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Undoing the Master/s: Generic Ambiguity in Karoline von Günderrode's Ballad "Don Juan"

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Masters, slaves, and Hegel form the trinity of nineteenth-century ethics, though Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel did not invent the concept of the master. Its roots lie rather in antiquity and it was particularly fundamental to early modern political theory. Understanding the concept of the master requires *Anschauung*; it requires the concrete perception of an example. But every example that provides *Anschauung* of the concept of the master also shifts its meaning. That is definitely the case with the character Don Juan, whom the German Romantic author Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806) refers to in her ballad of the same name from the beginning of the nineteenth century.[1] In dubbing her character Don Juan, she takes advantage of an ambiguity in the name, which could historically refer to two different people. On the one hand, her Don Juan could reference John of Austria, a historical master who aspired to be a sovereign. However, as an illegitimate son of Emperor Charles V and Barbara Blomberg, a commoner from Regensburg, John was excluded from political sovereignty. Instead, he served his half-brother, King Philip II of Spain, a legitimate heir of Charles V, as a military leader. On the other hand, her Don Juan clearly refers to the fictive character that

[1] Günderrode 1990; Engl. trans. Ezekiel (1990).

everyone associates with a profane narrative promulgated by art and literature since the early seventeenth century. Always ready for sex and crime, this Don Juan is the prototype of masculinity and virility. As such, he is considered the southern European counterpart to the northern European Faust. By invoking this ambiguity in the name Don Juan, Günderrode's ballad playfully violates the ontological border between history and fiction and thereby maps political power onto sexual potency. In other words, the ambiguous collision of the two figures sheds new light on the concept of the master. The ballad is thus an excellent example of how the epistemic media of art and literature produce philosophical insights.

Günderrode left behind a considerable oeuvre: poems, prose, and letters. She published the ballad "Don Juan" in 1804 under the pseudonym Tian in the collection *Gedichte und Phantasien*,[2] 11 years before the publication of E. T. A. Hoffmann's short story about Don Juan (1813) and 15 before Lord Byron's classic poem (1819). Although Günderrode doubtlessly belongs to the masters of the canon of German Romanticism, in the broader context of European modernity, her ballad has been all but forgotten.[3] And almost nobody has acknowledged that Hegel's female contemporary provided us with a concrete perception of the concept of the master. Her gender and early suicide prevented her voice from being heard. Yet her "Don Juan" challenges the concept of the master and the idea of its necessity in modern thought. Recent discussions on the master have pointed out his ridiculous, hysterical, excessive, undead, colonial, and racist aspects; some have even considered how the master may be considered, by definition, as castrated.[4] Indeed, I want to probe how the ballad advances such a

[2] See Ives 2000.

[3] The best among the few readings of the ballad is by Marjanne E. Goozé, who focuses on female authorship and considers Günderrode's sociopolitical context. See Goozé 1991.

[4] Here, I refer to the conference "The Master/s: On the Contemporary Structure of Power," Ljubljana, 22–24 September 2022, https://www.youtube.com/@goetheljubljana/videos, accessed 1 April 2023.

perspective. Günderrode's ballad stages the master before Hegel's master had even been born. This staging reveals the ambiguity of the concept, and this ambiguity is not only conceptual (semantic) but also formal, and the latter depends on the former. In fact, we could say that Günderrode's ballad does not so much dispute the concept as undo it aesthetically. The poem derives its subversive force from connecting political power with male potency.

In the following psychoanalytical close reading, I would like to demonstrate how the master is made ambiguous in three steps. I begin with the history of the Don Juan motif and consider the theoretical readings of this figure (1). Then I analyze the generic forms in Günderrode's ballad (2) and demonstrate that their interplay produces the ambiguity of the master. With this ambiguity, the ballad "Don Juan" undertakes a frontal assault on the modern myth of the master before the concept had begun its illustrious career under Hegel (3).

