

# *That Fluttering Stranger*

– Romantic metre as aesthetic idea of the Kantian tradition –

## Introduction: a wavering between sound and meaning

When I.A. Richards wrote on the significance of metre in Coleridge's philosophical system, he could not help drawing out an antagonism of concepts latent throughout the writings of the Romantic sage:

Coleridge, in his discussion of the functions of metre, wavers between [...] two conceptions; sometimes taking metre as a sensory pattern of the signs, sometimes making it the very motion of the meaning. And this is part of the explanation of the oddly disjointed condition of his argument.<sup>1</sup>

Richards' confusion, like that of others before and after him, came down to one fatal epithet applied to metre by both Wordsworth, in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, and Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*: superadded. At times, Coleridge uses this term in a way that appears to cast metre as an afterthought – so when he calls its purpose 'conditional, and dependent on the appropriateness of the thoughts and expressions, to which the metrical form is superadded'.<sup>2</sup> This would be what Richards calls a 'sensory pattern of the signs' – one that has to suit the underlying body of thought, to be sure, but certainly not organ and part of it, not its skin. At other times, however, Coleridge betrays a contradictory belief that metre is intertwined with the very heart of poetic composition, being the pulse and 'motion of the meaning' itself:

[...] nothing can permanently please, which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise. If metre be superadded, all other parts must be made consonant with it.<sup>3</sup>

But what if this wavering in his conceptions provides the very clue needed to spell out the gaps in Coleridge's metaphysics of prosody? At the end of the 19th century, Paul Valéry famously defined the

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<sup>1</sup> I.A. Richards, "The Sense of Musical Delight" in *Coleridge on Imagination* (ed. Constable, Routledge, 2001), p.88.

<sup>2</sup> S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817) (eds Engell&Bate, 1983), ch.18, v.2, p.69.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, ch.14, v.2, pp.12-13.

poem as 'cette hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens.'<sup>4</sup> According to Richards, Coleridge's critique of prosody was symptomatic of this very same hesitation, without openly championing it as a virtue. The present inquiry takes recourse to German Idealist tenets that influenced Coleridge's thought, namely of Kant and Schiller, in an attempt to spell out the gaps in the *Biographia*'s account of metre. True to the structure that Coleridge adopts there, the argument's first half will depart from the origins of metre, approaching the extreme forms of poetry via the traditional discourse of 'spirit and letter' that applies even to laxer forms of writing. Through examination of a curious similarity between a crucial passage of the *Biographia* and Kant's aesthetic discourse in the *Critique of Judgment*, the hypothesis of metre as an aesthetic idea will be arrived at, and its special relation to the important transcendentalist notion of *Geist* considered. The second half of the argument will then review the role of Romantic metre in light of its effects, comparing the imported theoretical concepts against samples of Romantic poetic practice of Wordsworth and Keats. Ultimately, it will be argued that Coleridge's pronouncements on metre, though patchy, are highly coherent when read through Kantian categories, and lead towards an understanding of metre as operating along some of the main Romantic faultlines such as subjective/objective, natural/unnatural, Imagination/Fancy.

### **Buchstabe and Geist: Romantic metre as Kantian Aesthetic Idea**

As Kathy Eden illumines in her book *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition*, before the distinction between the spirit and letter of a writing, there was the classical *scriptum/voluntas* dichotomy.<sup>5</sup> The latter was constantly on the verge of confusing itself with ambiguity of a semantic kind, i.e. of meaning vs. meaning. But, as Eden draws out, the *intention* of an author acquires relevance only where his *letter* has ceased to be fruitful to semantic interpretation. The German transcendentalist dichotomy influencing Coleridge, on the other hand – that of *Buchstabe/Geist*<sup>6</sup> – shares a different border with the semantic one of meaning/meaning. The German term *Geist*, as its very name leads to suspect (cognate to English *ghost*), is a notoriously elusive concept. While retaining concrete and trivial meanings as that of 'liquor' (e.g. in *Kirschegeist* – cherry liquor), it also taps into a world of more

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<sup>4</sup> 'That prolonged hesitation between the meaning and the sound.' Paul Valéry, *Tel Quel* in *Œuvres* vol.2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p.637.

