiles) but poignant in their subtle eroticism.

Снова шепот – и в шептаны  
 Чья-то ласка, как во сне,  
 В чьем-то женственном дыханьи,  
 Видно, вечно радость мне!

Again a whisper – and in the whispering  
 Someone’s caress, like in a dream,  
 In someone’s feminine breathing,  
 It seems, eternal happiness to me!

These first two stanzas describe behavior that is secretive and restrained, yet emotive (шепчет “whispers”, смеется “laughs”, женственное дыхание “feminine breathing”). The second stanza elaborates on the elision that began with the initial “кто-то” (someone) of the first stanza. Additional ambiguities arise here with “someone’s” caress (“ч’я-то ласка”) and “someone’s” breathing (“в ч’ем-то”). Again harmony can be found between the Symbolists and Decadents in the desire to communicate a scene or mood without overt description. These rather arch omissions follow Blok’s axiom: “The point is that what every artist dreams of is to ‘speak one’s soul without words,’ to use Fet’s expression.”<sup>50</sup>

Пошепчи, посмейся, милый,  
 Милый образ, нежный сон;  
 Ты нездешней, видно, силой  
 Наделен и окрылен.

Whisper, laugh, dear,  
 Dear image, tender dream;  
 It seems, by an unearthly power you are  
 Endowed and winged.

The vagaries and underlying sense of mystery in the moment described in this poem reflect many of the central traits of the *Augentäuschung* motif. The poet’s erotic fascination and longing for the obscured female figure is the impetus underlying the poem’s progression. Through the haze,

<sup>49</sup> “лилово-пурпурный сумрак,” “пурпурный оттенок,” “сине-лиловый мировой сумрак” (126).

<sup>50</sup> Blok “О современном”, *SS* vol. 8, 123. “Дело идет о том, о чем всякий художник мечтает, - «сказаться душой без слова», по выражению Фета.” This is a slight adaptation of Fet’s original: “О, если б без слова / Сказаться душой было можно!” from “Как мошки зарею...” (1844).

she beckons to him with whispers, laughter, and sighs. Each of these ephemeral productions constitutes the whole of her insubstantial presence. Despite lacking an earthly presence besides these slight indications, the final stanza hints that she may belong to the realm of the divine that grants her existence and gives her wings: “ты нездешней, видно, силой / Наделен и окрылен” (“it seems, you are by an unearthly power / Endowed and winged”). Blok’s threshold figure hovers between the physical and supernatural world, often portending either destruction or divine inspiration.

The lyric poet’s communion with the mystical feminine occurs in an uncertain, dreamlike setting. In verse seven, the interaction is described “kak vo sne” (“as if in a dream”); verse twelve juxtaposes the vision with a dream: “milyi obraz, nezhnyi son” (“dear image, tender dream”).<sup>51</sup> The uncertain medium of communication may instead be attributed to the ecstasy of prayer. Blok elaborates upon the theurgic ideal of Symbolist poetry to describe composition as a type of prayer: “Stikhi – eto molitva” (“Poetry is prayer”) he writes.<sup>52</sup> The response to this prayer is a divine message incomprehensible to the laity. Taking up the burden of poetic speech laid out by Ivanov, Blok advises against any attempts to interpret his verse:

...осмелюсь добавить кстати, что я покорнейше просил бы не тратить времени на непонимание моих стихов почтенную критику и публику, ибо стихи мои суть только подробное и последовательное описание того, о чем я говорю в этой статье, и желающих ознакомиться с описанными переживаниями ближе я могу отослать только к ним.<sup>53</sup>

...I will venture to add that I most humbly ask that time not be wasted on the incomprehension of my verses by the venerable critics and public, for my verses are only a detailed and consistent description of that of which I speak in this essay; and those willing to familiarize themselves further with the described experiences I can only refer to [my verses].

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<sup>51</sup> Blok’s version in an earlier manuscript has this verse: “милый образ, женский сон” (“dear image, womanly dream”). This version suggests a more direct connection between the vision of the mystical feminine and a dream state.

<sup>52</sup> Mochul’skii 39.

<sup>53</sup> Blok “O sovremennom”, *SS* vol. 8, 128-129.

In declaring his verse beyond human comprehension, Blok explicitly subverts cognition, analysis, and discussion. Nevertheless, in this framework, the world of the supernatural (the divine) and the phenomenal world are tightly bound. This view consequently is in direct opposition to Briusov's rigid distinction between art and life. Blok instead blends them (sleep and death, this world and others):

Океан – мое сердце, все в нем равно волшебно: я не различаю жизни, сна и смерти, этого мира и иных миров (мгновенье, остановись!)...Жизнь стала искусством, я произвел заклинания, и передо мною возникло наконец то, что я (лично) называю «Незнакомкой»: красавица кукла, синий призрак, земное чудо.<sup>54</sup>

My heart is an ocean, everything within it is equally magical: I do not differentiate between life, dream, death; between this world or other worlds (oh stay, moment!)...Life became art, I uttered incantations, and before me finally arose that which I (personally) call "The Unknown Woman": a beautiful doll, blue spirit, earthly miracle.