1

There has been a lot of scholarship on the history of the Don Juan material, which is among the most popular motifs in modern literature. From the very beginning, the character of Don Juan has been portrayed as shady: not only is he an unscrupulous seducer, but he is also a clumsy show-off. There may be some prototypes for Don Juan in the comic tradition, but he only really appeared at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Tirso de Molina's comedy *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest* (*El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*), first printed in 1630. Then Molière's comedy *Don Juan or The Feast of the Stone Statue* (*Dom Juan ou le festin de pierre*) brought the material to court theaters in 1665. In Günderrode's time, Don Juan was famous from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's 1787 opera *The Rake Punished, or Don Giovanni* (*Il dissoluto punito, ossia il Don Giovanni*), for which Lorenzo Da Ponte wrote the libretto.

As in the earlier comedies, Mozart's story is based on four elements: (a) Don Giovanni desires women (always more than one); (b) Don Giovanni has rivals; (c) Don Giovanni has a servant; and (d) Don Giovanni is punished. In the first act of the opera, Don Giovanni seduces two ladies and one peasant woman, cuckolds two husbands, and murders a father (il Commendatore), who is commemorated with a statue. The plot strings together not only affairs but also intrigues and misadventures, in which Don Giovanni's servant, Leporello, faithfully assists his potent master and keeps a record of the seductions: "Look at this thick book. It's filled with the names of all his sweethearts."[5] But then comes a morally, even theologically motivated turn in the second act: Don Giovanni, who refuses to repent, invites the statue of the murdered father to a candlelight dinner. When he arrives, the stone guest pronounces Don Giovanni's punishment, and the flames of hell engulf the playboy. Mozart's opera thus makes a tragic figure out of the ridiculous Don Juan. Don Giovanni's act of patricide does not allow him to escape the troubles he has sown. In the end, he succumbs to the real master—and there is an end to masculinity, virility, and potency.

Mozart's opera has been at the center of the Don Juan boom in modern literature and theory. The theoretical literature ranges from Søren Kierkegaard, who views Don Juan as the prototype of the aesthete,[6] to the existentialist philosopher Albert Camus, who claims that Don Juan's free love led to the citizenry's liberation in the French Revolution.[7] In psychoanalytical theory, Jacques Lacan evaluates him as a hysteric,[8] while Julia Kristeva diagnoses Don Juan with objectless love, which means that he embodies desire in and of itself—the absolute object,[9] whereas Alenka Zupančič

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[5] Mozart 2011, p. 531.
[6] See Kierkegaard 1956.
[7] See Camus 1991.
[8] See Lacan 2014.
[9] See Kristeva 1987.

points out that Don Juan's sharing of his *agalma* provokes the desire of other.[10] In literary studies, Shoshana Felman argues that Don Juan's seductive power can be ascribed to the power of language, because he does not tell the truth but only makes groundless promises.[11] And Cornelia Pierstorff claims that narrations are the medium of his desire.[12] But I am not prepared to put up with so much abstraction. Instead, I ask myself: Where does the energy that this character is charged with in literature and theory come from? How can it be that a rather ridiculous comedic figure has become a tragic figure in the modern age and has been seen as a mirror figure of the potent master Faust?

The Viennese psychoanalyst Otto Rank provides an answer to these questions. In an essay entitled "The Don Juan Legend" ("*Die Don Juan Figur*"), which appeared in the journal *Imago*, edited by Sigmund Freud, Rank derives the Don Juan myth from the Oedipus myth—the psychoanalytic metanarrative. In this telling, Hamlet, Faust, Don Juan, and other tragic heroes form, in Oedipus's wake, the psychoanalytical paradigm of the master. As is well known, the goal of a boy's development is to overcome the Oedipus complex. Only then has he successfully identified with his father and replaced his mother with another woman. Overcoming the Oedipus complex is thus the precondition for mastery. Only those who are not their fathers' servants can become masters. In his analysis of Mozart's opera, Rank elaborates how in Don Juan's Oedipus complex, "the many seduced women represent the one unattainable mother, and […] the many men whom he deceives, fights, and kills represent the father."[13] Don Juan remains loyal to his mother by devaluing women, hence the importance of the series of women in all the adaptions of the

[10] See Zupančič 2000.
[11] See Felman 1983.
[12] See Pierstorff 2017.
[13] Rank 1975, p. 20.

material. The father remains his enemy, represented very impressively by the stone guest. He embodies Don Juan's censoring ego ideal (*Ichideal*).