<sup>5</sup> Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition* (Yale University Press, 1997), pp.9-19

<sup>6</sup> see e.g. Johann Gottlieb Fichte "Über Geist und Buchstab' in der Philosophie in einer Reihe von Briefen" (1798)

abstract meanings. Often used synonymously with *mind* or *conscience* in philosophical treatises, it outstrips the rather emotionally laden connotations of English *spirit*. Its most baffling application, however, pertains to the realm of art, and no other but Immanuel Kant himself stubbed his critical toe against the paradox there in his *Critique of Judgment*:

Man sagt von gewissen Produkten, von welchen man erwartet, daß sie sich, zum Teil wenigstens, als schöne Kunst zeigen sollten: sie sind ohne *Geist*; ob man gleich an ihnen, was den Geschmack betrifft, nichts zu tadeln findet. Ein Gedicht kann recht nett und elegant sein, aber es ist ohne Geist.<sup>7</sup>

[One says of certain products, of which one expects that they are, partially at least, to present themselves as fine art: they are without *Geist*; although one has nothing, as regards taste, to find fault with. A poem can be quite nice and elegant, but without Geist.]<sup>8</sup>

From this it appears that *Geist* would be a quality or attribute of a poetic (or indeed any other artistic) work so rare that it defies logical appreciation. In any case it is a phenomenon unrelated to the question of a poet's *voluntas*, since knowing the intention behind a given poem might, occasionally, make the finished product appear more intentional, but hardly ever more *geistreich* ('rich with *Geist*'). In fact, it seems to be one of the essential characteristics of *Geist* that it leads a life of its own, bound up neither with poet, reader, nor the page – diffused as it is, it might be predicated of all three. A reader who is *geistlos* might not appreciate a poem, regardless its intrinsic richness of *Geist*. Equally, an author who is *geistreich* in general, might well fail to bottle his genius within any given poem in particular, poetic spirit volatilizing during transmission onto the page. In a crucial passage, Kant attempts to adumbrate this apparition of the arts against a better light:

Mit einem Worte, die ästhetische Idee ist eine einem gegebenen Begriffe beigeordnete Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft, [...] die also zu einem Begriffe viel Unnennbares hinzu denken läßt, dessen Gefühl die Erkenntnisvermögen belebt und mit der Sprache, als bloßem Buchstaben, Geist verbindet.<sup>9</sup>

[In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the esemplastic power accompanying a given concept, [...] which allows to associate with that concept many things unnameable, the feeling of which enlivens the capacities of recognition, and combines with language, as mere letter, Geist.]

Kant tries to get at his subject here by establishing association with other, better-known concepts. The aesthetic idea is supposed to be a phenomenon of what Coleridge translated as the esemplastic power

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<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) (Leipzig: Reclam, 2024), 1.1.2.§49, p.252.

<sup>8</sup> Translations from the German throughout are my own.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, *ibid.*, 1.1.2.§49, p.257.

(*Einbildungskraft*), or secondary imagination – i.e. the force within the human soul that 'at all events [...] struggles to idealize and to unify'.<sup>10</sup> Further on in the same paragraph of the *Critique*, Kant implies that the stylistic type belonging to this power is metaphor.<sup>11</sup> In likening an abstract, rational idea (*Vernunftidee*) to a sensual, aesthetic idea, metaphor imports *Geist* into the letter of a composition. Consequently, 'letter', too, will have outgrown its roots in the *scriptum/voluntas* tradition here. It will have become Letter with a capital L, and acquired more of a general symbolic function, representing *Verstand* (reason).

There are two relevant observations to be made about all of this. First, that the transcendentalist discourse of *Buchstabe/Geist* borders on a very different ambiguity than that of the classical discourse of *scriptum/voluntas*. Namely, on the ambiguity, not of meaning vs. meaning, but of sense vs. senses. Second, that Kant's passage on aesthetic ideas from the *Critique* uses terminology very similar to the most detailed remark on metre in the *Biographia*:<sup>12</sup>

Metre in itself is simply a stimulant of the attention, and therefore excites the question: Why is the attention to be thus stimulated? Now the question cannot be answered by the pleasure of the metre itself; for this we have shown to be conditional, and dependent on the appropriateness of the thoughts and expressions, to which the metrical form is superadded.<sup>13</sup>

Kant characterizes an aesthetic idea as 'enlivening the capacities of recognition', while Coleridge refers to metre as a 'stimulant of the attention'. Kant explains the aesthetic idea is *beigesellt* (accompanying) the *gegebenen Begriffe* (given term), Coleridge follows suit by calling metre 'superadded' to the given 'thoughts and expressions'. Curiously, it seems doubtless that neither posits that the Letter (since *Begriffe*, or thoughts and expressions, are precisely that) could ever lead an existence of its own, fully independent of form. Equally, however, neither posits that the introduction of an aesthetic idea (or metre) effects more or less than putting the perceiver in a state of enlivened, stimulated attention, or 'capacity for recognition'. Furthermore, there is a related passage of the *Biographia* that ties the nature

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<sup>10</sup> Coleridge, *ibid.*, v.1, ch13, p.304.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.255.

