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Imitation, Pleasure, and Aesthetic Education in the Poetics and Comedies of Johann Elias Schlegel

FOLLOWING THE REPUBLICATION OF HIS WRITINGS on literary aesthetics and drama and dramaturgy in 1887, Johann Elias Schlegel gained an ever more secure and respected place in the history of German poetics as the key figure between Gottsched and Lessing.¹ A respectable and international series of both major and minor studies culminated in 1945 with Elizabeth M. Wilkinson's extensive analysis and historical contextualization of Schlegel's theories which, reprinted in 1973, was the standard work for over forty years and remains an ever relevant achievement.² While Wilkinson proceeded rather cautiously on the question of Schlegel's originality, Steven D. Martinson in 1984 spoke openly of his innovativeness apropos the nature and effect of imitation in art, together with the related *Ständeklausel* in drama, specifically the relationship between pleasure and instruction.³ It was with respect to precisely these topics that Gerlinde Bretzigheimer two years later challenged Schlegel's originality in a monograph which, according to one reviewer, offered the "deepest and broadest reading of Schlegel's aesthetics to date."⁴ Bretzigheimer would appear to have had the last word on the subject, for silence has prevailed over it ever since. Although her work reveals great learning and her conclusions are generally valid, however, I contend that she failed to give Schlegel his just due, and it is in part the purpose of the present study to show this.⁵

A virtual commonplace in Schlegel scholarship is the assertion of a disjunction between his aesthetic theory and dramatic practice.⁶ In view of the importance he attaches to the impact of poetic mimesis on the recipient and the social dimension of drama and theater, however, it would be surprising if his plays did not reflect at least these central concerns, especially when one considers that his theoretical and dramatic writings, unlike, for example, those of Lessing, arose in close temporal proximity to, and often enough in conjunction with, each other and that all were written within the short space of the some dozen productive years granted Schlegel. Inexplicably, several scholars have in fact observed aspects of continuity between these elements of his theory and plays without realizing it, or at least without stating as much. For this reason the contribution of the present considerations lies not in the discovery of an entirely new state of affairs but rather in eliminating a marked inconsistency in Schlegel studies and elaborating on the

consequences of its elimination for his work. Since the sparse writing on the poet over the last two decades has dealt largely with the tragedies, I have limited my comments to the link between crucial theoretical issues and the comedies, convinced with Wolfgang Paulsen in any event that the comedy was "die seiner Wesensart entsprechende Gattung."⁷

I

Schlegel's aesthetics proceeds from the familiar initial assumption of Aristotle and early modernity that art is an imitation of nature.⁸ In each of the several arts the artist employs a certain medium, or *Subjekt*, to create his imitation, in the case of literature, of course, language. Utilizing this medium, the poet produces his imitation, or *Bild*, of a given object in nature, the *Vorbild*, striving after the greatest possible, and therefore manifest, similarity between the two. But what if the *Vorbild* imitated is different in the mind of the recipient than in nature or, by the same token, in the mind of the poet and his reader or audience? In this event, similarity cannot guarantee perceptibility. In his *Critische Dichtkunst* of 1740 Johann Jacob Breitingen had already anticipated this eventuality, proposing that the poet create a *Bild* so vivid that the recipient responds to it as if it were the actual *Vorbild*, in a sense, that the *Bild* infix the *Vorbild* in the mind of the recipient.⁹ Given the emphasis placed on it in his writing, the relationship between similarity and perceptibility was even more crucial for Schlegel. Rather than "energize" the *Vorbild*, however, he would change certain aspects of it, that is, he would create a *Bild* that departs from the *Vorbild* in various ways and often to a dramatic extent.

Breitingen may well have influenced Schlegel with regard to the relationship between the *Vorbild* as in nature and as in the mind of the recipient, in the sense of pointing out the problem and the necessity of confronting it.¹⁰ However, their approaches to the problem differ significantly, both in substance and in implication. Breitingen's implantation of the *Vorbild* in the recipient privileges image over nature, imagination over reality. Given the importance of vividness of image and the resulting energy exerted on the recipient, the Swiss opens the way theoretically for a literature dominated by subjectivity, expressivity, and emotionality. Schlegel's modification of the *Vorbild* in the *Bild* acknowledges a possible, even likely, discrepancy between subject and object and thereby also creates a theoretical space for subjectivity. However, he does not "fill" this space himself, at least not in the sense of the *Sturm und Drang* or Romanticism. In the elaboration of his basic premise he privileges *Vorbild* over *Bild*, the empirical world over solipsistic imagination, tailoring the image to the specific conditions of the recipient in this world, particularly as a social and national creature. It is here that Schlegel's relative contribution to contemporary discussion should be sought. If representing no paradigm shift—and it is an uncharitable notion of innovation that requires such—his poetics nonetheless marks progress within the paradigm, indeed pressing forward to its very limits.¹¹ While, as it were, only hinting at the notions of his famous nephews, Schlegel clearly points beyond them to the realism of the nineteenth century and later.¹²

Schlegel repeatedly asserts the primacy of similarity over dissimilarity. In the "Abhandlung, daß die Nachahmung der Sache, der man nachahmet, zuweilen unähnlich werden müsse," for example, he reacts to the unwarranted introduction of dissimilarity into a work as follows: "Desto eifriger muß man sich bemühen, seinem Vorbilde nahe zu kommen . . . damit man durch die übrigen Aehnlichkeiten die regelmäßige Unähnlichkeit des Bildes überdecken und verbergen möge" (3:176). Even here, however, the principle consideration is dissimilarity, the concern that it not obtrude. The weight Schlegel places on dissimilarity throughout his critical work attests eloquently to his view of a widespread discrepancy between reality and its perception by individuals and thus in society and among nations. In the "Abhandlung von der Unähnlichkeit in der Nachahmung" he writes: "Wenn wir die Mittel völlig kennen wollen . . . , so gehört auch dieses dazu, daß wir wissen, für wen wir nachahmen. . . . Die Sachen, die man nachahmen kann, sind so vielfältig, und nicht alle für alle Leute; die Begriffe der Menschen sind oft einander so entgegen gesetzt, daß man nicht genau bestimmen kann, für wen man eigentlich nachahmen soll . . ." (3:141). This state of affairs, in turn, bespeaks a practical epistemological skepticism that had consequences for Schlegel's concept of aesthetic education as well as his plays.¹³

In the later and more extensive of the essays mentioned above Schlegel states that artistic imitation should in principle be accessible to all people regardless of intellectual capacity, for, as we shall see shortly, art does not address itself immediately to the mind (3:143–44). In his *Gedanken zur Aufnahme des dänischen Theaters*, however, he acknowledges the existence of many different degrees between the lowest and highest levels of society, that is, many different degrees of experience and thus a multitude of varying *Vorbilder*, including that of the theater itself (3:278). While retaining the tripartite *Ständeklausel* of tradition, he therefore proposes five different categories of drama according to social class (3:278–80).¹⁴ Two of these embrace traditional comedy, where persons of lower class evoke laughter, and traditional tragedy, in which persons of rank arouse the passions. The other three are subgenres of comedy. In one, persons of lower class stir the passions; in another, persons of rank induce laughter; and in the third, persons from both classes elicit both laughter and the passions. Schlegel's typology represents not only an attempt to account for the socially determined difference between objective and subjective *Vorbild* but also a revision of the social code in the direction of egalitarianism, providing a theoretical justification for laughing at nobility, weeping over peasants, and doing so in one and the same play. As we shall see in greater detail, indeed, he left behind the fragment of a comedy, *Die drei Philosophen*, which is set at court, and one of a "tragicomedy," *Der Gärtnerkönig*, in which a person of low rank is the main character and the most admirable figure (2:599–618, 2:635–38). If one needed more evidence than *Canut*, Schlegel's liberalization of the social code of drama should give pause to those who speak of a "political conservatism which ran deep in [his] consciousness."¹⁵ Given the fact that absolutism was the primary fact of political life in most of eighteenth-century Europe, its enlightened variety, which Schlegel had ample opportunity to observe in Denmark, must be considered progressive.¹⁶

For Schlegel, *Vorbilder* can diverge from nature according to nationality as well as social class. In the *Gedanken zur Aufnahme des dänischen Theaters* he therefore expresses the wish that young Danish actors read the best of the ancients' and moderns' writing on drama, that they, however, not imitate them indiscriminately (3:262). For, as he writes twelve years before the seventeenth *Literaturbrief*, every nation's customs determine the rules of its theater, and the drama of one country will seldom completely satisfy spectators in another (3:262): "Bey Einrichtung eines neuen Theaters muß man also die Sitten und den besonderen Charakter seiner Nation in Betrachtung ziehen . . ." (3:265). When bringing histories of foreign peoples to the stage, one should thus adapt the characters to the *Denkungsart* of one's nation, otherwise the audience will soon lose patience due to the unfamiliarity. In the northern countries, including Germany, for instance, (passionate) love does not make the same strong impression on stage that it does in France (3:267). Schlegel makes a manifest allusion to this cultural and dramatic verity in his incomplete comedy *Die Pracht zu Landheim*. In act 3, scene 4, Frau von Landheim's prized French maid, Lisette, involuntarily reveals herself to the petit maître, Junker Berthold, to be in fact a German Lieschen. When she tries to save face by asserting that she has French blood, Berthold replies, "Ein französisches Geblüte! Und Sie schreyen so, wenn man Sie küssen will. Nehmen Sie mirs nicht übel, Sie sind noch sehr deutsch" (3:568).