The echo of this thesis lingers in all the theoretical readings. But at one point Rank notes something that has since ceased to play a role. In a reading that is strongly informed by cultural studies, he shows how two temporal layers overlap in the Don Juan material: the unconscious of the individual and the "immemorial" (*das Unvordenkliche*) of a culture. I take the term *immemorial* (*Unvordenklich*) from Hans-Georg Gadamer,[14] who appropriates it, in turn, from Friedrich Schelling[15] to address the repressed layers of human history. For this inaccessible layer, Freud invents the famous fairy tale of the primordial horde. It tells of how, in the dim and distant past, the sons of the father who led the horde and who owned all the women were guilty of a common crime: they murdered their father. Among the brothers, the master was the one who committed the murder, took his father's place, and claimed all the women for himself. As Rank shows, precisely such an idealization through heroization is at the basis of the Don Juan figure. Don Juan's guilt is not oedipally motivated at the level of the individual; rather his guilt reveals the "original guilt" of the cultural imaginary:

> The artistic-synthetic presentation of the Don Juan material culminates in Mozart's immortal masterpiece. Here the sense of guilt breaks through so powerfully that it leads on the one hand to its clearest manifestation in the father complex (the Commander), and on the other hand to the complete inhibition of the libido (which was originally unrestrained) for the forbidden maternal object. The result of this second effect is that the whole series of women remains unattainable for the hero. (Rank 1975, pp. 107–108.)

[14] See Gadamer 2004.
[15] See Schelling 1979.

This collision of the immemorial and the psychological charges the Don Juan figure with an energetic potential that has fascinated modern literature and theory since the mid-nineteenth century. It is the source for the ambiguity of the master in the first place.

2

With *Don Giovanni*, Mozart produced a great monument to the master. In her ballad, Günderrode knocks it off its pedestal. In cases of such a hostile relationship to a predecessor, Harold Bloom speaks of "misreading," which he assesses as a strategy of outdoing another author.[16] However, Günderrode misreads not only Mozart but also all the other Don Juan variations before and even after her ballad.

This narrative poem has 22 cross-rhymed stanzas in iambic tetrameter, each stanza ending with a triple rhyme to form the pattern ABABCCC. The stanzas are divided into one group of 8 stanzas and two groups of 7 stanzas. Günderrode immediately violates all four elements of the storyline: (a) Don Juan desires only one woman; (b) Don Juan does not have any rivals; (c) Don Juan does not have a servant; and (d) Don Juan is not punished by a father—at least not by a "real" father. So the story narrated in the ballad is very different from those of Mozart and company. The ballad instead tells a "romantic" version of Don Juan.[17] European literature began to promote a bourgeois concept of romantic love starting in the middle of the eighteenth century. Such love is exclusive and combines heteronormative sex with the idea of friendship and the institution of marriage. The fact that such a concept is not designed to last is the problem that modern novels revolve around, beginning with the prototype of a failing lover:

[16] See Bloom 1975.
[17] See Goozé 1991, p. 117 passim.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe's famous diary fiction *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*; 1774).