<sup>12</sup> Coleridge's general indebtedness to the *Critique of Judgment* is attested by his friend Henry Crabb Robinson: 'Of Kant [Coleridge] spoke in terms of high admiration. [...] The "Kritik der Urtheilskraft" he considered the most astonishing of Kant's works.' Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson* (London: Macmillan, 1869), v.1, ch.23 (1810), p.305.

<sup>13</sup> Coleridge, *ibid.*, ch.18, v.2, p.69.

of metre closely to the notion of *viel Unnennbares* ('many things unnameable') attached to Kant's aesthetic idea, there animating the capacities for recognition of *Geist*:

[Metre's] quick reciprocations of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited, which are too slight indeed to be at any one moment objects of distinct consciousness, [...] act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed.<sup>14</sup>

This returns the present argument to the question Coleridge asked and left unanswered in the *Biographia*: 'Why is the attention to be thus stimulated?' It seems that recourse to Kant's *Critique* has offered up a possible answer. Metre, if understood as an aesthetic idea, enlivens a reader's capacities for recognition. It makes him exert his esemplastic power in the attempt to wed metrical form to the matter at hand, carrying *Geist* into the Letter of a poem in the process.

### **Widerspruchsgeist : Romantic metre as impersonalization and heightening**

Despite all their well-known differences as regards the proper functions of metre, both Wordsworth and Coleridge agreed that its presence had a way of tempering the passions excited by a composition.<sup>15</sup> Coleridge spoke of a 'balance of antagonists' inside the human *Gemüt*,<sup>16</sup> which became 'organized into metre' during poetic production.<sup>17</sup> This might give the impression that metre's most important role, according to Romantic prosodic theory, lay in mediating the antithesis of thought/passion or mind/heart. However, a curious scholium of Coleridge's, affixed to the very chapter dealing on metre in the *Biographia*, hints, all its digressive appearance notwithstanding, at an additional role in a perhaps more unexpected antithesis – that of subjective/objective:

It is no less an error in teachers, than a torment to the poor children, to enforce the necessity of reading as they would talk. In order to cure them of *singing* as it is called; that is, of too great a difference, the child is made to repeat the words with his eyes from off the book; [...] But as soon as the eye is again directed to the printed page, the spell begins anew [...]<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Coleridge, *ibid.*, ch18, v2, p.66.

<sup>15</sup> William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* (eds Owen & Smyser, 1974), v.1, p.146.

<sup>16</sup> The German word *Gemüt*, notoriously tricky to render in English, affords connotations of both feeling and thought, and thus represents the compositum of heart and mind which the English language and Romantic tradition are lacking.

<sup>17</sup> Coleridge, *ibid.*, ch.18, v.2, p.64.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.60.

It is to be assumed that the 'reading' under consideration here is prose rather than poetry, but all the more the presence of a 'spell' on the 'printed page', which induces a child to 'sing' what is written, seems like a remarkable notion. The behaviour of children being, faithful to the Romantic tenet, highly significant of man's original disposition, Coleridge was eager to offer a metaphysical explanation of the phenomenon right away:

[...] an instinctive sense tells the child's feelings, that to utter its own momentary thoughts, and to recite the written thoughts of another, as of another, and a far wiser than himself, are two widely different things; and as the two acts are accompanied with widely different feelings, so must they justify different modes of enunciation.

Aware that he is speaking in the voice of another, the schoolboy would modulate his voice into a kind of chant, a somewhat heightened but impersonal affectation of his normal way of speaking. It is the reverse effect of what modern metrist Derek Attridge describes in his book *Poetic Rhythm*:

[H]eightingening of language also produces a certain impersonality. When language, usually assumed to be the product of a single individual and a single mind, takes on the garb of some conventional order such as figures of rhetoric or oral formulae, it becomes to that extent trans-individual.<sup>19</sup>

Only that, in the case of Coleridge's schoolboy, it is the obvious impersonality, or otherness, of the printed letter, as a symbol of another's thought, that produces a heightening of language. Not, of course, on the semantic level, but on the phonetic level of recitation. By being forced to read as he would talk, the schoolboy is being made to counteract that natural instinct, separating spirit from the letter. Not the superficial, legal-hermeneutic spirit of *voluntas*, which could only ever be made to suffer from *semantic* misinterpretation, but the more profound spirit of *Geist*, which – to the keen sensibility of the child – could only ever be made to suffer from *musical* misinterpretation. The printed letter cannot outgrow a feeling of personal difference, of voice – of *aural* otherness. The critical faculty, fully fledged in the person of the stern teacher, tries to assert its way over the esemplastic power, still intuitively dominant and unchecked in the schoolboy.