Blok's mysterious "Neznakomka" bears relation to Ivanov's Eternal Feminine that draws the poet forth in divine ascent, yet contains the possibility of damnation as well. She is a chaotic force with indeterminate intentions. In this unstable symbol, Blok internalizes Ivanov's structure of thesis/antithesis, but the relationship presented here is antinomic rather than syncretic.<sup>55</sup>

### Aisthesis, Deception, and the Divine

The competing poetics of the Symbolists yield a shared struggle with moments of dual signification placed on the edge of "the chaotic," to employ Ivanov's terminology.<sup>56</sup> The three engagements with mystical situations considered here reveal different facets of the Symbolist inheritance from the Romantics. In the evolution of the *Augentäuschung* motif in Russian Symbolism, the poet maintains a less skeptical relationship with the threshold feminine figure than the Romantics. Whereas Romantic authors worked to promote skepticism of man's

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<sup>54</sup> Blok, "O sovremennom" SS 8, 127

<sup>55</sup> Blok, "O sovremennom" SS vol. 8, 404. This commentary records Blok's notes on Ivanov's lecture on the "Testaments of Symbolism" in which he explained his concept of thesis, antithesis, and correspondence.

<sup>56</sup> Ivanov, "Symbolics", 10. "The chaotic" (хаотическое) is the third principle identified in this essay besides ascent and descent.

individual experience of the world, the Symbolists approach aesthetic experience not as a type of deception but rather as an inscrutable message from a higher (supraindividual) power. She is construed as a polyvalent symbol, alternately with biographical, mythical, divine, or banal meaning. In this feminized personification of artistic production, the Romantics and Symbolists alike utilized ambiguous symbolics in response to rigid moral precepts. Briusov defies moral didacticism and the subservience of art to life by instead demanding a reversal of this relationship: the reader is forced to draw on his experience and knowledge to find meaning in his poetics of elision. In this sense, Briusov composes poetry at an emotional distance, rooting the perceptual divide within the reader rather than in an external force that could exert affective pressure. His method differs significantly from his successors who instead rely upon affect and individual lived experience to access the universal. Unlike Briusov's rigid partitioning of life and art, Ivanov positions the poet as an essential link between the phenomenal and the universal, whose divine message is lost without theurgic mediation. Rather than leaving the burden of interpretation to the reader, Ivanov tasks the poet with the activity of "translating" the divine word, although the product of this prophetic activity nevertheless poses a significant hermeneutic challenge to the laity. Whereas Briusov construes moments of antinomic ambiguity as a challenge of judgment and distinction for the reader – tasked with determining which of the mutually exclusive realms is real – Ivanov proposes a correspondence between contrasting existential realms that converge during brief moments of theurgic mediation. Blok's contribution to Ivanov's poetics of correspondence is unique in allowing for divine intervention with indeterminate motives. His threshold figures oscillate airily between the phenomenal and supernatural with varying effects on the lyric poet. With this ambiguity of motive and agency,

Blok's figurations more closely resemble the Romantic threshold figures fraught with the possibility of salvation or destruction.

## Conclusion

In tracing the evolution of the *Augentäuschung* motif over time and across national boundaries, this dissertation has attended to the means and method of literary evolution. By investigating the exchanges that shape the Romantic imagination in German and Russian literature, I propose to approach literary movements on a broad scale. The *Augentäuschung* draws on elemental imagery with universal appeal: in its most frequent form, a firm footing on dry land is contrasted with the uncertainty of the sea, of water, even of water vapor. Such a rudimentary scene can easily feature in any literature. The decisive moment occurs when the two environments come into contact and conflicting worlds collide. Central to this moment is how the tension is resolved. From Schiller to Blok, each text coalesces around a female figure who attracts the gaze of the poet-hero in an eroticized vision of the past. Gazing at the figure, the hero is torn between dual realms that juxtapose the individual (hailing from the empirical realm determined by individual perception) and the universal (the realm of the supernatural that can only exist beyond the individual). Within each chapter, I have selected representative texts that demonstrate a variety of narratological devices for processing this ambiguity.