Günderrode interrupts the serial pattern of the Don Juan tradition by staging his romantic love. The love story represents a moment that each element in the series of lovers might have and reveals that moment's psychic economy. It is the specular and spectacular moment of union that the ballad narratively unfolds by underlaying this moment with a story. The first part of the ballad tells of Juan's adoration of a queen, the second fantasizes a passionate love story, and the third ends with the king's revenge. My analysis of the ballad's form is based on narratological categories.[18] In a narrative metalepsis, the narration jumps in the very first verse from an extradiegetic position outside the narrated world into the middle of the narrated world: "Now the festival has come" (Es ist der Festtag nun erschienen). Intradiegetically, the narrative is tied to a nonpersonalized position among the people. From out of the crowd and literally live on stage, the appearance of the beautiful queen alongside her new husband is enthusiastically cheered. The live effect is supported by the verb tenses in the present and perfect—the rhetorical technique of energeia (vividness). The pair's wedding dance is watched in particular by "one man, one in the crowd" (Einer, Einer im Gedränge): "Juan," whose observing in turn is observed. Until the fifth stanza, Juan remains nameless, and "Don" only appears in the title of the ballad. The second stanza introduces the two central concepts of the ballad, the "gaze" (Blick) and the "heart" (Herz). Indeed, the heart appears no less than six times as the organ of *Empfindsamkeit*, that is, of the eighteenth-century European movement of sentimentalism. Juan's heart aches for the queen, but above all, in good Petrarchan tradition, it burns for her—and it has done so for months, as the fourth stanza, which narrates the backstory to the wedding, makes clear.

[18] See Genette 1980 and 1988.

In the entire first part of the ballad, the narrative follows Juan's gaze. It thus forfeits the autonomy that normally characterizes extra- and heterodiegetic narration. In other words, the ballad does not narrate about Juan but rather *with* Juan. Not even the title ensures that the narration is anchored outside the character's consciousness. The internal focalization is continuous even in the passages that are not narrated in free indirect discourse (*erlebte Rede*) or as a stream of consciousness. Pointedly, one could say that the nameless character interprets himself as "Juan." The readers are thus plunged deeply—and without escape—into Juan's world: "[t]hus he falls prey to his watching" (*So wird er seines Schauens Beute*), and the reader falls with him. This internal focalization is precisely the formal ingenuity of the poem. It is not about Juan, which would alone make the deviation from the literary tradition clear, but rather inhabits a Juanian consciousness that is tied to a specific character. In this "Juanian world," a young man has devoted himself to the adoration of a beautiful married woman, from whom he is separated by social status above all: he is a nobody from the people, she the queen.

In his adoration, Juan almost religiously transfigures his lady in the tradition of minnesang. In an analepsis, the fifth stanza narrates how Juan disturbs the devotions of the courtly congregation on the Christian holiday of All Souls. In one scene, the queen poses like the Mother of God, first with her head lowered, then with her eyes turned heavenward, as in the iconographic tradition of Maria Immaculata, such as in a painting by Sassoferrato (see Fig. 1). It is this transfiguration that stimulates his desire: "Then Juan's ardent gaze implored / That she would just *once* make him happy!" (Da flehen Juans heiße Blicke: / Daß sie ihn *einmal* nur beglücke!). He imagines himself stepping in front of the altar: "Aloud he'll tell her of his passion" (laut will er seinen Schmerz ihr nennen). To his mind, it is not the souls of the deceased that are to be liberated but his own desire:

Fig. 1: Sassoferrato (Giovanni Battista Salvi): Maria Immaculata (1640/1660). Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main. Photo © Städel Museum

Stanza 7

Laut spricht er: Priester! lasset schweigen	Aloud he speaks: Priest! let fall silent
Für Todte die Gebete all.	All prayers for the dead.
Für mich laßt heisse Bitten steigen;	Raise for me your ardent pleas;
Denn größer ist der Liebe Quaal,	For greater is my love's torment,
Von der ich wehn'ger kann genesen,	From which I can less recover,
Als jene unglücksel'gen Wesen	Than those unhappy creatures
Zur Quaal des Feuers auserlesen.	Chosen for the fiery torment.