If all this holds true for prose, then how much more potential to carry *Geist* must poetry written in metre exhibit? Surely this additional formal heightening would put the reader under an even stronger 'spell' (in Coleridge's words), while increasing the expansion of the 'trans-individual' element of the

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<sup>19</sup> Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: an introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.12.

composition (in Attridge's words). If a poem, by taking on the 'garb of some conventional order' – a metrical order like the iambic pentameter – becomes more than the 'product of a single individual and a single mind', is that to mean it becomes the product of multiple? A shared rhythmical conscience? A swaying *spiritus mundi*? In that case, it would seem that metrical language could be described as the hallmark of *deliberately esemplastic writing* – not only in that it brings together a certain tune and a certain content, but also in that it brings together different individuals across space and time. Attridge himself goes on to particularize that function into a somewhat political relation:

The rhythmic forms of poetry – especially metrical poetry – furnish utterances with a public quality, even when they seem most personal and intimate.<sup>20</sup>

Just as the 'certain impersonality' had to be read as a certain capacity to transcend the individual and discrete, so now the 'public quality' of the utterances has to be understood as 'public' in the Athenian sense, where the art of politics represents the continuation and highest end of ethics. Viewed this way, Coleridge's schoolboy, in 'singing' the words as those of one 'far wiser than himself', was not trying to imitate any abstract 'public' voice, but rather that of some one idealized man. Transferred to the highly idealized rhythms of metrical poetry, their trans-individual impersonality stems not from the fact that *nobody* would speak in such a manner in real life, but the fact that *everybody* would in artificial life.

### **Widerspruchsgeist : Romantic metre as straightening curve**

This begins to bear considerable resemblance to the function of art that Friedrich Schiller propounded in his letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794) – a work of seminal influence on the whole of the English Romantic tradition and Coleridge in particular. Lamenting the spiritual isolation of 'specialized' individuals within a single state, but also of the diachronically separated states of the brute *Naturstaat* (state of nature) and the cold-hearted *Vernunftstaat* (state of reason), Schiller offers art, or poetry, as a tool and a pattern for the reconciliation of these states.<sup>21</sup>

In the visual arts, preference for the curve over the straight line is no denial of symmetry, but an admission and an emphasis of the fact that no line, in nature, is ever ideal. The ideal line is a

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: in a series of letters* (1794) (eds Wilkinson & Willoughby, 1967), IX.1, p.54.

phenomenon of man's mind, not his senses. Still, there is the undeniable human tendency for symmetry, order and linearity. Or, in particular, the poet's tendency to cast his periods into a repetitive, orderly pattern.

It is to be argued that this is a tendency peculiarly in line with the Romantic programme, or rather orthogonal to one of its main faultlines. It is nothing else but the attempt to close the divide within the *Gemüt*, to approach the *sensual* (for every *manifestation* of linearity must be called so, even in the purely aural manifestation of music) to the *rational*. As Schiller observed in his *Aesthetic Education*:

Indem der spekulative Geist im Ideenreich nach unverlierbaren Besitzungen strebte, mußte er ein Fremdling in der Sinnenwelt werden und über der Form die Materie verlieren.<sup>22</sup>

[Through pursuing unlosable possessions in the realm of ideas, the speculative Geist must become a stranger in the world of the senses, and thus lose matter over form.]