Goethe's *Faust* first illuminated the subversive activity of aesthetic productions as a kind of deception. This chapter posited an ethics of vision and demonstrated the importance of agency in resolving the moment of aesthetic confusion. Elaborating on the central device of exchange or trade as deception, the second chapter considers linkages between aesthesis and memory. In the metamorphic figures shifting between an idealized antiquity and the empirical present, I explored the tensions between individual and collective memory. The ensuing existential divide between competing realities took shape via Romantic doubling: opposite the eroticized avatar of antiquity, the empirical world finds expression in a humble Christian woman, often naïve and

chaste. Imagine Goethe's Gretchen in *Faust*, Eichendorff's Bianca in *The Marble Statue*, or E.T.A. Hoffmann's Ulla in "The Mines of Falun." Each woman competes against a seductive figure of mystical power for the hero's attentions. Gretchen is eventually countered by Helen, Bianca competes with the Venus statue incarnate, and Elis succumbs to the Woman of the Mountain. These narratives promoted the fantastic – defined in the context of Hoffmann's Serapiontic principle rooted in *das Wunderbare* – as a response to uncertainty.

While the most common transformation from the selected German Romantic texts was from flesh to stone, Russia's water demons manifest comparable traits in their ability to appear as women on land only to reassume demonic traits at sea. Aspects of the *rusalka's* figuration both in folklore and literature bear similarities to the depiction of pagan goddesses in German nineteenth-century literature. The goddess Diana's seasonal emergence corresponded with the *rusalka's* appearance in late May/early June. Beyond the shared isochron, both figures hover between environments as they luxuriate at the water's edge. German Romantic goddesses led a dual life, living alternately in the phenomenal world as seductresses and as elemental beings bound to nature. Consider the metamorphoses of Eichendorff's Venus at the water or Tieck's Woman of the Forest. They are changeable, holding conflicting allegiances to two different existential planes. The same can be said of the *rusalka* in her easy movements between fields, forest, and river. Doomed to haunt the land and sea, she nevertheless has the potential to return to a human form under the right circumstances.<sup>1</sup> In respect to this duality, the selected nineteenth-century Russian texts demonstrate greater flexibility in accommodating narrative uncertainty by allowing both the phenomenal and spiritual realms to exist concurrently. I identify this as a

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<sup>1</sup> Dmitrii Zelenin's *Izbrannye trudy – Ocherki russkoi mifologii: Umershie estestvennoi smert'iu i rusalki* includes accounts of wanderers who managed to trap a *rusalka* by laying the cross upon her and saying the "Our Father" prayer. See Orest Somov's 1831 tale "Rusalka" for an example of this transition from spirit to human in popular literature.



distinctly Slavic evolution of the *Augentäuschung* motif in rooting this theological flexibility in “dual faith” (*dvoeverie*).

Finally, I turn to Russian modernism, which sees a resurgence of an assumed theurgic imperative of the poet in Symbolist ideology. In the works of Aleksandr Blok and Viacheslav Ivanov in particular, uncertain aesthetic experience is no longer couched in terms of deception but rather as an inscrutable message from a higher power. The contrasting realms are united by the theurgic meditations of the poet. Buoyed by the Symbolist poetics of mystification, Goethe’s *Faust* found new life in their vision of the divine feminine. Having followed the progression of an aesthetic of radical indeterminacy, we may now acknowledge a common thread spanning from the beginnings of our investigation in eighteenth-century German literature through to the Russian Symbolists. The culmination of Goethe’s *Faust* in the Chorus Mysticus of Part II, which praises the Eternal Feminine (*Das Ewig-Weibliche*), may serve as a succinct demonstration of this kinship:

CHORUS MYSTICUS:  
Alles Vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;  
Das Unzulängliche  
Hier wird’s Ereignis;  
Das Unbeschreibliche  
Hier ist es getan;  
Das Ewig-Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan. (12104-12111)

CHORUS MYSTICUS  
All that is transitory  
Is only an allegory;  
That which is deficient  
Here will be realized;  
The indescribable  
Here will be done;  
The Eternal-Feminine  
Draws us ever onwards.

In the celebration of the transitory (*das Vergängliche*), allegory (*Gleichnis*), the incomplete (*das Unzulängliche*), and the indescribable (*das Unbeschreibliche*), the inspiration for the Symbolist poetics of elision is indisputable.<sup>2</sup> The Eternal-Feminine catalyzes the unusual correspondences between deficiency and completion, the indescribable and the depicted (realized), and draws

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<sup>2</sup> Beyond the clear resonance with Symbolist ideology, this influence is well documented in partial or full *Faust* translations produced by Ivanov, Briusov, and Boris Pasternak.

them ever upwards. This privileging of incompleteness and obscurity aligns with the theurgic activity of the poet, who can only ever render an imperfect translation of the divine message.