Here, an ambiguity of scope connects the torment of purgatory with the suffering caused by the flames of love, which form the imagery of the second and third parts of the ballad. But a consideration of form makes clear that Don Juan has only imagined his "love" (Liebesmuth). He has not revealed it to the courtly community but only to the crowd, in which he is only one among a multitude. The attempt to realize the wish in reality does not result in a sovereign entrance but rather in a crank talking crazy. The crowd is quite astonished at Juan's expression of his feelings, as one reads in an ironic break in the scene in one of the few verses narrated without a Juanian focalization: "'Where among the festive splendour?' / Some quietly think, 'is she intended / By his words and with such fervour?'" ("Wo ist, im festlichen Gepränge," / Denkt Manche still, "die solche Gluth / Und solches Wort hat jetzt gemeinet?").

Don Juan: a stalker, a poor lunatic, who covets his queen as a virgin and displays behavioral problems—that alone would be incredible. But Günderrode goes even further with her misreading. Graphically separated from the first eight stanzas of the ballad's first part by a line, the next seven stanzas of the second part introduce a change in the modality so as to narrate the fulfillment of an exclusive romantic love. The trigger for this change, which is additionally motivated in stanzas 9 and 10 by a shift from a narrative to a dramatic mode of narration, are the queen's "secret

tears" (heimliche Thränen). Juan imagines how his beloved saw his tears at the court and correctly read their meaning. In free indirect discourse, he asks himself, "Was it pity, was it love, / That wrung those tears from her?" (War's Mitleid, ist es Lieb' gewesen, / Was diese Thränen ihr erpreßt?). He desires just one day with her, even just a single nocturnal hour "[w]here sweet love blooms for him" (Wo süße Liebe für ihn blüht) to be ready for the eternity of "death's night" (Todesnacht).

Modality is an ontological category used in fiction theory.[19] The theory of possible worlds distinguishes the actual world from other possible worlds. While the first part of the ballad and the beginning of its second part are epistemologically unreliable since they are narrated with internal focalization, the events are nonetheless situated in the realm of what is possible in the actual world. The following seven stanzas shift into the realm of the impossible (in the actual world) and so from what I will call a narrated possible world into a narrated impossible world. The love story between Juan and his beloved plays out in this other world, which is not located on the same ontological level as the events presented so far. From stanzas 11 to 15, the narration is not internally focalized, that is, it does not inhabit a Juanian consciousness. Instead, the love story is narrated without focalization as if it were real. In this impossible world, Juan builds a theater for the queen. It is this absurdity—a poor wretch from the people building a theater at lightning speed—that justifies my ontological interpretation, for there is no other way to explain how the theater is built so quickly. In fact, this scene retrospectively casts doubt on the ontological status of the first scene as a possible world since it, too, possesses clear theatrical attributes. Further pursuing this insight would, however, go too far, unless one is not afraid of considering a formal collapse in which there is no orientation between distinct ontological levels.

[19] See Ryan 1991.

Stanzas 11–12

Es liebt die Königin die Bühne,	The Queen loves the stage,
Erschien oft selbst im bunten Spiel.	Often appeared in colourful play.
Daß er dem kleinsten Wunsche diene	To serve her smallest wishes
Ist jetzt nur seines Lebensziel.	Is now his life's only goal.
Er läßt ihr ein Theater bauen,	He has a theatre built for her,
Dort will, die reizendste der Frauen,	There he will see the loveliest
Er noch in neuer Anmuth schauen.	Of women in new grace.
Der Hof sich einst zum Spiel vereinet,	The court unites one day for a play,
Die Königin in Schäfertracht,	The Queen, dressed as a shepherdess,
Mit holder Anmuth nur erscheinet	Appears with lovely grace
Den Blumenkranz in Lokkennacht.	A floral wreath in her hair's night.
Und Juans Seele sieht verwegen,	And Juan's soul recklessly,
Mit ungestümen wildem Regen,	With impetuous wild stirrings,
Dem kommenden Moment entgegen.	Looks forward to the coming moment.

