

IN SEARCH OF SELF-REALIZATION
A CRITICAL STUDY OF THREE SEELENROMANE

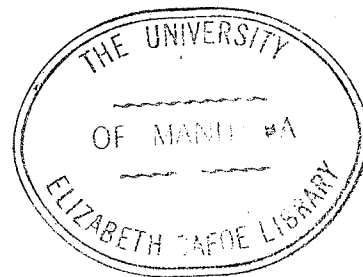
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to

PROFESSOR K. W. MAURER
with profound gratitude

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the quest for self-realization as revealed by the protagonists of three Seelenromane. The novels which after careful examination have been selected for this study are: Anton Reiser by Karl Philipp Moritz, Hyperion, oder der Eremit in Griechenland by Friedrich Hölderlin, and Unterm Rad by Hermann Hesse.

The genre of the Seelenroman is demonstrated on the basis of its historical and literary importance and considered in its relationship to modern literary trends.

The Seelenroman has its immediate roots in the broader-ranging genre known as the Bildungsroman (a novel devoted to the hero's mental and spiritual growth and his acquisition of knowledge) in that it covers the life of the hero from early childhood through adolescence, that is, the period of life when he is most exposed and susceptible to environmental influences. It shows how the hero inevitably clashes with society if he is to discover in himself the unchanging and lasting values and meaning of life.

INTRODUCTION

Compared to what is taken to be the Hohe Gattungen, that is, drama and epic, which can be traced back to the very beginnings of literature, three thousand years or more, the novel, appearing on the literary scene as a late-comer in the course of the XVIIth century, cannot make any venerable claims to such ancient tradition. However, what it lacks in the sanction of age, it more than makes up in precocity. Dealing with themes of either heroic or burlesque character and offering little as regards aesthetic qualities, the novel was at first considered to represent a decadent form of the epic. Indeed, the word Roman stems from the Old French word romanz or romans which referred to writings in the vulgar tongue -- that is, the language of the vulgus or common people. Their main function was to entertain and amuse the reader with adventurous and heroic tales in prose. The appearance in 1678 of La Princesse de Clèves marked an important turning-point in that this novel established and created entirely new standards of integrity and artistry for the genre. Not only did it distinguish itself by its delicacy and noble melancholy, but also by a psychological insight not

previously encountered in this form. Story and fantasy gave way to a preoccupation with the human psyche; no longer was the emphasis placed on events and occurrences, but on the central character's personal experiences, struggles and problems. The example set by Mme. de La Fayette was followed in 1740 by the equally sensitive novel Pamela, by Richardson. It presented to the reader an hitherto unknown insight into, and an understanding of, the feminine heart, and opened the way for the portrayal of man's most intimate thoughts. These examples, it is true, remained isolated, but their spark induced others to choose, and to create in this medium. Free, as this genre is, of restrictions in matters of form and presentation, its possibilities were rapidly recognized, and interest in it grew so rapidly that it soon overshadowed other literary genres. But it was Rousseau more than any other writer who gave new impetus to the novel and revealed its promises to the writers of his time and those of future generations. La Nouvelle Héloïse, an evocation of nature and domestic life both powerful and intimate, stressed the importance of following the dictates of one's heart rather than those of reason and thereby exerted an immeasurable influence on, and gave much impetus to, the fashionable vogue of sensitivity.¹ Goethe grasped this phenomenon

with terse acumen:

Avec Voltaire, c'est un monde qui finit; avec
Rousseau, c'est un monde qui commence.²

Rousseau's gospel was to have its repercussions all over Europe, not only in the field of literature but in music and painting as well. Art became the vessel for the expression of the individual temperament, freed the imagination and allowed introspection to have full sway.

It was only during the last decade of the XVIIIth century that "the German species of the novel"³ came into its own. At a later stage the aesthetic writer Karl Morgenstern gave this 'species of novel' the new name Bildungsroman, a term which encompasses those novels that relate the "Geschichte des inneren und äusseren Aufbaus eines auf sich beruhenden menschlichen Daseins."⁴ Such works have this in common that they present the story of a youth with distinctive character traits and a Gemüt, a mental disposition which more often than not reflects the author himself. Through his encounter with the world and society he gradually, and often painfully learns how to meet the inescapable exigencies of daily living. By means of an appropriate choice of action, subject matter and style, the author of any given Bildungsroman moulds the experiences of his hero into a symbolic Menschenbild.