One should view Schlegel's emphasis on national features in literature in the context of his notions of imitation and the social role of literature. Literature must speak a language an audience can understand, but his language ought, in turn, to speak of openness, to other cultures as well as other members of society. Schlegel criticizes Charles Perrault and others precisely because "deren Geschmack sich nicht weiter erstreckt, als daß sie die Sitten ihres Volks für die schönsten, die jemals seyn können, oder wohl gar allein für schön achten" (3:206). He himself affirms familiarity with the diversity of national characters through the representation of foreign manners (3:287–88). He felt, moreover, that society is the principal arena of man's happiness, where one proves and improves oneself through intercourse with other members of society (3:315, 309). His social ideal was indeed the man of the world, a cosmopolitan ideal reminiscent of that expressed later in Wieland's *Die Abderiten* and *Das Geheimnis des Kosmopolitenordens* as well as Lessing's *Ernst und Falk*.¹⁷ He saw a quite concrete use of the theater in the mere fact that it serves as a meeting place of society (3:251–52).

Within Schlegel's aesthetics, perceptibility of similarity, often as conditioned by dissimilarity, occupies a key position ultimately because it alone can assure realization of the main purpose of imitation in the arts, namely, pleasure. I say "can assure" advisedly, for successful imitation does not guarantee pleasure. In his *Vergleichung Shakespears und Andreas Gryphs* Schlegel states that anything that impedes the arousal of emotions and passions, the pleasure peculiar to tragedy, is a flaw, "es mag so gut nachgeahmet seyn, als es will" (3:60). In the "Abhandlung, daß die Nachahmung der Sache, der man nachahmet, zuweilen unähnlich werden müsse," indeed, he writes that one cannot derive the main purpose of imitation from imitation itself, that is, by logical or systematic necessity, rather, that one must appeal to experience

(3:135). Experience tells him that when he perceives similarity between *Bild* and *Vorbild* he senses pleasure, and he concludes that such is the pleasure that arises from the nature of imitation (3:130). He then goes on to speak of pleasure in general:

Alles Vergnügen gehöret zu den Sachen, die man um ihrer selbst willen sucht. Denn da unsere Glückseligkeit in der Zusammenkunft alles möglichen Vergnügens besteht, so hat jegliches Vergnügen einen unmittelbaren Einfluß in dieselbe; und es ist ungereimt, wenn uns etwas vergnügt, noch weiter zu fragen, warum man dieses Vergnügen suche? Alles Vergnügen also, das aus dem Wesen einer Sache fließt, hat die Vermuthung vor sich, daß es der Endzweck derselben Sache sey; und es hat vor allen andern Dingen ein Recht, als die Absicht betrachtet zu werden, warum die Sache, die ihrem Wesen nach vergnügt, in der Welt ist. (3:135–36)

Other theorists claim that the purpose of art involves both pleasure and instruction, to be sure. If asked which is the main purpose, however, Schlegel must confess, “daß das Vergnügen dem Unterrichten vorgehe, und daß ein Dichter, der vergnügt und nicht unterrichtet, in so fern er als ein Dichter betrachtet wird, höher zu schätzen sey, als derjenige, der unterrichtet und nicht vergnügt” (3:136).

Pleasure as an end in itself, and aesthetic pleasure as the main end of literature—taken out of context, and with appropriate changes in diction, these passages might be mistaken as portions of a declaration of *l'art pour l'art*. As the second of them suggests, however, edification may play a role in literary works, and we shall see momentarily that this potentiality is indeed significant. All the same, one should not compensate for the earlier undervaluation of this fact by diminishing the systematic and essential primacy of *delectare* over *prodesse* in Schlegel's aesthetics and its distinctiveness in his time and place. Though Schlegel's achievement appears more modest from a bird's-eye view of the history of poetics in the West, indeed, it was with the work and ideas of his German-language contemporaries that he dealt most particularly and directly.¹⁸ If, with respect to the purpose of literature, Gottsched stresses mind and the Swiss emotion, Schlegel privileges experience qua sensual pleasure. Indeed, this emphasis has a determining influence on instruction in both his critical and literary work.

Although sensual pleasure is for Schlegel the main and peculiar end of art, it is not the only possible one. Assuming that a *Bild* attains the requisite similarity to its *Vorbild* and elicits the resulting pleasure, any other perfection creates all the more pleasure. One of the greatest of such perfections is instruction, especially if the *Vorbild* arises more in the *Verstand* of the individual than in his senses, for, as Schlegel writes in the “Abhandlung von der Unähnlichkeit in der Nachahmung,” “[E]s vergnügt den Verstand des Menschen nichts so sehr, als was ihn lehret . . .” (3:158). He goes so far as to say that those *Vorbilder* are most pleasing which are most instructive and that it is always advisable to combine such a pleasing main end with such a noble secondary one since it is possible to do so and since each promotes the other (3:158). Schlegel pursues a similar line of thinking in the *Gedanken zur Aufnahme des dänischen Theaters*. Once again postulating pleasure as

the main purpose of imitation in art, he asserts that such pleasure is all the more noble because it is for the *Verstand* as well as for the senses. After all, "Lehren ist ohne Zweifel eine viel wichtigere Sache als Ergetzen" (3:271), and the theater, while designed for pleasing by nature, is also very skilled at teaching. What is true in abstracto, however, is not necessarily true in context: "Ein Stück, bey welchem noch so viel Kunst verschwendet, aber die Kunst zu ergetzen, vergessen worden ist, gehört in die Studierstube, und nicht auf den Schauplatz. Ein Stück hingegen, das *nur* diesem Hauptzwecke Genüge thut, hat ein Recht, auch den vernünftigten Leuten bloß aus dieser Ursache zu gefallen . . ." (my emphasis; 3:270).¹⁹

Based on the value Schlegel attaches to *Lehren* both in the abstract and in art, some scholars have asserted that he dismisses it through the front door only to admit it again through the back.²⁰ However, the substantiality and centrality of pleasure and the accidental and peripheral nature of instruction remain fundamental principles of his aesthetics. Schlegel offers not merely a conceptual justification, but a theoretical imperative for going beyond Gottsched's privileging of the moral *Lehrsatz* toward greater appreciation of art per se and an integrated approach to the recipient as individual and member of society. Schlegel repeatedly stresses that an instructive *Vorbild* must not appear to be such. In the *Gedanken zur Aufnahme des dänischen Theaters* he writes that when theater teaches, "so thut es solches nicht wie ein Pedant, welcher es allemal voraus verkündigt, daß er etwas Kluges sagen will; sondern wie ein Mensch, der durch seinen Umgang unterrichtet, und der sich hütet, jemals zu erkennen zu geben, daß dieses seine Absicht sey" (3:272). For this reason, he rejects the notion that plays must evince a single *Hauptlehre*, though such teachings are not to be scoffed at (3:273). Theater imparts knowledge as experience of human character and passion in the diverse situations of life. Such a view of the didactic dimension of literature anticipates that of Weimar classicism. In "Über das Pathetische," for example, Schiller writes, "Die Dichtkunst führt bey dem Menschen nie ein besondres Geschäft aus. . . . Ihr Wirkungskreis ist das Total der menschlichen Natur, und bloß, insofern sie auf den Charakter einfließt, kann sie auf seine einzelnen Wirkungen Einfluß haben."²¹ Goethe expresses a similar view in his brief critical essay "Über das Lehrgedicht": "Alle Poesie soll belehrend sein, aber unmerklich; sie soll den Menschen aufmerksam machen, wovon sich zu belehren wert wäre; er muß die Lehre selbst daraus ziehen wie aus dem Leben."²²

Another reason for Schlegel's rejection of overt didacticism in literature may be that he saw no necessary link between reason and will and, therefore, between reason and human action.²³ He appears to have discerned in man something akin to what the philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt calls first- and second-order desires. First-order desires occur when someone "simply desires to do or not to do one thing or another"; second-order desires arise when someone "wants simply to have a certain desire or when he wants a certain desire to be his will."²⁴ According to this notion of desire and will, art, like religion, may be understood to address one's second-order desires in order to influence one's first-order desires. It would appear that Schlegel viewed the edificatory impact of drama as of all art in this manner, and it is

only a short step from this point to the idea that the pleasure imparted by art has the same salutary effect.