In tracing the travels, evolutions, and sedimentation of the *Augentäuschung*, I have avoided addressing the question of *why* Romantic forms reemerge as a resource in disparate times or national traditions. I believe this is a question that merits further study in a fuller supplementary analysis beyond this initial identification and description of the phenomenon. I briefly address this question during the historical contextualization I offer in the chapters considering Russian Romantic and Symbolist literatures, which respond to absolutist artistic mandates with ambiguity. The Romantics pushed against the dominance of empiricism in a move to recover the authority of man's emotional intelligence – sentiment and intuition – which, in their view, accessed truths beneath the world's observable surface. The Romantic aesthetic of radical indeterminacy reemerges in early twentieth-century Russia in time to challenge artistic precepts once again. The Symbolist poetics of mystification pushes against the prevailing materialist aesthetic that preceded the movement and presented a similar threat to human intuition and emotional perception. Still, we are left with the question: *why* is the chronotope of the *Augentäuschung* a Romantic *lieu de mémoire* and what is gained with each literary visitation? An expanded historico-political analysis might consider the implications of the reemergence of Romantic literary forms not as token allusions, but as indicative of shifting aesthetic sensibilities endowed with imminent political purpose.

## Appendix

### Poems Referenced in Chapters 1–4

#### **Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais<sup>1</sup>**

Friedrich Schiller

Ein Jüngling, den des Wissens heißer Durst  
Nach Sais in Egypten trieb, der Priester  
Geheime Weißheit zu erlernen, hatte  
Schon manchen Grad mit schnellem Geist durchheilt,  
Stets riß ihn seine Forschbegierde weiter,  
Und kaum besänftigte der Hierophant  
Den ungeduldig strebenden. „Was hab ich,  
Wenn ich nicht Alles habe, sprach der Jüngling  
Giebts etwa hier ein Weniger und Mehr?  
Ist deine Wahrheit wie der Sinne Glück  
Nur eine Summe, die man größer, kleiner  
Besitzen kann und immer doch besitzt?  
Ist sie nicht eine einzge, ungeteilte?  
Nimm einen Ton aus einer Harmonie,  
Nimm eine Farbe aus dem Regenbogen,  
Und alles was dir bleibt ist Nichts, solange  
Das schöne All der Töne fehlt und Farben.“

Indem sie einst so sprachen, standen sie  
In einer einsamen Rotonde still,  
Wo ein verschleiert Bild von Riesengröße  
Dem Jüngling in die Augen fiel.

Verwundert

Blickt er den Führer an und spricht: Was ists,  
Das hinter diesem Schleier sich verbirgt?  
»Die Wahrheit«, ist die Antwort?

Wie? ruft jener,

Nach Wahrheit streb ich ja allein, und diese  
Gerade ist es, die man mir verhüllt?

„Das mache mit der Gottheit aus, versetzt  
Der Hierophant. Kein Sterblicher, sagt sie,  
Rückt diesen Schleier, biß ich selbst ihn hebe.  
Und wer mit ungeweihter schuldger Hand  
Den heiligen, verbotnen früher hebt,  
Der, spricht die Gottheit“ –

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Schiller. „Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais.“ *Schillers Werke: Gedichte*. Vol. 1. Weimar: Böhlau, 1943. 254-256.

Nun?

„Der sieht die Wahrheit“

Ein seltsamer Orakelspruch! Du selbst  
Du hättest also niemals ihn gehoben?

„Ich? Wahrlich nicht! Und war auch nie dazu  
Versucht.“

Das faß ich nicht. Wenn von der Wahrheit  
Nur diese dünne Scheidewand mich trennte –

„Und ein Gesetz, fällt ihm sein Führer ein.  
Gewichtiger mein Sohn als du es meynst  
Ist dieser dünne Flor – Für deine Hand  
Zwar leicht, doch Zentner schwer für dein Gewissen.“

Der Jüngling gieng gedankenvoll nach Hause,  
Ihm raubt des Wissens brennende Begier  
Den Schlaf, er wälzt sich glühend auf dem Lager,  
Und rafft sich auf um Mitternacht. Zum Tempel  
Führt unfreywillig ihn der scheue Tritt.  
Leicht ward es ihm die Mauer zu ersteigen,  
Und mitten in das Innre der Rotonde  
Trägt ein beherzter Sprung den Wagenden.

Hier steht er nun, und grauenvoll umfängt  
Den Einsamen die Lebenlose Stille,  
Die nur der Tritte hohler Wiederhall  
In den geheimen Grüften unterbricht  
Von oben durch der Kuppel Oefnung wirft  
Der Mond den bleichen silberblauen Schein,  
Und furchtbar wie ein gegenwärtger Gott  
Erglänzt durch des Gewölbes Finsternisse  
In ihrem langen Schleier die Gestalt.

Er tritt hinan mit ungewissem Schritt,  
Schon will die freche Hand das Heilige berühren,  
Da zuckt es heiß und kühl durch sein Gebein,  
Und stößt ihn weg mit unsichtbarem Arme.  
Unglücklicher, was willst du thun? So ruft  
In seinem Innern eine treue Stimme.  
Versuchen den Allheiligen willst du?  
Kein Sterblicher, sprach des Orakels Mund,  
Rückt diesen Schleier, bis ich selbst ihn hebe.