To be sure, similar characteristics can be found also in those novels literary history has designated as Entwicklungsromane. This term at once calls to mind Grimmelshausen's Simplicissimus (1668-69) and at a much earlier date Wolfram's Parzival (c. 1200), but in these novels the emphasis is placed on those phases of organic development which everyone undergoes from childhood to maturity. This organic development is in accordance with the laws of nature and is therefore inseparable from what is considered to mark the natural phases of man's growth as he progresses through life. It is this natural flow of unconscious elements which constitutes the framework of the Entwicklungsroman. The Bildungsroman, on the other hand, is a product of the XVIIIth century which was dominated by the untranslatable idea of Bildung, that is formation and education moulded into one. During the Age of Enlightenment the stress was placed more and more upon the demands of the mind, the intellect and thus on the conscious aspects of human development, that is, the rational element or intellectual side of man's make-up was pushed to the fore. Perhaps the most significant step in this direction was undertaken under the auspices of the educational idealist and theorist, Wilhelm von Humboldt (who was to become the founder and dean of the University of Berlin).

He reformed the German universities along the guidelines of an essentially classical view of humanity. This marked a break between the organic and unconscious aspects associated with the various phases of man and life, and the conscious demands made by man's reasoning powers and mental processes. Here, then, is to be found the explanation for the emergence of self-analysis which is, after all, a deliberately intellectual activity. Such analysis invariably unveiled to the individual the very real gulf between the claims of the intellect and the mind and those centred on feeling and emotion. Especially in artistically endowed youths this dichotomy became the cause of grave and often tragic conflicts. Whilst many of them succeeded in alleviating these tensions by the transference of their personal problems to the fictional characters of their literary creations, there remain those who succumbed to them. The tormented life and tragic death of Heinrich von Kleist most poignantly exemplifies the magnitude of the struggle and its possible outcome for a person of an uncompromising nature and attitude. Because of his inability to reconcile the demands of man's intellect with those of feeling he had been doomed to failure: "Die innere seelische Wahrheit liess sich nicht mit der äusseren Geschehniswirklichkeit in Einklang bringen."⁵

In an effort to counteract the influence of Rousseau who had so strongly advocated a return to primitive virtues, the German novelists of this age were wont to stress the formation of mind through disciplinary forces to such an extent that the other claims were left undernourished and in a state of jeopardy. It is inevitable that the individual who subjects himself to the demands of the one ideal, does so at the expense of the other and must of necessity leave them unresolved and go down in defeat. Only the authors who had kept their faith with the Bildungsgedanke and who channelled the urges, longings and ambitions of their various protagonists, ultimately present us with a hero who succeeds in accomodating himself to the exigencies of the outside world.

Rousseau's credo in a return to nature was influential in giving origin to yet another prototype of German novel, though closely akin to those already mentioned. The resulting novels emphasize the hero's Herzensbildung, and have thus rightly become known as Seelenromane. The Grosse Brockhaus uses the word Entfabelung to characterize this particular type and this term, denoting the absence of hyperbole, implies the artist's close adherence to what is true and real.

The author is not precluded from making a discreet use of poetic licence, a freedom which is indeed necessary if the fabric of everyday existence is to be woven into a work of art; but in the Seelenroman this freedom may be exercised only when it serves to bring into relief the animated visions and feelings of a particular hero.

Since stress is laid on feeling as much as on thought, the Seelenroman is also referred to as being the Roman der Innerlichkeit, or novel of introspection, implying subjective intensification, or Verinnerlichung. In a lecture given at Princeton University on "Die Kunst des Romans", Thomas Mann spoke of Verinnerlichung as the guiding principle for all great novelists. To substantiate his claim he has no difficulty in quoting Schopenhauer, "der mit der Kunst auf intimerem Fusse stand, als sonst Denker zu tun pflegen." For him this principle had been of such crucial importance that it became the chief criterion for his critical assessment of a novel:

"Ein Roman wird desto höherer und edlerer Art seyn, je mehr inneres und je weniger äusseres Leben er darstellt; und dies Verhältnis wird, als charakteristisches Zeichen, alle Abstufungen des Romans begleiten...."⁶