By making his matter adhere to a certain form, a poet is merging the *Sinnenwelt* (world of the senses) and the *Ideenreich* (realm of ideas). Their underlying antagonism, however, means that, if *Geist* enters poetic composition through the vessel that is metre, then it might appear in the guise of a *Widerspruchsgeist* (a *Geist* of contradiction). In the simple sense, this would mean that a reader finds that *Geist* and content of a poem are at odds, and so takes *Geist* to be contradicting content. Taken this way, any kind of *Geist* in the spirit/letter tradition would only be felt as a kind of *Widerspruchsgeist*. But in a more profound sense, the *Geist* that Kant associated with art in general, is a symptom of the repulsive forces resisting the merging of aesthetic to rational ideas, or metre to meaning. Taken in this way, the *Widerspruchsgeist* is a quintessentially Romantic apparition – both as regards the poet's relation to nature and, consequently, his matter for composition. Like the man of prime in Keats's *The Human Seasons*, the Romantic poet aspires to take in nature's phenomena 'with an easy span',<sup>23</sup> grasping without understanding them. Speculative reason, however, dogs his every footfall, finding the flaw where both perfection and imperfection had been foreign concepts just a second ago. Precisely so it happens in Wordsworth's famous passage from *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey*:

[...] Once again I see  
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, VI.10, p.36-38.

<sup>23</sup> John Keats, *The Human Seasons* in *John Keats: The Complete Poems* (ed. Barnard, repr. 2006), 1.3, p.232.

Of sportive wood run wild: [...] <sup>24</sup>

On the semantic plane, it would appear that Wordsworth abandons the artificially cultivated, human (hedge-rows) in favour of the natural (sportive wood). But he can only reconstitute the scene's innocence at the cost of his own. The tendency of his *Gemüt* runs the opposite way, matter being lost over form in the span of a pentameter: hedge-rows... hardly hedge-rows... lines. The complete materiality of the landscape as presented to Wordsworth's view is being weighed, measured and found wanting in comparison to the geometrical forms of his reason. The sensually curving line is that of prose; the rationally straightening line that of poetry. If the word 'lines' in the passage is to be taken as an invite to a reading of poetical self-awareness, then the metre is introducing a different subtext at all times:

Once again I see  
These verses, hardly verses, little lines  
Of sportive prose run wild

Wordsworth's return to his childhood scenes is mapped as a return to the childlike faculties of the esemplastic power, an attempt to turn back the human seasons of the *Gemüt*. But, just as little as Wordsworth's semantically purported intention could countermand his psychologically imported one, so could it now countermand the formal intention of the metre. The lines are written as lines (indeed the fact is stressed in the very title of the poem), and as such they will always give an impression of a straight and cultivated growth – regardless however much their composer might desire to trace in them the spiralling, natural line of growth of a poet's mind. Metrical practice, particularly in blankverse, always conveys a notion of a forced breathing, of some natural act contained. It is under this counter-pressure, enforced by the attractive esemplastic power, that *Geist* remains within the poem at all times, a wayward genie held within its magical lamp. The critic Geoffrey Hartman observed of *Tintern Abbey* that 'there is a *wave effect* of rhythm whose characteristic is that while there is internal acceleration, the feeling of climax is avoided.'<sup>25</sup> It is just this paradox of acceleration without climax that results in an impression of *energy* latent in a poem. Such a term, however loose it may be, clearly leads away from the purely abstract notion of *Geist*. This quintessence is no longer confined to an atmosphere merely of

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<sup>24</sup> William Wordsworth, *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey* (1798) in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, (ed. Selincourt, 1952), Vol. 2, ll.14-16, p.259.

<sup>25</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, "Tintern Abbey" in *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (Yale University Press, 2014), p.26.

a poem, as its feeble aroma. Instead, the German word is reunited with its close English cognate, and it is by some effect on the living, by some manifestation of spectral energy, that a *ghost* must make its presence known. Only then will a reader become haunted by a poem's *Widerspruchsgeist*.

**Weingeist and Rausch: Romantic metre as agent of fermentation:**

It appears that thus, true to Coleridge's structure of argument in the *Biographia*, the present inquiry has now reached the point where the hypothesis of metre as an aesthetic idea must be argued from the effects thereof. To Coleridge's initial question of 'why is the attention to be thus stimulated' by the agency of metre, recourse to Kant presented the possible answer: so that *Geist* might enter a composition. But might this not result merely in a new question: why is *Geist* to enter into a composition? How exactly does it manifest its energy? What exactly does it afford a reader?

In one of the more eccentric passages of the *Biographia*, Coleridge managed to hit off two apparently disparate connotations of German *Geist* at once, tavernous and transcendentalist, when he propounded on the role of metre in poetic composition:

But for any poetic purposes, metre resembles (if the aptness of the simile may excuse its meanness) yeast, worthless or disagreeable by itself, but giving vivacity and spirit to the liquor with which it is proportionally combined.<sup>26</sup>

Charioted by Bacchus and his pards *and* on the viewless wings of poesy, it would appear. Coleridge's analogy frames metre as an agent, conduit or catalyst to the spirit of a poem. At the same time, it also makes it extremely difficult to locate that very spirit. Is it an inherent property of the product? An extraneous force entering the draught, pardon, draft through the agency of the metre? A potentiality residing within the recipient reader?