II

As stated at the outset of this study, Schlegel's plays reflect at least two central tenets of his poetics—this despite numerous wholesale assertions to the contrary.²⁵ One of these involves his notion that art must account for the intellectual and experiential—read broadly socially determined—differences among individuals in order to insure congruity between *Bild* and *Vorbild* in the artwork.²⁶ This view, we recall, led him to propose a taxonomy of drama that departs significantly from tradition by blurring distinctions between comedy and tragedy. Schlegel made four distinct attempts to realize this aspect of his theory in original plays. Though completing only two of them, one of which survives only as a fragment, all four clearly indicate what he was about, which was little short of revolutionary for the time and place.

Schlegel apparently wrote only seventeen lines of a tragicomic *Nachspiel* entitled *Der Gärtnerkönig*, which he based on the story originating in antiquity about Abdalonymus, an impoverished gardener of royal lineage who was made king of Sidon by Alexander the Great.²⁷ In his lengthy letter to Johann Jacob Bodmer of 18 September 1747, however, he gives an illuminating sketch of both the plot and the characters and their motivations.²⁸ His Abdolnim was to be a man of much common sense and unquestionable integrity who, however, lacks the refined manners of the fashionable world and court and “der in seinem Ausdrücke nicht bloß einfältig, sondern grob dabey redet.”²⁹ He is half persuaded to accept Alexander's offer of the crown by his wife, who, wishing to make an impression in high society, expresses herself in the affected language of someone of low estate who has suddenly attained high rank—and of recent German tragedy—and who shrinks neither from giving her husband rules for proper behavior at court nor from hatching plots to enable her daughter to win Alexander's heart. Following complications involving the daughter and her two suitors, one a pretender, the other a true successor to the throne of Sidon, Abdolnim realizes *inter alia* that anyone removed from the condition to which he is accustomed cuts a foolish figure in the world and gladly cedes the crown to the rightful heir and his daughter, much to the chagrin of his wife.

As the descriptions of his characters as well as overt statements demonstrate, Schlegel intended *Der Gärtnerkönig* to be a satire of “vielerley Fehler der neuen [German] Tragödien,” particularly those related to diction and verse form, for which he planned to offer remedies.³⁰ At the same time he makes clear that the subject matter would make for a good play irrespective of the satiric intent; indeed, he aimed to write it in such a way that uncritical spectators would not even notice the satire in his “halbkomisches und halbpathetisches” play.³¹ The lion's share of the mirth was to be provided by Abdolnim's wife and the young suitor-pretender, a *Petit-Maitre* in Alexander's camp who was to epitomize the poorly realized hero of contemporary German tragedy.³² For present purposes it is worthy of note that this comic foop is a nobleman.³³ More noteworthy, however, is the fact that the main

character, the source of pathos in the play, is a common man, and not even a bourgeois at that, but rather a peasant. Abdolnim's royal descent may give him a certain patina of respectability lacking in the figures of farce, but by upbringing, nature, and mentality—i.e., in every way that truly counts—he is a man of the people. His common sense and integrity are clearly not dependent upon class, something even Schlegel's uncritical spectators would have realized. And it is precisely this nobility of soul in sackcloth that would have linked a fully developed Abdolnim to Hermann and Canut, Schlegel's best-known untragic tragic heroes, who, if not pathetic in the classical, or perhaps any other, sense, are nonetheless moral and wise in the best sense of the eighteenth century.

Another ideal of the era of Enlightenment finds expression in the comedy fragment *Die drey Philosophen*, in which the relation between social class and traditional dramatic genre evinced by *Der Gärtnerkönig* is reversed.³⁴ Though Schlegel left behind no comments pertaining to the play per se, it is significant that he spoke of it to his brother Heinrich as a “Komödie von einer besonderen Gattung,” that is, that he considered it an experiment in genre, one, as he relates to Bodmer, that his friends in Leipzig repeatedly urged him to complete.³⁵ Moreover, the three scenes of the first act, though unfinished, as well as the stage directions and notes for several other scenes in what was to be a full-length play provide a sufficiently lucid picture of the shape the work was to take.

Schlegel's three philosophers are Aristippus, Diogenes, and Plato. True to the figure of tradition Aristippus is a man of the world whose good humor and practical good sense make him the perfect “shadow” of Dionysius (2:601) and whose hedonism both enables him to understand his ruler's preference for his beautiful mistress, Cleone, over his clever wife, Arete, and makes him receptive to the charms of Cleone's confidante, Phryne. Diogenes is the familiar sharp-tongued ascetic who has come to court to “convert” its legitimate residents as well as its creations, or at least to teach them “wie toll ihr seydt” (2:603), i.e., how false their ideal of opulent pleasure is. Plato also sojourns at court for missionary purposes, but, ever the idealist, he seeks to make a “true prince” of Dionysius according to his notions of virtue and justice. The conflict arises precisely because this attempt jeopardizes Cleone's privileged position and, as Phryne laments, “unsern ganzen Hof zur Winkelschule machet, / Wo alles ernsthaft sieht, und schon kein Mensch mehr lachet” (2:609).

The stage directions and notes indicate that as a result of Plato's influence Dionysius initially resolves to reconcile with Arete and virtue. However, he soon returns to his old ways, which costs Diogenes the royal favor, since he has told Cleone precipitously that the king has banned her from court at Arete's insistence. Indeed, Dionysius commands that Plato be placed under arrest and that provisions be made “zur Wollust und zu Ueppigkeiten” (2:616). Diogenes now requests permission to leave court, citing Dionysius's unjust treatment of Plato and his favorites. However, Plato's fate and the plot take a favorable turn when Arete appears to plea for his life, having heard that he is soon to be executed. Alarmed, Dionysius traces this false rumor back to Cleone, who invented it to induce Plato to leave court. Now in disgrace, she herself must depart, and Diogenes returns to his barrel.

It would appear that of the three philosophers competing in the play Plato and his idealism ultimately emerge victorious, and, with them, Schlegel's ideal of enlightened absolutism—an aristocratic ideal, to be sure, but one devoted to the wellbeing of all. It is no surprise that Diogenes comes to his defense against Aristippus and Cleone, for though he is politically an anarchist, believing, “Der beste Staat sey der, den man so kollern lasse” (2:605), his asceticism is closer to Plato's notion of virtue than to Aristippus's pleasure principle. The play was thus to be a sort of *Fürstenspiegel*, predating Haller's *Usong* and Wieland's *Der goldne Spiegel* by some thirty years, though the proximity of Plato's and Diogenes's views on morality tends to attenuate any primary didactic thrust. While Plato's enlightened absolutism was Schlegel's ideal for the real world, Diogenes's ultimately ineffectual skeptical anarchism reflects an apparently cardinal element of his private politics, related to his epistemological skepticism.