To define terms such as Innerlichkeit and Verinnerlichung would be difficult, and certainly hazardous, since the result would inevitably entail subjective

connotations. Yet, in reading a Seelenroman, we become strongly aware of the presence of these qualities. The three novels under discussion in our context illustrate, and give witness to, these properties in their differing ways and have been selected for these very reasons from a large number of representative works extant. They are: Anton Reiser by Karl Philipp Moritz, Hyperion, oder der Eremit in Griechenland by Friedrich Hölderlin, and Unterm Rad by Hermann Hesse. Inevitably the choice had to be made on the basis of their particular power to meet the demands, and to possess the requisite qualities of the Seelenroman.

To the reader who is familiar with the biographies of the authors, the similarity between the writers and their protagonists will soon become apparent; for of itself the Seelenroman tends to take on an autobiographical character. Where an autobiography represents the written chronicle of the author's life, an autobiographical novel draws on the author's experiences only insofar as these experiences reflect his own spiritual development. In the Seelenroman the central hero does reflect the author, and yet for the reason that the protagonist must not be identified with his creator, the Seelenroman is and remains a legitimate work of fiction.

On the other hand, the Seelenroman presents to the reader a life which is seemingly true and real. Although none of the authors can lay claim to any specific training in psychology, be it in academic or intellectual terms, they nevertheless present in their works causal-effect relationships which are both psychologically and historically revealing, valid and significant. They remember from life, how and what they were, what they experienced and what they eventually became as a result of these experiences. The artist's innate sensitivity and intuitive understanding has merely enabled him to distinguish between the relevant and irrelevant forces as they contribute to, and determine, his own self-realization.

There are certain definable characteristics which the heroes of these Seelenromane appear to have in common. They are highly sensitive individuals with an unquenchable thirst for self-realization. It is from their intensified Ichbewusstsein that they derive inner riches and creative genius. Being egotistical, that is to say, oriented towards their own selves, they find themselves constantly pitted against everything which is at odds with their own nature. This conflict may have its origin with the parents, a friend, a lover, teachers,

society as a whole, or merely the climate of the times in which the heroes find themselves placed. But as they rebel against the status quo, which incidentally they all do, they invariably fall victim to states of depression when they have to realize their inability to change the world which surrounds them.

The ensuing personal and spiritual predicaments and struggles of these individuals with the inevitably harsh and cruel realities of society and the world, together with the internal realities of a distinctive personality, form the core and burden of these Seelenromane; they determine their substance, structure and form.

In order to interpret the three protagonists in their quest for self-realization, an effort has been made to follow the action and temper of each one of these novels, to present the material relevant to the theme by means of a continuous narrative, to focus, and whenever the need arises, to enlarge on those ideas pertaining to the ensuing struggle of the protagonist's soul. A close 'reading' connotes a natural approach and a critically justifiable method; to this end the authors have also been allowed to speak for themselves.

CHAPTER I

ANTON REISER

The latter half of the XVIIIth century was characterized by a ferment of intellectual currents which affected and influenced the lives of all thinking men. The literary works of Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-1793) reflect the turmoil of his own life but offer nonetheless a valuable insight into this age of new and often conflicting ideas. From an environment of pietistic atmosphere and self-righteousness nurtured by his parents in early childhood, the young Moritz had escaped into the baroque world of fantasy-novels. Following upon his encounter with the ideas and ideals of the enlightenment as expounded by Gottsched and Christian Wolff, he turned like so many like-minded young men to the gentle but unmistakable melancholy of the Night Thoughts by Young; after the wholesome discovery of Shakespeare, he was soon to succumb to the shattering impact of Werther, made only more poignant by his identification with the latter's sorrows.

Inevitably these conflicting tendencies and influences were bound to leave their mark on Moritz, and in 1785, driven by the compulsion to give form to his past experience, "to see it again 'originally', i.e. animated (beseelt sehen),"¹ he embarked upon the writing of his major work Anton Reiser. This novel has as its subtitle "Ein psychologischer Roman", but it should be read as a biography, for it constitutes in the words of the author

eine so wahre und getreue Darstellung eines Menschenlebens bis auf seine kleinsten Nuancen ... als es vielleicht nu irgendeine geben kann.²

The fact that Anton Reiser does not deal with a purely fictional character but represents a scarcely disguised autobiography heightens its authentic import and meaning.