Doch setzte nicht derselbe Mund hinzu:  
Wer diesen Schleier hebt, soll Wahrheit schauen?

Sey hinter ihm, was will! Ich heb ihn auf.  
(Er rufts mit lauter Stimm) Ich will sie schauen.  
Schauen!  
Gellt ihm ein langes Echo spottend nach.

Er spricht und hat den Schleier aufgedeckt.  
„Nun, fragt ihr, und was zeigte sich ihm hier?“  
Ich weiß es nicht. Besinnungslos und bleich,  
So fanden ihn am andern Tag die Priester  
Am Fußgestell der Isis ausgestreckt.  
Was er allda gesehen und erfahren  
Hat seine Zunge nie bekannt. Auf ewig  
War seines Lebens Heiterkeit dahin,  
Ihn riß ein tiefer Gram zum frühen Grabe.  
„Weh dem, dieß war sein warnungsvolles Wort,  
Wenn ungestüme Fragen in ihn drangen,  
Weh dem, der zu der Wahrheit geht durch Schuld,  
Sie wird ihm nimmermehr erfreulich seyn.“

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## Rusalka<sup>2</sup>

Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin

Над озером, в глухих дубровах,  
Спасался некогда монах,  
Всегда в занятиях суровых,  
В посте, молитве и трудах.  
Уже лопаткою смиренной  
Себе могилу старец рыл —  
И лишь о смерти вожденной  
Святых угодников молил.

Однажды летом у порогу  
Поникшей хижины своей  
Анахорет молился богу.  
Дубравы делались черней;  
Туман над озером дымился,  
И красный месяц в облаках  
Тихонько по небу катился.  
На воды стал глядеть монах.

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<sup>2</sup> A.S. Pushkin. "Rusalka" (Ballad). *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*. Vol. 2. Moscow-Leningrad: Academia, 1936-38. 96-97.

Глядит, невольно страха полный;  
Не может сам себя понять...  
И видит: закипели волны  
И присмирели вдруг опять...  
И вдруг... легка, как тень ночная,  
Бела, как ранний снег холмов,  
Выходит женщина нагая  
И молча села у берегов.

Глядит на старого монаха  
И чешет влажные волосы.  
Святой монах дрожит со страха  
И смотрит на ее красы.  
Она манит его рукою,  
Кивает быстро головой...  
И вдруг — падучею звездой —  
Под сонной скрылася волной.

Всю ночь не спал старик угрюмый  
И не молился целый день —  
Перед собой с невольной думой  
Все видел чудной девы тень.  
Дубравы вновь оделись тьмою;  
Пошла по облакам луна,  
И снова дева над водою  
Сидит, прелестна и бледна.

Глядит, кивает головою,  
Целует издали шутя,  
Играет, плещется волною,  
Хохочет, плачет, как дитя,  
Зовет монаха, нежно стонет...  
«Монах, монах! Ко мне, ко мне!..»  
И вдруг в волнах прозрачных тонет;  
И все в глубокой тишине.

На третий день отшельник страстный  
Близ очарованных берегов  
Сидел и девы ждал прекрасной,  
А тень ложилась средь дубров...  
Заря прогнала тьму ночную:  
Монаха не нашли нигде,  
И только бороду седую  
Мальчишки видели в воде.

### **Der Fischer<sup>3</sup>**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Das Wasser rauscht', das Wasser schwoll,  
Ein Fischer saß daran,  
Sah nach dem Angel ruhevoll,  
Kühl bis an's Herz hinan:  
Und wie er sitzt und wie er lauscht,  
Theilt sich die Fluth empor,  
Aus dem bewegten Wasser rauscht  
Ein feuchtes Weib hervor.

Sie sang zu ihm, sie sprach zu ihm:  
Was lockst du meine Brut  
Mit Menschenwitz und Menschenlist  
Hinauf in Todesgluth?  
Ach wüßtest du, wie's Fischlein ist  
So wohlrig auf dem Grund,  
Du stiegst herunter, wie du bist,  
Und würdest erst gesund.

Labt sich die liebe Sonne nicht,  
Der Mond sich nicht im Meer?  
Kehrt wellenathmend ihr Gesicht  
Nicht doppelt schöner her?  
Lockt dich der tiefe Himmel nicht,  
Das feucht verklärte Blau?  
Lockt dich dein eigen Angesicht  
Nicht her in ew'gen Tau?

Das Wasser rauscht', das Wasser schwoll,  
Netzt' ihm den nackten Fuß,  
Sein Herz wuchs ihm so sehnsuchtsvoll,  
Wie bey der Liebsten Gruß.  
Sie sprach zu ihm, sie sang zu ihm;  
Da war's um ihn geschehn:  
Halb zog sie ihn, halb sank er hin,  
Und ward nicht mehr gesehn.