Even in its unfinished state, and from a modern perspective, *Die drey Philosophen* reveals Schlegel's idea of the national role of drama insofar as it upholds a German (and Danish) ideal form of government, criticizing the toadyism and excesses of court in German lands. This despite the ancient Greek garb, or perhaps precisely because of it, since the play was based loosely on the historical Plato's unsuccessful intervention in Syracusan politics in 367 and 361–360 BC, when at the invitation of Dion and Archytas of Tarentum he sought to train Dionysus II as a constitutional king.³⁶ The successes of enlightened absolutism in the Saxon duchies to the west, as in the rest of central Europe, still lay in the future.³⁷ If requiring more inspiration than that offered by Xenophon, Machiavelli, and Fénélon, Schlegel had only to consider the unenlightened form of absolutism represented by the politically disinterested and extravagant Friedrich August II of Saxony (August III of Poland) and his soon-to-be prime minister, Heinrich von Brühl, with his disastrous economic policy.³⁸

What makes the play a comedy, in the sense of early eighteenth-century Germany, is in important part the happy resolution of the conflict between Plato and Cleone. While the plot turns on an intrigue, as in contemporary Saxon comedy, however, the schemer is not a positive character seeking to improve another, but one in need of improvement herself, which foreshadows our discussion of the relation between pleasure and didacticism in Schlegel's finished comedies below. Typical of comedy as well is the witty dialog particularly of Diogenes and Aristippus together with Phryne, who possesses the linguistic agility characteristic of her sisters in the theater. Though comic in conception—the ascetic Diogenes, for example, cannot conceal his lust for the confidante—the three philosophers represent a comic type only in the most general sense. Perhaps because Schlegel was able to rely on features of the historical figures, e.g., the jovial urbanity of Aristippus and the rather crass audacity of Diogenes, his philosophers are too individuated even considering the fragmentary form of the play to qualify even remotely as generic *doctores*. Paulsen is right to maintain, with Schlegel, that the author attempted something quite new—and complex—in the play.³⁹

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the play's complexity is the social and genre-historical extraction of the principal characters. The son of a

banker, the historical Diogenes consciously chose his life of peregrine mendicancy for philosophical reasons. Schlegel's Diogenes, however, exhibits nothing of a bourgeois upbringing. On learning that Plato is seeking to make a true prince of Dionysius, for instance, he remarks,

Ey, das ist ärgerlich! Das muß getadelt seyn.
 Zum Henker! Laß mich nur in den Pallast hinein!
 Gleich vor dem Dionys will ich dem Plato sagen,
 Daß er sehr närrisch thut, unmöglich Zeug zu wagen. (2:606)

He thereby displays the familiar temperament and language, if not the prudence, of the peasant or craftsman in low comedy or farce. Aristippus characterizes himself as well as Plato when he reveals the latter's intentions:

Doch glaube; Plato ist deswegen ganz gescheid.
 Er redet, wenn er soll, und schweigt zu seiner Zeit.
 Er pralt bei Hofe nicht mit dunkelm Schulgeschwätze.
 Er kennt der Bürger Wohl, er kennt des Landes Schätze.
 Er weis, wie man die Furcht mit Liebe stets vereint;
 Wie man List gebraucht, und doch es redlich meynt.
 Doch merke dir von ihm noch eins; es ist zum Lachen:
 Er will den Dionys zum wahren Fürsten machen. (2:606)

Though differing greatly in philosophical conviction and sense of the politically possible, Aristippus and Plato are identical in their upper-class background and savoir faire as well as their provenance from high comedy, or the comedy of manners.⁴⁰ Dionysius does not appear in any of the partially executed scenes of the play. Based on the existing evidence, however, it is safe to say that he was to be an indecisive, frivolously dissolute figure whose potentially dangerous inconstancy is ultimately counterbalanced by susceptibility to good advice. Certainly, in any case, he was not to be the admirable and august hero of tragedy. How to make a comic figure of a king, to transform a literary genre to reflect a not infrequently lived reality? An inability to answer these questions may have partly determined Schlegel's failure to complete the play. However, the fact that he broached them, in addition to the even broader question of how to mix three social classes and three literary genres, attests to the originality of his thinking for the time and place as well as to its continuity with his creative work.

One factor that verifiably did not contribute to the fate of *Die drey Philosophen* was fear of offending the nobility. For in 1742, the same year in which Schlegel began work on the play, he completed another, *Die Pracht zu Landheim*, in which the relative obliquity of criticism in the earlier work yields to what amounts, in terms of comedy, to a frontal assault. This full-length play is one of the two Schlegel finished. For reasons given further along, however, it has come down to us as a fragment, more precisely as a reconstruction based on the author's drafts and his brothers' memory (3:526).⁴¹ The end of the fourth act and the entire fifth act are missing, editorial comments revealing how the play was to conclude. Nonetheless, the sixty-one pages extant surely provide a reliable impression of the original and thereby of Schlegel's intentions.

The splendor evoked in the title has two sources. Frau von Landheim is much at pains to transform her country estate into a little Dresden, without, however, spending any money in the process. In addition to keeping a French chambermaid, who, as we saw, turns out to be a mere German, she resorts to such measures as making three local craftsmen over into a hunter, a lackey, and a footman. Her son, Junker Berthold, returns from *le grand tour* sniffing at his mother's provincial ways and inept attempts to emulate high society and seeking to establish a "truly" fashionable, and ruinously extravagant, "French" lifestyle for himself at home. As part of this endeavor he reveals to Lisette-Lieschen his wish to marry a Frenchwoman of quality but to keep her, the chambermaid, as his mistress, an honor which she, however, declines. Much of the comic interest of the play derives from such efforts per se as well as from their clash, which forms the conflict of the plot. The play was to climax with a birthday party for Frau von Landheim, which, however, comes to naught when the servant, Christian, absconds with most of what was intended for the celebration.

At its most general level *Die Pracht zu Landheim* is obviously a critique of the ostentation of the nobility, particularly of its German instantiation as *Deutschfranzosentum*, much in the manner of Holberg's *Jean de France*.⁴² While Holberg's Hans Frandsen and his family and neighbors are clearly designated as *Borger*; however, Schlegel's principal characters are of the gentry, and if they act no better than commoners that is precisely the point. They are indeed country squires rather than royalty, but crossing their cousins in the real world could incur unpleasantness all the same. If Schlegel's criticism seems mild, one should consider the circumstances surrounding the fate of the original manuscript. As Heinrich relates in his preface, their father feared that the play might be understood as a sort of *drame à clef* referring to certain individuals in the local peerage with whom he had had unnamed "Verdrießlichkeiten" and that the author might be taken for his avenger and the satirist that he in fact was (3:525-26). Although the elder Schlegel recommended only withholding the play from publication, his son consigned it to the flames out of filial respect.

Whether Schlegel intended the play as an act of retribution or not, his father's concerns demonstrate that it mirrored conditions around Meißen as well, by extension, as in Germany at large.⁴³ This fact, coupled with the depiction of the figures and the absence of a love intrigue—Berthold's failed dalliance with Lisette-Lieschen does not amount to such—suggests that Schlegel wrote the play with his notion of the ideal national character of drama in mind. He self-evidently intended it to express his new views on the social function of drama within the context of his theory of imitation. Here, more patently than in *Der Gärtnerkönig* and *Die drey Philosophen*, he breaches the *Ständeklausel* of tradition by making the first estate the butt of comedy.

In anticipation of subsequent discussion it should be added that none of the plays discussed up to this point exhibits the didacticism of Gottschedian moralism. Schlegel's criticism, itself aesthetic and/or socio-political in nature, unfolds by way of comic self-revelation rather than by overt precept or heavy-handed demonstration. One finds an emphasis on pleasure in place of edification in most of the finished works as well.

III

As we saw earlier, Schlegel by no means banishes didacticism or even the moral dictum from his poetics. Neither does he entirely eschew them in his plays. *Der gute Rath*, written in 1745, two years after his move to Denmark and thus no early work, presents itself rather unapologetically as a comedy after Gottsched's heart. Raadfest's virtual obsession to give advice and to see it followed sets him at odds with his future brother-in-law and sister as well as others, thus reflecting both the general moral or character flaw, or *Laster*, and the conflictful dramatic situation typical of the Saxon comedy. His angry insistence that Vorhoved not renew a promissory note extended to Frau Husvild leads ultimately to the latter's taking flight and leaving both men in the financial lurch. Though Raadfest remains somewhat recalcitrant even with lighter pockets, the play essentially represents a variant of Gottschedian comedy which, as we shall soon see in greater detail, has been called the "monomische Komödie." Thus, it comes as no surprise when at the very end of the play Leonore, Raadfest's sensible sister, relates the "moral of the story" as follows: "Eben deswegen, Herr Bruder, weil man irren kann, muß man auf seine Urtheile nicht so viel Vertrauen setzen, daß man sich erzürnen sollte, wenn ihnen andre nicht folgen" (2:468). If the poet's *Vorbild*, here self-righteousness, arises in the *Verstand*, then a more didactic approach to representation is for Schlegel not at all out of order in drama or art as a whole. Such, however, is not the case in the vast majority of his major comedies.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to consider the question of what makes a didactic comedy of the Gottschedian type didactic. Based on relevant scholarship, the sine qua non of the form would appear to be twofold: the thematic centrality of laughable human flaws and their potential consequences, often expressed sententiously at the end of the play, and a rhetorical, or argumentative, plot structure designed to impress the failing and its possible results on the spectator. As the "motor" of the play, with its edificatory intent, the plot structure is of particular importance. Horst Steinmetz has identified two fundamental types.⁴⁴

In both kinds the main character's flaw disturbs his relationship with others in his world, be they a beloved or a lover, friends, or family members, thus creating two "fronts" in opposition to each other. The binomial type evinces a second, more general social-moral evil embodied by a character who is frequently an out-and-out criminal and who seeks to take advantage of the principal figure. Over the course of the play the interaction between protagonist and antagonist escalates to the point that the former's failing finally dawns on him and the latter's vice is revealed to the world. In Frau Gottsched's *Die Pietisterei im Fischbein-Rocke*, for example, Frau Glaubeleichtin recognizes her gullibility, while Magister Scheinfromm, who has taken advantage of a young girl, must flee to avoid arrest. The circle of sensible characters usually has a static function in this variant of Saxon comedy, occasionally intervening in the action in order to hasten revelation of flaw and vice. In the monomial comedy the dramatic energy released by the absence of the second vice is, as it were, absorbed precisely by this group of reasonable figures.