No doubt it would be fair to object that Coleridge's use of 'spirit' was much more innocuous in its immediate implication here, signalling more of a vivacity than a vital force. There is an equal danger, though, to underestimate the underlying significance of the analogy. After all, the connexion of the effects of drink to those of poetry is a highly Romantic one. In his *Ode to Joy*, Schiller put on par what he called the *Feuerspiegel* ('fire-mirror') of scientific method with the state of being *feuertrunken*

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<sup>26</sup> Coleridge, *ibid.*, ch.18, v.2, p.67

('drunk with fire') upon drinking wine. The headlong trochees of his stanzas ferment this effect, propelling the listener into the rare heights of ethanol and ether:

Brüder fliegt von euren Sitzen,  
wenn der volle Römer kraißt,  
Laßt den Schaum zum Himmel sprützen:  
Dieses Glas dem guten Geist.<sup>27</sup>

[Brothers fly from off your seats,  
when the brimming chalice reels,  
Let the foam fizz to the skies:  
This cup raise to the goodly Geist.]

Der *gute Geist*, the good spirit, might be partaken of through the sensual delights of drink just as much, or even more intimately, as through exertion of the critical faculties. The question as to the precise relationship between wine and veracity is ancient, and bears surprising resemblance to that between *Geist* and art. The Aeolic lyricist Alcaeus kept it general, musing about οἶνος καὶ ἀλήθεια, wine *and* truth;<sup>28</sup> in its most popular form, the adage has it that truth is contained *in* wine, *in vino veritas*, and then there is Plato, in whose *Symposium* it is said that wine is truth itself.<sup>29</sup> The Romantic view seems to prefer wine as a conduit. Keats, in his *Ode to a Nightingale*, presents drink as a veritable means to approximate the spirituality of the 'light-winged Dryad' haunting the 'melodious plot' that the speaker passes by:

[...]  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim –  
  
Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known<sup>30</sup>  
[...]

The speaker longs to be spirited away from the material realm, and 'dissolved'. That word seems to entail more than just an outward disappearance, since it is immediately linked with the internal process of forgetting. Pining to be rid of his worldly knowledge, the dissolution the speaker seems to have in

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<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *An die Freude* in *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1992), 11.77-80, p.171.

<sup>28</sup> Alcaeus, Fragment 366 in *Greek Lyric: Sappho, Alcaeus* (ed. Campbell, Loeb, 1982), p.396.

<sup>29</sup> 'οἶνος ἄνευ τε παίδων καὶ μετὰ παίδων ἦν ἀληθής', see Plato, *Symposium* in *Lysis. Symposium. Phaedrus*. (eds Emlyn-Jones & Preddy, Loeb, 2022), 217e, p.298.

<sup>30</sup> Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale* in *ibid.*, 11.19-22, p.346.

mind is much more of a resolution between internal antagonists. This impression is supported when he goes on to assert that his escape is to be effected by poetry's influence, as an alternative to the stimulus of drink. Poetry and wine represent two means to the same end, two drugs of the same class of effects. Both must encounter the brain's critical, perplexing faculty which is resisting their musical intoxications; wrest reason's ruling sceptre to give heart equal power within the *Gemüt*:

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards<sup>31</sup>  
[...]

All of this takes a view of poetry's effect as some kind of ecstasy by intoxication. Whereas the English idiom of the 'drunken stupor' has something of inert bafflement, the German word of choice, *Rausch*, is highly dynamic. It carries connotations of water, sound and movement, of being carried away as in the rapids of a stream. In a poem, what carries a reader along is *rhythm*, – a word ultimately derived from Greek ῥεῖν, 'to flow' – already applied by Homer both, concretely, to the flowing of liquids and, figuratively, to a flow of words. But in regard to the German Idealist sensibilities under consideration in the present inquiry, it would be more in keeping to stick to the separation of force and effect that exists between German *Rausch* and its English cousin, 'rush'. Rhythm, though being the force propelling a verse, is not its effect, just as little as the stimulant, alcohol, is to be confused with its symptom, drunkenness. *Geist*, as Kant's writing established earlier, enters a composition proportionally to the degree to which form and content are in keeping. *Rausch* might be understood as the manifestation of *Geist*, a symptom of its presence within the particular poet, poem or listener. Just as with the Romantic trope of the stream (itself another etymological cognate of ῥέω/rhythm via PIE *\*srū-*), it is the *sound* that is eloquent of the forces at work underneath the surface. Just as with music, harmony is located neither within the producing instrument nor the receiving organ, nor can it exist in between, independent of the two. Nor, equally, can it come to be, according to the Romantic ideal, if its composer did not partake of it in composition:

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, ll.31-34, p.347.