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<sup>3</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. "Der Fischer." *Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Sämtliche Werke. Brief, Tagebücher und Gespräche*. Vol. 1. Eds. Dieter Borchmeyer, et al. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985-2013. 302-303.

## Рыбак<sup>4</sup>

Vasilii Zhukovskii

Бежит волна, шумит волна!  
    Задумчив, над рекой  
Сидит рыбак; душа полна  
    Прохладной тишиной.  
Сидит он час, сидит другой;  
    Вдруг шум в волнах притих...  
И влажною всплыла главой  
    Красавица из них.

Глядит она, поёт она:  
    "Зачем ты мой народ  
Манишь, влечёшь с родного дна  
    В кипучий жар из вод?  
Ах! если б знал, как рыбкой жить  
    Привольно в глубине,  
Не стал бы ты себя томить  
    На знойной вышине.

Не часто ль солнце образ свой  
    Купает в лоне вод?  
Не свежей ли горит красой  
    Его из них исход?  
Не с ними ли свод неба слит  
    Прохладно-голубой?  
Не в лоно ль их тебя манит  
    И лик твой молодой?"

Бежит волна, шумит волна...  
    На берег вал плеснул!  
В нём вся душа тоски полна,  
    Как будто друг шепнул!  
Она поёт, она манит –  
    Знать, час его настал!  
К нему она, он к ней бежит...  
    И след навек пропал.

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<sup>4</sup> V. A. Zhukovskii. "Rybak." *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*. Vol. 3. Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2008. 136.



## Loreley<sup>5</sup>

Clemens Brentano

Zu Bacharach am Rheine  
wohnt' eine Zauberin,  
die war so schön und feine  
und riß viel Herzen hin.

Und machte viel zuschanden  
der Männer rings umher,  
aus ihren Liebesbanden  
war keine Rettung mehr!

Der Bischof ließ sie laden  
vor geistliche Gewalt  
und mußte sie begnaden,  
so schön war ihr' Gestalt.

Er sprach zu ihr gerühret:  
"Du arme Lore Lay !  
Wer hat dich denn verführet  
zu böser Zauberei ?"

"Herr Bischof, laßt mich sterben,  
ich bin des Lebens müd,  
weil jeder muß verderben,  
der meine Augen sieht'

Die Augen sind zwei Flammen,  
mein Arm ein Zauberstab –  
schickt mich in die Flammen,  
o brechet mir den Stab!"

Ich kann dich nicht verdammen,  
bis du mir erst bekennt,  
warum in deinen Flammen  
mein eignes Herz schon brennt!

Den Stab kann ich nicht brechen,  
du schöne Lore Lay!  
Ich müßte denn zerbrechen  
mein eigen Herz entzwei!

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<sup>5</sup> Clemens Brentano. "Zu Bacharach am Rheine." *Clemens Brentano / Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*. Vol. 1. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2007. 165-173.

"Herr Bischof, mit mir Armen  
treibt nicht so bösen Spott  
und bittet um Erbarmen  
für mich den lieben Gott?

Ich darf nicht länger leben,  
ich liebe keinen mehr, –  
den Tod sollt Ihr mir geben,  
drum kam ich zu Euch her!

Mein Schatz hat mich betrogen,  
hat sich von mir gewandt,  
ist fort von mir gezogen,  
fort in ein fremdes Land.

Die Augen sanft und wilde,  
die Wangen rot und weiß,  
die Worte still und milde,  
das ist mein Zauberkreis.

Ich selbst muß drin verderben,  
das Herz tut mir so weh,  
vor Schmerzen möcht' ich sterben,  
wenn ich mein Bildnis seh'.

Drum laß mein Recht mich finden,  
mich sterben wie ein Christ,  
denn alles muß verschwinden,  
weil es nicht bei mir ist!“

Drei Ritter läßt er holen:  
"Bringt sie ins Kloster hin!  
Geh, Lore! Gott befohlen  
sei dein berückter Sinn!

Du sollst ein Nönnchen werden,  
ein Nönnchen schwarz und weiß,  
bereite dich auf Erden  
zu deines Todes Reis' !“

Zum Kloster sie nun ritten,  
die Ritter alle drei  
und traurig in der Mitten  
die schöne Lore Lay.

"O Ritter, laßt mich gehen  
auf diesen Felsen groß,  
ich will noch einmal sehen  
nach meines Lieben Schloß.

Ich will noch einmal sehen  
wohl in den tiefen Rhein  
und dann ins Kloster gehen  
und Gottes Jungfrau sein!"

Der Felsen ist so jähe,  
so steil ist seine Wand,  
doch klimmt sie in die Höhe,  
bis daß sie oben stand.

Es binden die drei Reiter  
die Rosse unten an  
und klettern immer weiter  
zum Felsen auch hinan.

Die Jungfrau sprach: "Da gehet  
ein Schifflin auf dem Rhein,  
der in dem Schifflin stehet,  
der soll mein Liebster sein !