The sharpened contrast between “lasterhafter Typ” and “vernünftige Umwelt” serves both to profile the former’s flaw and to generate a conflict that ultimately leads to his recognition of it. In a progressive variant of this scheme the circle of family and/or friends tries repeatedly, yet unsuccessfully, to convince the protagonist of the error of his ways, whereupon they resort to an intrigue that finally has the desired result. While artistically far superior to its predecessors, Lessing’s *Minna von Barnhelm* clearly displays the contours of the monomial comedy of intrigue. Schlegel’s most characteristic comedies also exhibit signs of the age in which they were written, but like *Minna*, if not entirely in the same ways, they disclose an essentially independent artist at work.

In this regard even the unfinished *Die Pracht zu Landheim* is paradigmatic. Both Frau von Landheim and Junker Berthold exhibit flaws, and their squabble generates a plot-controlling conflict reminiscent of the binomial comedy.⁴⁵ However, they share the same dominant flaw, pretense, to which the one couples parsimony and the other extravagance, which would render any intended didactic thrust diffuse, certainly in comparison with the binomial form in its definitive sense. Moreover, none of the characters’ failings reflects a broader social evil, not to mention a crime. Most importantly, the back-and-forth between mother and son does not culminate in any opening of their eyes—or in the servant Christian’s incidental theft of what in any event were to be the paltry accoutrements of the wedding celebration, the only true crime committed in the work—for in the end they remain as unregenerate as ever. They simply reveal their foolishness for the entertainment and observation of the spectators, who are free to make of it what they will, if anything at all.

Critics are virtually unanimous in their opinion that Schlegel’s *Die stumme Schönheit* (1747) represents a unicum among eighteenth-century German plays prior to *Minna*.⁴⁶ Wicke opines that the “Wertung” of the play is “die der Schaubühne,” yet concedes, rather contradictorily, that the satire in the work is “ästhetisch überhöht, ja, relativiert.”⁴⁷ Even Steinmetz, otherwise keen to absorb individual works into his taxonomy, speaks of the lightness of a more value-free comedy: “Alle Aktionen laufen ohne den sonst üblichen moralischen Akzent ab. . . .”⁴⁸

Certainly, the wealthy Richard and Frau Praatgern are at cross-purposes in their desire to marry their respective daughters to the well-to-do Jungwitz, not, however, to the end of revealing a moral or character flaw in either, for the wish for a good match for one’s child per se hardly constitutes such. The same can be said of Richard’s traditionalism with regard to his notion of the ideal wife. Frau Praatgern exhibits a certain social overreach, or pretense, in her aspirations for her daughter and certainly displays deceptiveness in her attempt to pass the beautiful but dull and monosyllabic Charlotte off as Richard’s charming and intelligent Leonore, whom he had placed in Praatgern’s care years earlier on becoming a widower. However, she and Charlotte share Richard’s view of the ideal wife, both at the beginning of the play and following the intrigue at the end. Moreover, the intrigue, introduced late in the play in any event, serves not to expose Praatgern, or Charlotte, in the sense of the Saxon comedy, but rather to show the implementation

of their designs on Jungwitz. To top it off, the intrigue fails, achieving precisely the reverse of its objective by allowing Charlotte's intellectual deficits to become transparent, as Leonore, concealed behind her friend's chair, tries unsuccessfully to prompt her in her decisive conversation with Jungwitz. And just what moral could be drawn from this revelation, as Neuhuber asks: Not to be born dumb?⁴⁹

In *Die stumme Schönheit* Schlegel presents a new ideal view of both wife and woman in general, one in which neither need apologize for being the intellectual equal of a husband or men on the whole. Along the way, the privileging of appearance over substance *inter alia* comes in for its share of disparagement. Satire is certainly present in the work, however not in the form of a forefinger raised from a lectern, but rather as a corollary of character revealed in incident. It is a telling but typically good-humored irony that in the final scene the philosopher Lakonius asks for Charlotte's hand precisely because her silence will allow him to pursue his thinking, thus insuring a happy ending for all. According to Hinck, the play is conciliatory, a "weltüberlegene[s]' Spiel" that breaks the mold of the *Verlachkomödie*.⁵⁰ Of course, it is no small part of the work's aesthetic disposition and appeal, i.e., its *raison d'être*, that it is written in verse.

Critical opinion on Schlegel's other major comedies is divided to the point of marked contradiction, even self-contradiction. Relative to *Der Geheimnisvolle*, Wolf deems the true motivation for Abgrund's secretiveness respectable but nonetheless finds him in need of edification and acceptance.⁵¹ Similarly, Paulsen terms Abgrund's "vice" at worst a bad habit yet still speaks basically as if Schlegel were up to "das obligate Moralisieren."⁵² Steinmetz opines that Abgrund realizes his wishes despite retaining his "Charakterschwäche" because his flaw is not a true moral weakness, being unique to him, and because he has a good reason for it⁵³—all of which is to say that the work is not a moral comedy in ethos. Indeed, Wicke writes insightfully that the play wants "zunächst und in erster Linie erheitern" and represents a "zweckfreies komisches Spiel ohne moralische Wertung."⁵⁴

As in the case of *Die stumme Schönheit* an unmistakable streak of satire runs through *Der Geheimnisvolle*. Von Glocke is so named because of his character-defining habit of divining and then "peeling out" the secrets of others, particularly when it serves his peculiar purposes, here to compete with Abgrund for Amalia's affections. His is a *Laster* more or less in the mold of the Saxon comedy. However, the revelation of his "vice," punished in any case only by his loss of the contest, is incidental to the main plot, which revolves around Abgrund's disguises and other attempts to conceal his true identity. The intrigue executed by von Schlangendorf and Catherine, Amalia's father and maid, respectively, reflects an attempt to uncover Abgrund's identity so as to determine his fitness as a husband for Amalia, not to cure him of his "inscrutability." Moreover, as we learn at the end of the play, he left home under the pretext of going to France in order to seek his fortune relying only on himself rather than on his influential father. That is to say, he returns to the fold not, for example, as a prodigal son, but instead as an admirable, if rather unusual young man, one who retains his characteristic trait even at the final curtain.

Again as in *Die stumme Schönheit*, the women in *Der Geheimnisvolle* hold their own against the men. In the face of Schlangendorf's patriarchalism Catherine must suppress her conviction that Amalia should choose her husband for herself (2:208-12), but she is at pains to insure that father and daughter make the same choice. Likewise, Amalia maintains an independent critical reserve even when von Bährenfeld (Abgrund's father) speaks highly of women. When he acknowledges that men owe women everything, their social graces as well as their honesty, since their virtues often derive from their attempts to please women, she counters what could be construed as the implicit condescension by replying, "Sie sagen etwas, Herr Graf, das Sie bey dem übrigen Frauenzimmer nicht leichtlich werden verantworten können" (2:309).

As an unrelated but not at all insignificant sidelight one should note that the major figures in the play have "von" as part of their surnames. *Der Geheimnisvolle* is neither a conception nor a fragment, but rather a finished full-length comedy, the second of those mentioned above and the only one extant in its entirety, in which members of the gentry reveal themselves to be more human than heroic and in which at least one, von Glocke, attracts the steady gaze of the laughing harlequin. More clearly than the related texts, the play represents an implementation of Schlegel's new theoretical understanding of the social role of drama.