The vexations encountered by the protagonist are aggravated, if not caused, by his innate characteristics. Evidence given in the novel enables us to ascertain that Anton Reiser was neither a poet nor an actor of great merit, but this must in no way detract from the fact that as a person he lived and experienced aesthetically, by which is meant that he understood and perceived things as artists do.

Kein Problem, keines in der Welt, ist quälender als das vom Künstlertum und seiner menschlichen Wirkung.

This pronouncement is taken from Thomas Mann's short story Tonio Kröger, and the reader of Anton Reiser will soon note its application to this XVIIIth century novel; indeed, on almost every page of this work one meets with the confirmation and amplification of the same predicament.

Moritz states the purpose of this novel in the introduction to the first part in this way:

[Es] soll die innere Geschichte des Menschen schildern ... und den Blick der Seele in sich selber schärfen.³

Many years later and after the author's death Goethe was to give this work high priority "in dem Kreise der höchsten Kunst und schönsten Natur,"⁴ and thus a conspicuous place in German literature.

The novel opens on a factual background which helps us to comprehend better Anton Reiser's unusual disposition. The teachings of a religious sect called the Quietisten or Separatisten which was active toward the middle of the XVIIIth century and inspired by the writings of a certain Mme. Guion are given detailed treatment. Its central doctrine states that perfection and spiritual peace are to be attained through denial of self and through the contemplation of God; in this state, the soul is indifferent to worldly and sensual desire, and thus becomes heir to the claims of virtue and morality.

Anton's father, a widower, had been converted to this faith after the death of his first wife. When he met Anton's mother, she anticipated much understanding, love and happiness from such a God-fearing man. But the mortification and renunciation which her husband practised soon brought discord to the house in which Anton was born.

Die ersten Töne, die sein Ohr vernahm und sein aufdämmernder Verstand begriff, waren wechselseitige Flüche und Verwünschungen des unauflöslich geknüpften Ehebandes.⁵

It is in the first few pages of the novel which deal with the child's formative years that one finds the origin of Anton's difficulties in later life:

Ob er gleich Vater und Mutter hatte, so war er doch in seiner frühesten Jugend schon von Vater und Mutter verlassen, denn er wusste nicht, an wen er sich halten sollte, da sich beide hassten und ihm doch einer so nahe wie der andre war.⁶

When his mother gives birth to a second child (Anton is now eight years old), he finds himself even more neglected by his parents. Desperately he searches for friendship outside the family circle; but in this, too, he is hampered, for he is ashamed of the miserable condition of his clothes. And since he does not dare to speak to the children of the village who seem better off than he is, "... hatte er keinen, zu dem er sich gesellen konnte, keinen Gespielen seiner Kindheit, keinen Freund unter Grossen noch Kleinen."⁷ And more tragic still, although he has a great yearning for affection, in time he does not even expect it any more, because of the very low opinion he has of himself.

At this time his father decides that Anton should learn to read. He masters this new skill within weeks, and is overjoyed to discover in books a happier world than the one in which he has been living hitherto. He comes upon the great men of the Bible for whom he

develops an attitude of hero-worship. Wishing to emulate heroes who are less remote, he is soon driven to replace the Biblical patriarchs by the Fathers of the Church.

As if the lack of love on the part of his parents and his shabby appearance were not sufficient as handicaps, even the joys of this unreal, idealistic world of books are threatened by another serious obstacle: he contracts severe pains in his left leg, with the result that they force him to put aside his reading. When his parents finally decide to do something about it, the doctor who is consulted is unable to bring the swelling and the spreading infection to a halt and decides that the leg must be amputated. At the very last moment the leg is saved by means of an ointment supplied by a compassionate shoemaker. Yet, it takes four years before the leg is healed. Being confined to the house during his convalescence Anton is unable to play with children, and he withdraws once more into his world of books, so that "das Buch musste ihm Freund und Tröster und alles sein."⁸

In one of the religious books that Anton is given by his father he finds instructions on how to prepare one's soul to receive God and how to communicate