Mein Herz wird mir so munter,  
er muß mein Liebster sein !"  
Da lehnt sie sich hinunter  
und stürzt in den Rhein.

Die Ritter mußten sterben,  
sie konnten nicht hinab;  
sie mußten all´ verderben,  
ohn´ Priester und ohn´ Grab!

Wer hat dies Lied gesungen?  
Ein Schiffer auf dem Rhein,  
und immer hat´s geklungen  
von dem Dreirittstein:  
Lore Lay!  
Lore Lay!  
Lore Lay!  
Als wären es meiner drei!

**“Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten...”<sup>6</sup>**

Heinrich Heine

Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten,  
Daß ich so traurig bin,  
Ein Märchen aus uralten Zeiten,  
Das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn.  
Die Luft ist kühl und es dunkelt,  
Und ruhig fließt der Rhein;  
Der Gipfel des Berges funkelt,  
Im Abendsonnenschein.

2. Die schönste Jungfrau sitzet  
Dort oben wunderbar,  
Ihr gold'nes Geschmeide blitzet,  
Sie kämmt ihr goldenes Haar,  
Sie kämmt es mit goldenem Kamme,  
Und singt ein Lied dabei;  
Das hat eine wundersame,  
Gewalt'ge Melodei.

3. Den Schiffer im kleinen Schiffe,  
Ergreift es mit wildem Weh;  
Er schaut nicht die Felsenriffe,  
Er schaut nur hinauf in die Höh'.  
Ich glaube, die Wellen verschlingen  
Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn,  
Und das hat mit ihrem Singen,  
Die Loreley getan.

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**Rusalka<sup>7</sup>**

Mikhail Lermontov

Русалка плыла по реке голубой,  
Озаряема полной луной;  
И старалась она доплеснуть до луны  
Серебристую пену волны.

И шумя и крутясь, колебала река  
Отраженные в ней облака;  
И пела русалка - и звук ее слов

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<sup>6</sup> Heinrich Heine. “Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten.” *Heinrich Heine, Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*. Vol. 1. Ed. Manfred Windfuhr. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1797-1856. 207-209.

<sup>7</sup> M.Iu. Lermontov. “Rusalka”. *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrex tomakh*. Vol. 1. Leningrad: Nauka, 1979. 145-146.

Долетал до крутых берегов.

И пела русалка: "На дне у меня  
Играет мерцание дня;  
Там рыбок златые гуляют стада;  
Там хрустальные есть города;

И там на подушке из ярких песков  
Под тенью густых тростников  
Спит витязь, добыча ревнивой волны,  
Спит витязь чужой стороны.

Расчесывать кольца шелковых кудрей  
Мы любим во мраке ночей,  
И в чело и в уста мы в полуденный час  
Целовали красавца не раз.

Но к страстным лобзаньям, не зная зачем,  
Остается он хладен и нем;  
Он спит - и, склонившись на перси ко мне,  
Он не дышит, не шепчет во сне!"

Так пела русалка над синей рекой,  
Полна непонятной тоской;  
И, шумно катясь, колебала река  
Отраженные в ней облака.

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**Серебряный бор**<sup>8</sup>  
Viacheslav Ivanov

Н. И. Шатерникову

### **Посвящение**

Haecce decem cecini peramoenis qui vocitantur  
Argenteis in saltibus,  
Te plaudente, mihi iunctissime nuper, Horati  
Cultor facunde rustici.

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<sup>8</sup> Viacheslav Ivanov. "Serebrianyi bor." *Svet vechernii*. Ed. Dimitri Ivanov. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

## Запев

И рад бы я в зеленый рай...  
Смеется Муза: «Поиграй  
Там на рожке пастушьем  
В лад ветерку и ручейку.  
Мудрил ты на своем веку,  
Дружил и с простодушьем».

И рад быв рай; да, знать, лихи  
На сыне города грехи —  
Не выпустят на волю  
Из плена каменных столиц  
Навстречу ветру, гаму птиц  
И зыблемому полю.

### 1

Бор над оползнями красный;  
За излучиной реки,  
Отлагающей пески,  
Кругозор голубо-ясный,  
Перелески, да лески.

Бот могильник зеленеет  
Стародавней татарвы;  
Церковь тут и там белеет,  
И в тумане розовеет,  
Блеща, марево Москвы.

Край исконный мой и кровный,  
Серединный, подмосковный,  
Мне причудливо ты нов,  
Словно отзвук детских снов  
Об Индее баснословной.

### 2

Лес опрокинут в реке.  
Вesper в ночном челноке  
Выплыл, — и вспыхнул алмаз  
Где-то в бесдонной реке.

Видел я в жизни не раз  
В сей вечереющий час,  
Как выплывал он и гас,  
Вesper на сонной реке:

Что же в старинной тоске  
Слезы струятся из глаз?