If in the two preceding plays the question of romantic love and marriage is peripheral to the main action, it occupies the structural and thematic center of *Der Triumph der guten Frauen* (1747). Here, it presents itself as a battle of the sexes, at least as far as the men are concerned. Agenor begins to tyrannize Juliane immediately after their wedding, questioning her loyalty while trying to seduce her maid, Catherine. His friend Nikander has left his wife, Hilaria, and seeks to conquer every beauty he encounters, including Juliane, for he is not above taking advantage of Agenor's troubled marriage. Indeed, the two are uncommonly and openly brutish in their chauvinism. Nikander, for example, proudly proclaims his unfaithfulness and the ruthlessness with which he pursues his prey (3:404). He goes so far as to declare his hatred of women, attempting to give the sentiment an aura of respectability by couching his treatment of them as a means of opening their eyes to their weakness and thus improving them (3:379-80)—perhaps Schlegel's meta-literary distancing of his play from the moral comedy of the *Schaubühne*.

The women, particularly, Hilaria, conduct their campaign much more subtly than their husbands. For a time, Juliane hopes that continued demonstrations of love will move Agenor to change. Growing outraged over his behavior, she eventually resolves to meet obstinacy with obstinacy, only then to despair of ever achieving her end. Independent and self-assertive, like Leonore in *Die stumme Schönheit*, Hilaria disguises herself as her pretended brother, Philinte, and performs the charade of seducing Juliane before Agenor's very eyes.⁵⁵ As a result, Agenor, and with him Nikander, realizes what he has almost forfeited and nearly goes so far as to allow Juliane to rule over him.

Wolf speaks for most recent critics when he implicitly aligns *Der Triumph der guten Frauen* with Gottschedian comedy, finding a clearly expressed "Programm" in the opening lines, where Catherine tells the already disguised

Hilaria, "Ich glaube doch bald . . . wir Frauenzimmer würden es nicht anders machen, als die Mannspersonen, wenn wir an ihrer Stelle wären. Die Begierde zu verführen muß doch gleich in den Mannskleidern stecken" (2:327).⁵⁶ Wicke considers the play a "Denkspiel[], das . . . durch Vernunftschlüsse im logischen Raum überzeugen will" by means of a satiric "Frontendialog," which, however, does not lead to reconciliation.⁵⁷ For Steinmetz, indeed, the work marks the highpoint of the monomial comedy of intrigue.⁵⁸

The play's structural similarity to German Enlightenment comedy is clear enough. The women and men indeed form fronts whose opposition controls the plot from beginning to end, though here there are two *lasterhafte Typen*, rather than the one customary in the monomial comedy. Moreover, it is an intrigue that brings about a resolution of the conflict, albeit one that is initiated at the very beginning of the play. This, however, is a significant departure from convention, for, no last resort, it casts a playful light over the entire action, from the outset tonally assuring the happy ending endemic to comedy and thereby attenuating the excesses of the men.⁵⁹ Early introduction of the intrigue is all the more understandable, moreover, since the men's misogyny and philandering are hardly laughable human flaws. Significantly, it is not *Vernunftschlüsse* that indeed lead to reconciliation, but rather fear of loss, i.e., emotion. If there is any *Programm* in the play it is found in Catherine's lines at the close: "Ihr Herren Ehemänner, ihr möget so wild oder so ausschweifend seyn, als ihr wollt. Eine gute Frau findet schon Mittel, euch wieder zurechte zu bringen" (2:448). In this play such means are not born of reason, but rather reflect a *Programm* of love. The work reveals more than the first "Auflösungstendenzen" of the monomial comedy of intrigue:⁶⁰ in its ethos, that is to say, at its core, it is already something else. While not morally indifferent, it seeks first and foremost to express the power and joy of love through aesthetic means. If written in prose rather than verse, the play evinces both the disguise and the soliloquy, which, though common in comedy in general, demonstrate Schlegel's distance from Gottsched by emphasizing the dissimilitude, or *Unähnlichkeit*, of the work and thereby underscoring its entertainment value.⁶¹

Despite the comments cited above scholars are quite aware that *Der Triumph der guten Frauen* is different from the comedy of its time in important ways. Virtually all subsume these differences under a proximity, tendency, or transition to sentimental comedy.⁶² Wicke writes that *Der Geheimnisvolle*, too, is often called "ein empfindsames Lustspiel."⁶³ Although considerations of space preclude adequate elaboration, I would like to suggest that these plays as well as *Die stumme Schönheit* resemble less the *comédie larmoyante* of Destouches and the work of Gellert than the English romantic comedy beginning with Robert Greene and Shakespeare. In none of these texts does one find that dominant effusive or cloying emotionalism of *das weinerliche Lustspiel*, calculated to inculcate virtue through an appeal to the heart. One does find an atmosphere of good spirits, not infrequently spiced by attic salt of feminine provenance, created by characters that show more matter-of-factly that people of wit, good will, and true feeling can overcome obstacles to their happiness. In a play designed to convince through the logic of head or heart, improbability is out of place. In one intended primarily to please, on

the other hand, the “psychological implausibility” of Agenor’s and Nikander’s sudden conversion, like Leonore’s poorly played role as *souffleuse*, is as appropriate as the four sylvan marriages in *As You Like It*.⁶⁴

Schlegel establishes pleasure as the reason for being of comedy in his very first complete work in the genre, *Der geschäftige Müßiggänger* of 1741. The play has been called the most Gottschedian of all his comedies, to be sure, adhering precisely to the master’s rules.⁶⁵ Indeed, it exhibits the typical two fronts: Fortunat, the title figure, on the one hand, and virtually all the other major characters, on the other. Throughout the play the latter seek to talk the “idler” into changing his ways. However, they fail utterly. While this may not alter the monomial structure of the play, as has been pointed out, it certainly constitutes a breach of convention and bears on the alleged presence of satire as moral corrective in the work.⁶⁶ Here, one must ask to what *Gruppe der Vernünftigen* Fortunat should or could return. His mother, Frau Sylvesterin, née Sorger, is frenetic in her repeated expressions of concern that he meet his obligations as a newly minted lawyer, *nota bene* in order to better himself and the family socially. His stepfather, Sylvester, is an equally philistine fur merchant for whom anything useless is wrong. If Fortunat is *geschäftig*, his sister, Fiekchen, has more than she can handle with a single activity. For Lieschen, his intended intended, orderliness and punctuality are so important that she has chosen the clock as her personal symbol.

Fortunat, for his part, also has his shortcomings. He bears a distinct, if distant resemblance to Junker Berthold in *Die Pracht zu Landheim* in his dandyish concern for his appearance. He reveals a streak of vanity in the pride he takes in his newly acquired learning, for instance, using *Tusche* instead of *Bild* when speaking with his artistically uninformed, and annoyed, father. Most significantly, he exhibits decided dilettantism *inter alia* in his inability to distinguish between allusion and plagiarism with regard to lines from Günther or to recognize the inferiority of his own diction. However, he is not at all without artistic apprehension, aware, for example, of the relationship between music and lyric poetry as well as the distinctive modes of experiencing them, the immediacy of the former and the reflection involved with the latter. In the *verkehrte Welt* of the play, peopled largely by caricatures, his varied interests and refusal to limit himself to one emerge not as the greatest, or least, of evils, but rather as something admirable in tendency and innocuous in youthfully imperfect implementation. When at the end of the play Lieschen declares her shame over being loved by the most idle person in the world, breaking with him in favor of his aptly named rival, Rennthier, one can only congratulate the new couple, who so richly deserve each other—as well as the fortunate Fortunat, who turns unbowed to his far more compatible easel.⁶⁷

Schlegel expressed the notion of poetics and comedy discussed in these pages most graphically and suggestively, perhaps, in his allegorical *Vorspiel*, *Die Langeweile*, which he wrote for the coronation of Denmark’s King Frederik V and the opening of the new theater in Copenhagen in 1747. Here, *Verstand* dismisses *Langeweile* from the theater, implicitly by ordering *Komödie* to marry *Scherz*. *Komödie* readily complies and concludes the work with the words, “Zween Wünsche, welche mir am treuen Herzen liegen,

/ Will ich im Ernste stets zu meinen Scherzen fügen; / Den ersten, Friedrichs Wohl; den andern, eur Vergnügen!" (2:544).

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NOTES

1. *Johann Elias Schlegels aesthetische und dramaturgische Schriften*, ed. Johann von Antoniewicz, Deutsche Litteraturdenkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts 26 (Heilbronn: Verlag von Gebr. Henninger, 1887).

2. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, *Johann Elias Schlegel: A German Pioneer in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1945; rpt. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973).

3. Steven D. Martinson, "Nachwort," *Johann Elias Schlegel: Vergleichung Shakspears und Andreas Gryphs und andere dramentheoretische Schriften* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984) 85-93.