[...] the fairest of all Rivers, lov'd  
 To blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song,  
 And from his alder shades and rocky falls,  
 And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice  
 That flow'd along my dreams? [...]<sup>32</sup>

For Wordsworth, the warbling of the river Derwent is both *Rausch* and *Rauschen*, state and activity, psychological and acoustic phenomenon at once.<sup>33</sup> Is it a symptom of Nature's spirit, seeping into the poet's consciousness? A symptom of the poet's spirit seeping into the reader's consciousness?

Wordsworth is, as the critic Anthony Easthope observed on *Tintern Abbey*, 'weaving between the represented speaker and the landscape he describes. There is some uncertainty about how it gets from one to the other.'<sup>34</sup> The aesthetic idea accompanying this syntagmatic and imaginative weaving is embodied in the even, undulating blank verse of the passage, a rhythmic presence which 'blends' with Wordsworth's 'song'. It is akin to the stream, which blended its purling with the Nurse's words...

Which with its steady cadence, tempering  
 Our human waywardness, compos'd my thoughts  
 To more than infant softness, giving me,  
 Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,  
 A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm  
 That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.<sup>35</sup>

In his *Aesthetic Education*, Schiller spoke, somewhat incongruously, of the 'springs' opened up in the immortal patterns of Fine Art that work as 'tools' towards the ennobling of human character.<sup>36</sup>

Wordsworth's lines on the Derwent might provide the key to this strange metaphor. No harsh clanging of the chisel here, but the soft and 'steady cadence' – the *Rauschen* – of a stream shaping its river bed, softening rough boulders in its liquid line. The 'knowledge' imparted along the way, must be in motion, must be emotion: a 'dim earnest', the object of its grasp no object at all, but a paradox both unmoving and moving, a 'calm / That Nature breathes', *Rausch* and a *Rauschen*, a spirit and a respiration. As the poetry runs its measured course, thoughts are not merely composed, but (as the line-turn reveals) 'compos'd / To... softness'. Content blends into form, sense turns into sense.

<sup>32</sup> Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805) (eds De Selincourt&Darbishire, 1959), bk.1, ll.272-276, p.17.

<sup>33</sup> *Rausch* = 'rush' n., *Rauschen* = 'rushing' n. (the latter with exclusively aural connotations in German)

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Easthope, "The Continuities of Romanticism" in *Poetry as Discourse* (Taylor&Francis, 2002), p.124.

<sup>35</sup> Wordsworth, *ibid.* ll.280-285

<sup>36</sup> Schiller, *ibid.*, IX.1, p.54.

That other stock trope of Romantic poetry, the nightingale, exemplifies the idea of *Geist* and *Rausch* to even finer nuances in Keats's famous ode. In one sense, the bird there is most like unto the reader, in that it poses as addressee to the speaker's effusion. In another sense, it is most like a medium, a voice disembodied, dislocated – if the eagle is an aesthetic idea attached to Jove, then the nightingale perches on the aesthetic branch forking from the bole of the Romantic *Gemüt*. From the heart of nature's forfeited covert, it appeals to the forlorn listener's esemplastic power in far-reaching symbolism – a feeling metaphorized into a bird, metaphorized into a voice, metaphorized into a song. Finally, Keats's nightingale could be called most like the author, too, in that the bird's sentiment is supposed to precede and originate the speaker's emotion in the ode, virtually *inspiring* him:

While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy! [...] <sup>37</sup>

It might be the point here precisely that the *Geist* of the 'deceiving elf' is not to be pinned down anywhere in particular. The pleasant flow of the iambic pentameter is as liquid as it is elusive. Only momentarily tapering to a sense of climax in the trimeter of the sixth line of the stanzas, the music of the poetry slips the poet's tentative grasp as the bird's presence slips the listener's powers of discernment. All differences of subjective/objective, man/nature, etc. are blended into a composite *atmosphere*, much alike to what Coleridge described as the effects of metre in the *Biographia*:

As a medicated atmosphere, or as wine during animated conversation; [metre's quick reciprocations] act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed. <sup>38</sup>

Coleridge's own version of the trope, the conversation poem *The Nightingale*, has through its blankverse metre much of the 'animated conversation' of wine. Keats's ode, on the other hand, with its carefully distilled stanzaic drops, has much more of the *Rausch* induced by a 'medicated atmosphere' – the aesthetic conjunction of metre and metaphor acts powerfully, though itself unnoticed. While the song and poetry last, *Geist* remains potent but impalpable. Only with the cessation of *Rausch*, during the last lines, its *absence* will be grasped:

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<sup>37</sup> Keats, *ibid.*, ll.57-58

<sup>38</sup> Coleridge, *ibid.*, ch18, v2, p.66.

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music —Do I wake or sleep?<sup>39</sup>

Tellingly, the smooth iambic pentameter of the preceding stanzas fails, the flow of the closing lines runs up against strong caesurae, in the last line visually signified by the em-dash (or *Gedankenstrich*, 'thought-dash'). Thought interrupts feeling, the speculative reason stirs again, tries to question and ascertain the quality of the experience retrospectively (vision? waking dream?). Only with the realization of the loss – intruding with the flat, precocious inversion at the line-head ('Fled') – is the loss consumed. Unmused, the reveler awakes from his *Rausch*; the smooth unity of form and content has cracked; *Geist* has fled through the interstices.

### **Conclusion: a wavering between the sense and the senses**

Over the course of this inquiry, it has emerged that the role of metre in Romantic poetry deserves a reframing. Its significant relation is not that of formal 'superaddition' to some material base, but that of metaphor between an aesthetic and a rational idea. Thus metre is deeply rooted in the incipience of poetic composition, at a stage where the separation of thought and form has not yet become an actuality, but exists only potentially in the conflicting tendencies of the forces of *Gemüt* of the Kantian tradition. Their merging on the page marks the triumph of the esemplastic over the critical power. From the standpoint of the reader, however, the impersonalized product – or Letter, as it has been called – must betray to a lesser or a greater degree the seam along which these aesthetic and rational ideas have met and closed. The greater, the more the reader will attribute that strange quintessence of *Geist* to an artwork. This is because *Geist* (as signified by its frequent appearance as *Widerspruchsgeist*) is not tantamount to a disappearance of the precedent antagonism in the poet's *Gemüt*. Quite to the contrary, it relies for its reality on a manipulation of a continuous double 'sense' – a weaving between reason and feeling in the *Gemüt* of the reader, mimicking that in the Romantic poet's during composition. Since metre is itself an ordered weaving, it aspires to that special aesthetic idea that is metaphor to the Letter and emblem of the poet's conflict of *Gemüt* at once. As in the famous closing lines of Goethe's *Gingko Biloba* (1815):

Solche Frage zu erwidern,  
Fand ich wohl den rechten Sinn,

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<sup>39</sup> Keats, *ibid.*, ll.79-80, p.348.

Fühlst du nicht an meinen Liedern,  
Daß ich Eins und doppelt bin?<sup>40</sup>

[Such inquiry to address  
I must have found the perfect sense;  
Don't you feel along my songs  
That I'm one and duplicate?]

The double entendre on 'Lieder' (songs), a homophone to German 'Lider' (eye-lids), is reminiscent of Valéry's punning bonmot on *le son et le sens*. While Valéry seemed to capture the double-dealing that I.A. Richards encountered in Coleridge's philosophical attitude towards the role of metre, Goethe's two meanings here outgrow the pun to become a kind of emblem for the bilobate nature shared by song and poet's inner eye in Romantic creation. Feeling along the Romantic 'song', the Romantic line, is akin to feeling along the fluttering, bilobate eye-lids of the Romantic *Gemüt*, where quintessential Romantic dilemmas such as subjective and objective, Imagination and Fancy, or heart and mind, part and meet. Although a verse unfolds in sequence, Romantic rhythm has to be a 'sensory pattern of the signs' and the 'very motion of the meaning', not in alteration, but at once, and the Romantic poem that prolonged wavering between the sense and the senses.

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<sup>40</sup> J.W. Goethe, *Gingo Biloba* (1815) in *Goethe: Selected Verse* (ed. David Luke, Penguin, 1986), ll.9-12, p.249.