Словно приснилось лицо  
Милой моей вдалеке;  
Словно кольца на руке  
Верное ищет кольцо.

### 3

Ловлю в реке тускнеющей  
Жемчужно-бледный знак,  
Лишь в небе пламенеющий  
Затеплится маяк.

Уж сумраки древесные  
Слились в вечерней мгле,  
И призраки небесные  
Склонили взор к земле;

И былль воскресла маревом,  
И вновь пловца зовет  
Любовь обетным заревом, —  
И вновь Леандр плывет.

### 4

В какой гармонии Природа  
Легчайшей поступью Харит  
Обряд дневного хоровода  
Пред оком видящим творит!  
Как нежно с тенью свет мирит,  
Прозрачный сумрак цветом красит!  
В каких венцах, одна, горит,  
Когда цвета вещей погасит!

### 5

Заплаканный восход уныло я встречал.  
Зардев по краю, бор дичился и молчал,  
И прятал меж стволов испуганные тени.  
Семья берез, развив зеленой мрежей сени,  
Роняла капли слез при качке ветерка.  
Сияла зеркалом предчувственным река...  
Но клики первых птиц не раньше прозвучали,  
Чем, брызнув золотом сквозь облако печали,  
Укравшее зарю, — безпечно-горячи,  
В развороженный лес ударили лучи.

## 6

Уязвило жарким жалом утро бор.  
Под глухим нашло забралом утро бор.

По стволам янтарных сосен рдеет жар:  
Опоясало кораллом утро бор.

Под зелеными шатрами красный пир:  
Упоило светом алым утро бор.

Огласило буйным бубном, медью труб  
И ликующим кимвалом утро бор.

## 7

И чудо невзначай в дубраве подглядишь.  
Вот час: вечерняя прозолотилась тишь.  
Лиловые стволы повиты сном и страхом.  
А на прогалине, дымясь летучим прахом  
Сияет хрисолит огнистых двух полос:  
То след от солнечных промчавшихся колес.  
Вот ветвь червонная — не та ли, что Энея  
Вела чрез темный дол? — волшебнo пламенея,  
Хвостатым светочем висит во мгле чащоб.  
А там и Лучница возносит ясный лоб  
Над бахромой ветвей, и стали кущи белы,  
Где первые легли серебряные стрелы.  
Но ласки лунные таит ревниво бор.  
Мне памятен олень, добыча ловчих свор:  
Что видел не скажу, пугливый соглядатай;  
Собак я днем боюсь, как Актэон рогатый.  
Пришельцы древние из солнечной земли,  
Любезны кошки мне, и — помнится — влекли  
В повозке Вакховой меня младенцем тигры,  
Я с пардами делил в раю невинном игры.  
Подале ж уйдем, о Муза, от охот  
И чар лесных под кров, где ужин, свет и кот.

## 8

Какою ленью дышит лес,  
Зеленовейный и воздушный.  
Дреме полуденной послушный,  
Слагая луга жаркий вес,  
Войди под лиственный навес  
Отдохновительно-радушный,  
И в облаке ее завес  
Усни с Дриадой равнодушной.



## 9

Осенний дышит пар и хвоей, и теплом.  
Чрез желтый папортник, плаун и бурелом  
Ступаю сторожко. Едва шуршат вершины.  
Луч бродит ощупью, и лоснится крушины  
Коварной гроздие; и, пышно разодет  
В листву румяную, кичится бересклет  
Красой оранжевых и розовых подвесок.  
Лиловым вереском дымится перелесок.  
А сосны, как палат незыблемых столпы,  
В угрюмо-сизые стеснились толпы,  
Лучу воинственным багрянцем отвечают  
И, равнодушные, ущерб времен встречают.

## 10

Творит природа свой закон  
И знает срок суровости и неге,  
Себе верна в цветах и в снеге,  
В беге  
Несущих злак и плод, ущерб и сон  
Времен...  
А человек — все недоволен он.

Мгновенье замедляет иль торопит,  
Ветр хочет упредить иль облак удержать,  
Обиду в горьких сотах копит;  
На пиршестве богов пришедший возлежать —  
Тоску по скудости в нектарных кубках топит.  
Не буду же грустить о том,  
Что летним подошел конец усладам;  
Мирюсь в душе с извечным ладом, —  
С хладом  
С ударившим в свой колокол постом, —  
С листом,  
Пестреющим в лесу еще густом.

## Прощальная

Песню спеть — не хитрая наука,  
Если в сердце песня запоет.  
Божий мир весь полон света, звука:  
Человек угрюмо прочь идет.  
А когда б, как на лужайке дети,  
Он вмешался в общий хор без слов,  
И его в свои поймало б сети  
Солнышко, веселый рыболов.

В полном сердце песня бы запела,  
Как растет весной мурава,  
И душа, что вдовствуя немела,  
Золотые родила б слова.

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