4. Gerlinde Bretzigheimer, *Johann Elias Schlegels poetische Theorie im Rahmen der Tradition* (Munich: Fink, 1986); David Price, rev., *Lessing Yearbook* 20 (1988): 336-39.

5. Within the framework of the present study it is impossible to respond in any adequate way to Bretzigheimer's broad-scaled as well as detailed study. For this reason I restrict myself to isolated aspects of her argument as they become relevant for my own purposes.

6. For examples see note 25 below.

7. A review of the publications on Schlegel's plays appearing in *Germanistik* between 1986 and 2008 reveals that those dealing with the tragedies, principally *Hermann* and *Canut*, outnumber those treating the comedies by a margin of almost two to one (10-6). Paulsen makes his statement on the prominence of comedy in Schlegel's work in *Johann Elias Schlegel und die Komödie* (Bern and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1977) 68.

8. Schlegel's views of imitation as well as pleasure and the *Wirkung* of art are present in nuce in the early essay "Schreiben über die Komödie in Versen" of 1740; Johann Elias Schlegel, *Werke*, ed. Johann Heinrich Schlegel, 5 vols. (1764-73. Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1971) 3:65-94 (Subsequent page references are to this edition and will be included in the text in parenthesis). However, the principle statements are found in "Abhandlung, daß die Nachahmung der Sache, der man nachahmet, zuweilen unähnlich werden müsse" (1741) *Werke*, 3:163-76 as "Abhandlung von der Unähnlichkeit in der Nachahmung") and "Abhandlung von der Nachahmung" (1742) *Werke*, 3:95-162 as "Von der Nachahmung"). The following comments are indebted in significant part, both in agreement and disagreement, to Wilkinson, Bretzigheimer, and Steven D. Martinson, *On Imitation, Imagination and Beauty: A Critical Reassessment of the Concept of the Literary Artist During the Early German "Aufklärung"* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1977). It should be noted that Martinson views the achievement of Gottsched and the Swiss Bodmer and Breitingner as well as Schlegel more sanguinely than does Bretzigheimer.

9. Johann Jacob Breitingner, *Critische Dichtkunst* (1740; Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966) 1:73-77, especially 75; Price (n. 4) 337.

10. Price (n. 4) 337 asserts such an influence in his review of Bretzigheimer, apparently extrapolating from the author's discussion on pp. 23-24.

11. Bretzigheimer apparently sets the bar for innovation very high. Wilkinson (n. 2) 72 writes, more generously, “Clearly Schlegel . . . touches more closely on the nature of artistic creation than do any of his contemporaries. The actor must ‘create’ a death of his own; the artist must ‘transform’ his original. Is it possible within the theory of imitation proper to go further than this? Is the principle not thus stretched to a point beyond which it must break and be cast aside in favour of another?”

12. According to Martinson, Schlegel’s sharp distinction between art and reality reflects a notion of *Wirkung* that anticipates more Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* than Lessing’s *Mitleidstheorie*; “Nachwort” (n. 3) 87, 88.

13. In his verse epistle “Von der Verschiedenheit der menschlichen Begriffe” Schlegel reveals a fundamental skepticism reminiscent of that of Albrecht von Haller in his poem “Versenkt im tiefen Traum” and Wieland in his essay “Was ist Wahrheit?” (4:125–28).

14. See Marlies Kegel-Vogel, “Johann Elias Schlegel und der Erziehungsoptimismus in der deutschen Aufklärung,” *Worte und Werte: Bruno Markwardt zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Gustav Erdmann and Alfons Eichstaedt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1961) 161. Bretzigheimer (n. 4) 92 denies the originality of Schlegel’s classification of drama as well as the claim that he relaxed or overcame the *Ständeklausel*, without, however, offering any evidence in support of her contention. She goes on to characterize his categorization of drama merely as an inadequate attempt to systematize a multiplicity of dramatic forms. Proceeding purely theory-immanently, she fails to recognize the practical innovativeness of Schlegel’s thinking, i.e., outside the realm of theory, and its impact on his dramatic practice as well as the latter’s possible repercussions for an understanding of his theory.

15. Price (n. 4) 338 speaks of Schlegel’s political conservatism in his review, presumably in response to Bretzigheimer (n. 4) 122 and 209–10.

16. See, for example, Walther Hubatsch, “Die ‘Ruhe des Nordens’ als Voraussetzung der Adelskultur des dänischen Gesamtstaats,” *Staatsdienst und Menschlichkeit: Studien zur Adelskultur des späten 18. Jahrhunderts in Schleswig-Holstein und Dänemark*, ed. Christian Degn and Dieter Lohmeyer (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1980) 11–22, and Thomas Munck, “The Danish Reformers,” *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. H. M. Scott (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1990) 245–63.

17. In this regard see the informative studies of Sibylle Plassmann, “Johann Elias Schlegel: Aufklärer und Weltbürger,” *Cosmopolitans in the Modern World: Studies on a Theme in German and Austrian Literary Culture*, ed. Suzanne Kirkbright (Munich: Iudicium, 2000) 53–66, and especially Heinrich Detering, “Die Nation der Poesie—Johann Elias Schlegel und die Seinen,” *Skandinavistik* 24 (1994): 85–102. I have been unable to gain access to Reinhold Münster, “Das Ende der kulturellen Hierarchie unter den Nationen: Johann Elias Schlegels vergleichende Betrachtung der Nationalcharaktere,” *Estudios filológicos alemanes* 13 (2007): 361–68.

18. As Bretzigheimer (n. 4) 1–2 states and then demonstrates, revisiting Schlegel’s poetics and contemporary German-language writing within a historical European context has its value. However, it is useful to consider the reserved evaluation of her study by Jill Anne Kowalik, *German Quarterly* 61 (1988): 304–5, who observes in it a conflation of ancient and modern concepts that prevents the author from recognizing the novelty of Renaissance and neoclassical [including eighteenth-century German] responses to ancient texts as well as a tendency to compile quotations rather than to develop a clear argument, all of which limits its usefulness as a research tool. Moreover, a snail’s-eye view of Schlegel’s ideas and relation to his German and

Swiss contemporaries allows one to discern ultimately significant differences of emphasis even within (previously unrecognized) areas of essential agreement. In Bretzighheimer's study, finally, the whole question of Schlegel's originality represents a sort of straw man. Eugen Wolff, for example, had long since demonstrated Schlegel's indebtedness to French and Italian Renaissance and neoclassical figures on the questions of imitation (Aubignac, Batry, Riccoboni) and pleasure (Fraguier); see his *Johann Elias Schlegel* (Berlin: Verlag von Robert Oppenheim, 1889) 79, 35. Martinson (n. 8) 40–55 and 145–58 is quite right to treat Schlegel in the context of early eighteenth-century German poetics.

19. This passage belies Bretzighheimer's claim (n. 4) 186 that, while pleasure is the main purpose of art for Schlegel, instruction is its main value.

20. See, for example, Kegel-Vogel (n. 14) 158–59.

21. Friedrich Schiller, "Über das Pathetische," *Schillers Werke* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1962) 20:219.

22. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag) 13.1:498.

23. See, for example, Kegel-Vogel (n. 14) 155.

24. Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the will and the concept of a person," *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays*, by Frankfurt (New York: Cambridge UP, 1988) 12, 16.

25. Karl Holl writes, for example, "daß er [Schlegel] in der Praxis seiner Theorie nicht entfernt nahekommt"; see his *Geschichte des deutschen Lustspiels* (Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung J. J. Weber, 1923) 150. Peter Wolf speaks of an "auffallende Scheidung" between theory and practice in Schlegel's plays in *Die Dramen Johann Elias Schlegels: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Dramas im 18. Jahrhundert* (Zurich: Atlantis Verlag, 1964) 10. Other commentators see a link between Schlegel's poetics and plays in isolated instances. Heinrich Detering (n. 17) 90, for instance, notes a connection between Schlegel's ideas on theater as an expression of national character. However, see the following note. Bretzighheimer (n. 4) 208 considers Schlegel's comedies (and tragedies) means of reaching some of the goals of his "Pädagogik": "Schulung der Erkenntnisfähigkeit und Schärfung des begrifflichen Denkens." As should become evident further along, however, her understanding of the works as representatives of the didactic Saxon comedy does not reflect their variety and comparative complexity, which compromises her assertion concerning their relation to his poetics.

26. We saw earlier that Schlegel considered nationality as well as social class a determinant in this context, thus participating in a discourse associated early on with Montesquieu and soon to find a vigorous advocate in Herder. Indeed, Detering (n. 17) 93 sees a close resemblance between Schlegel's "Idee nationaler Eigenarten" and that of the young Herder. One may also find parallels to the associationist aesthetics that developed from British empiricist psychology. However, it is no clearer to me than to Plassmann (n. 17) 63 precisely what constituted or constitutes nationality in drama, or art in general, and, therefore, to what extent Schlegel's plays, individually or collectively, are German or Danish or, for that matter, "French." Writers from Mendelssohn and Lessing to Wolfgang Paulsen (n. 7) 78, for example, agree that the characters in the comedy *Der Triumph der guten Frauen* are French rather than German, but they offer little or no rationale for their opinion: Moses Mendelssohn, "Literaturbrief 312," *Gesammelte Schriften: Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. I. Elbogen et al., 24 vols. (1929. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag, 1971–1997) 5.1:651; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing "Hamburgische Dramaturgie, 52. Stück," *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Wilfried Barner et al., 12 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–

2003) 6:440–41. Given such uncertainty, I have limited my comments largely to Schlegel's handling of social class in his comedies.

27. See Schlegel's *Werke* 2:635–38. Schlegel included a slightly different version in his letter to Bodmer of 15 April 1747; *Briefe berühmter und edler Deutschen an Bodmer*, ed. Gotthold Friedrich Stäudlin (Stuttgart: Mantler, 1794) 52–53. The story was treated more notably later in the eighteenth century in Mozart's operetta, or serenata, *Il re pastore*, which he wrote to an Italian libretto by Pietro Metastasio that in turn was based on Torquato Tasso's *Aminta*.

28. "Briefe Joh. Elias Schlegels an Bodmer," ed. Johannes Crüger, *Archiv für Literaturgeschichte* 14 (1886): 48–62.

29. "Briefe" 1886 (n. 28) 51–52.

30. "Briefe" 1886 (n. 28) 52. In his letter to Bodmer of 8 October 1746 Schlegel describes his play, "worinnen A l e x a n d e r und andere allezeit den Charakter der tragischen Poesie in ihren Reden hätten, der Gärtnerkönig mit seiner Familie aber immer unvermuthet in die niedrigen Ausdrücke der deutschen Trauerspiele verfielen." In the letter to Bodmer of 15 April 1747 Schlegel includes the few existing lines of the play principally to elicit the Swiss's opinion of the new verse form he intended to use, a fusion of the alexandrine, *vers commun*, and blank verse, i.e., unrhymed iambic hexameters with the caesura following the second iamb. See *Briefe berühmter und edler Deutschen an Bodmer* 39 and 52–53, respectively.

31. "Briefe" 1886 (n. 28) 52, 51; *Briefe* 1794 (n. 27) 39.

32. "Briefe" 1886 (n. 28) 52.

33. Depending on the ultimate execution of the play, indeed, it might be more proper to view the work, in terms of its genre, as a pendant to *Die drey Philosophen*, which is discussed below.

34. *Werke* 2:601–18.

35. "Leben des Verfassers," *Werke* 5:XXVI; "Briefe" 1886 (n. 28) 52.

36. "Plato," *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1966 ed.

37. See, for example, Charles Ingrao, "The Smaller German States," *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe*, (see n. 16 above) 221–43.

38. See, for example, Jacek Staszewski, *August III: Kurfürst von Sachsen und König von Polen* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1996).

39. Paulsen (n. 7) 22.

40. While the two philosophers are comic in execution, Plato more so in his dramatic function than in his *Naturell*, characters of their social background are not uncommon in tragedy, e.g., Wurm and poor Davison in Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* and *Maria Stuart*, respectively.

41. Also see Wolff (n. 18) 92.

42. Wolff (n. 18) 88–91 discusses Schlegel's likely indebtedness to this and other plays.

43. Heinrich opines that his brother was in fact probably "ein allgemeiner Nachahmer hervorstechender Charaktere" (3:526), while Paulsen (n. 7) 53–54 sees Schlegel's destruction of the manuscript as the result of dissatisfaction with his management of the two plot lines.

44. Horst Steinmetz, *Die Komödie der Aufklärung* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965) 30–43. Also useful is Günter Wicke's *Die Struktur des*

deutschen Lustspiels der Aufklärung: Versuch einer Typologie (Bonn: H. Bouvier u. Co. Verlag, 1965), to which we shall have recourse further along in this study. However, Wicke understands *Struktur* in the sense of “inner structure,” or ethos, identifying comedy types such as “das satirische Lustspiel,” “das empfindsame Lustspiel,” “das Lustspiel als Spiel,” and “das Lustspiel als Drama.” For reasons that should soon become apparent, Steinmetz’s typology of plot structure is more relevant in the present context.

45. Though conceding it a *Sonderstellung*, Steinmetz (n. 44) 35–36 indeed discusses the play as such. However, the following makes clear that the work departs from the conventions of the form to such an extent as to make it something similar but essentially different. Wicke (n. 44) 28–29 also reckons the play a satiric comedy of Gottschedian provenance.

46. Wolf (n. 18) 205 alone views Charlotte’s silence as a character flaw to be castigated and healed. No fan of Schlegel’s comedies in general, he nonetheless calls *Die stumme Schönheit* a “Zufallstreffer” (219).

47. Wicke (n. 44) 37.

48. Steinmetz (n. 44) 43.

49. Christian Neuhuber, *Das Lustspiel macht Ernst: Das Ernste in der deutschen Komödie auf dem Weg in die Moderne: von Gottsched bis Lenz* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2003) 34.

50. Walter Hinck, *Das deutsche Lustspiel des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts und die italienische Komödie: Commedia dell’arte und Théâtre Italien* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965) 255.

51. Wolf (n. 18) 189–91.

52. Paulsen (n. 7) 26.

53. Steinmetz (n. 44) 38.

54. Wicke (n. 44) 76, 77. In a more limited but related connection Hinck (n. 50) 223 asserts that “die Kontrastierung von Sein und Schein” emanating from the extensive usage of disguises in the play “hat . . . keine Entlarvungs-, sondern reine Spielfunktion.”

55. Edward Potter makes much ado of Hilaria’s disguise in “The Clothes Make the Man: Cross-Dressing, Gender Performance, and Female Desire in Johann Elias Schlegel’s *Der Triumph der guten Frauen*,” *German Quarterly* 81 (2008): 261–82. As just indicated, however, Hilaria does not don her disguise in order to truly seduce Julianne. Consequently, one wonders whether “the very mention . . . of the practice of cross-dressing in order to gain sexual access to other women” indeed “places the idea into the heads of the audience member, at least as a potentiality” (276). For not only is such behavior not “ultimately ridiculed” (276), as Potter asserts in an erroneous concession to authorial intent in the work, it is not even problematized.

56. Wolf (n. 18) 219–20.

57. Wicke (n. 44) 102–3.

58. Steinmetz (n. 44) 41.

59. Hinck (n. 50) 255 finds a conciliatory “‘weltüberlegene[s]’ Spiel” that breaks the mold of the *Verlachkomödie* in this play as well as *Die stumme Schönheit*.

60. Steinmetz (n. 44) 41.

61. See Hinck (n. 50) 432, note 97.

62. See, for example, Wicke (n. 44) 107, Steinmetz (n. 44) 41, and Ursula Kändler, "Von der sächsischen Komödie zum europäischen Rührstück: Schlüsselwörter der Aufklärung im 'Triumph der guten Frauen' von Johann Elias Schlegel," *Soziokulturelle Kontexte der Sprach- und Literaturentwicklung: Festschrift für Rudolf Grosse zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. S. Heimann et al. (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1989) 253.

63. Wicke (n. 44) 78.

64. See Steinmetz (n. 44) 41 and Wolf (n. 18) 224.

65. See Wicke (n. 44) 18.

66. See Steinmetz (n. 44) 37 and Wolf (n. 18) 184.

67. According to Neuhuber the play treats social expectations and codes of behavior, placing them in question almost parodistically vis-à-vis Gottsched: "Aber erstmals bleibt die Forderung nach dem Über-sich-selbst-Verfügen in einer Komödie der Aufklärung unwidersprochen, scheitert die Autonomisierung des Ichs nicht am Integrationspostulat. Der Einzelne erkennt die Integration in das bestehende Ordnungssystem als Problem"; Neuhuber (n. 49) 35, 132, 39. Neuhuber sees in the play a cleft between professional world and private sphere (37) that leads Paulsen (n. 7) 64, 67 to call Fortunat the first *Taugenichts* and to place him in the tradition of Grillparzer's *armer Spielmann*.