Stanza 11 mixes the simple past, which refers to the possible world, with the present tense, in which the impossible world is narrated, whereas in stanza 12, past and present overlap. The modality of the impossible world, in which Juan's love is fulfilled, has a specific generic form: the ballad becomes an anacreontic ode (and I will spare you the detailed formal analysis that explains this categorization). What seems picturesque to us today—the queen donning the costume of a shepherdess, as in Jean-Honoré Fragonard's painting (Fig. 2)—was a familiar code for sex in the era of *Empfindsamkeit* and is echoed in the peasant girl Zerlina, the third woman in Mozart's *Don Giovanni.* One could say an anacreontic porno is playing in rapid time-lapse in Juan's "inner cinema." Because the events are not *possible* but rather *impossible*, it is not surprising that the theater, which has just been

Fig. 2 Jean-Honoré Fragonard: The Shepherdess (ca. 1750/1752). Bequest of Leon and Marion Kaumheimer. Milwaukee Art Museum. Photo © John Nienhuis, Dedra Walls

instantaneously built, all of a sudden burns down again at Juan's signal. The fire naturalizes the flame metaphors borrowed from the Petrarchan discourse of love. The burning theater and the flames of love alternate, whereas the love story culminates in the desired "lovely hour":

Stanza 13–14

Er winkt, und Flamm und Dampf erfüllen,	He signals: flame and fumes pervade
Entsetzlich jetzt das Schauspielhaus;	Now horribly the theatre;
Der Liebe Glück will er verhüllen	He will conceal love's happiness
In Dampf und Nacht und Schreck und Graus;	In fumes and night, and fear and horror;
Er jauchzet, daß es ihm gelungen,	He rejoices; he has succeeded,

Des Schicksals Macht hat er bezwungen	He has forced destiny's power
Der Liebe süssen Lohn errungen.	And gained love's sweet wages.
Gekommen ist die schöne Stunde;	The lovely hour has come;
Er trägt sie durch, des Feuers Wuth	He bears her through the fire's rage,
Raubt manchen Kuß dem schönen Munde,	Steals kisses from her lovely mouth,
Weckt ihres Busens tiefste Gluth.	Awakens her bosom's deepest blaze.
Möcht sterben jetzt in ihren Armen,	In her arms he would pass away,
Möcht alles geben! ihr, verarmen,	Would give all! To impoverish her,
Zu anderm Leben nie erwarmen.	Never warm to another life.

Marjanne E. Goozé decodes this episode allegorically: "The moment of sexual fulfillment is compared with death; the metaphor is an old one. After his orgasmic death, his warmth will be spent. His purgatory is to become hers."[20] The haunting literally comes to an end when the costumed queen breaks free from the impossible world, which in this interpretation is then unmasked and rationalized as Juan's dream. Not the ghost of a father, as in *Hamlet* (or *Don Giovanni*), but the ghost of his mother appears at the end of the scene: "He sees her float through the halls. / The minute's life is breathed out" (Er sieht sie durch die Hallen schweben. / Verhaucht ist der Minute Leben).

Another line graphically separates the final seven stanzas of the third and last part of the ballad from the seven stanzas of the second part. Back in the possible world, things are looking bad for the romantic "master to be": Juan suffers from "crazed senses" (irrer Sinn). The anacreontic porno, which played in the impossible world, is thus psychologized by the narrative instance as a delusion. Around 1800, the discourse on melancholy provided

[20] Goozé 1991, p. 126.

set pieces for representing madness. These set pieces were, in turn, stored in cultural memory by influential texts like Goethe's *Werther*: Werther's "sickness unto death" is an integral part of the bourgeois concept of romantic love. Such melancholic attributes are compactly gathered together in stanzas 16 and 17 to characterize Juan's madness. This characterization is rounded out by an *image* of the queen highlighted by the stanzaic form. In this last part of the ballad, the stanzaic form changes significantly. Through to the end, the cross-rhyming couplets are followed by a rhyming couplet and an unrhyming single verse. The very first such single verse emphasizes madness by addressing its medium: "Her beloved, lovely image" (ihr geliebtes, holdes Bild). The waking-dream state of madness, in which sleep and a "dream-like death"[21] are blended in a manner so typical of late-Enlightenment psychological discourse, leads to a dissociated state where Juan hears the voice of his grief and compares awakening from the episode to a resurrection from a "crypt" (Gruft). Today, Juan's condition would probably fulfill all the symptomatic requirements of a psychotic episode:

Stanza 18

Und da er wacht aus seinem Schlummer	And when he wakens from his slumber
Ist's ihm, als stieg' er aus der Gruft,	It seems he's climbing from a crypt,
So fremd und tod; und aller Kummer	So strange and dead; and all the anguish
Der mit ihm schlief erwacht und ruft:	That slept with him awakes and cries:
O weine! sie ist dir verlohren	Oh weep! she's lost to you forever
Die deine Liebe hat erkohren	She who your love chose
Ein Abgrund trennet sie und dich!	An abyss divides you from her!

[21] Goozé 1991, p. 127.

In stanzas 19 to 22, it again seems as if *something* is happening, but in fact, *nothing* happens in the real, possible world. For there is again a change in modality from the possible world to the impossible world, so the following actions are also located on a different ontological level and narrated there without focalization: Juan sets off for the gardens of the castle, where he meets a girl who gives him a letter from his beloved. In the letter, she tells him to save himself from the king, who, contrary to the Juanian tradition, has no intention of being cuckolded or murdered. Juan reads this passionate declaration, presses the beloved page as a fetish to his heart—"Loves it, holds it to his heart" (Und liebt's, und drückt es an sein Herz)—broods a little over his fate, and then, somewhat suddenly, falls victim to murder. While the impossible world of love has the generic form of an anacreontic ode, the impossible world of murder has the generic form of a condensed tragedy narrated at a high tempo. The elements of a secret love, the letter, and the murder are paradigmatic; they are not narrated so much as quickly recalled from cultural memory. That this tragedy does not occur in the real, possible world is made clear in the concluding verses, where Juan lapses back into his dissociated state, repeating in the very moment of his death the union with his beloved.

3

In the last section, I concluded that in Günderrode's misreading of the Don Juan material, both love and punishment—the two central motifs of the tradition—are narrated but do not really occur. For the author combines the techniques of internal focalization, which had become increasingly common since the end of the eighteenth century, with a sophisticated change of modality. The only "real" thing narrated in internal focalization is Juan's romantic love. But with the economy of this love, which is mirrored in the anacreon-

tic porno and the tragedy, Günderrode comes up with a surprising diagnosis: her Juan is not, as one would expect from the Don Juan material, an adult womanizer. Instead, the ballad identifies him as a whiny little boy and so reveals the master's potency as a regressive fantasy. In an "infantile tendency to regress,"[22] Juan idealizes the queen in the image of a mother according to the Mariological model, sexualizes that image according to the anacreontic model, and is then punished according to the tragic model—all of this as an expression of dissociation. Yet it is precisely the anacreontic costuming of the Mother of God that points to the phenomenon that Rank describes using the example of Mozart—a phenomenon that is quite typical of literature around 1800: the superimposition of temporal layers. When Juan worships and desires the queen, he worships and desires her individually as a mother and culturally as an archaic "great mother" (*magna mater*). This mother imago is mediated by the staging, common in anacreontic poetry, of the shepherdess in the tradition of a Flora–Aphrodite constellation, such as in François Boucher's painting (Fig. 3). In multiple mythological sources, Aphrodite is not only the goddess of love but also refers to the chthonic, maternal goddesses of an archaic, matriarchal cultural stage.

In his 1861 cultural-anthropological study *Mother Right: An Investigation of the Religious and Juridical Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World* (*Das Mutterrecht: Eine Untersuchung über die Gynaikokratie der alten Welt nach ihrer religiösen und rechtlichen Natur*), Johann Jakob Bachofen distinguishes between an early hetaeric mother, a later matriarchal, oral mother, and a final patriarchal, oedipal mother. Juan's supremely powerful mother imago is characterized by the fact that she combines all three mother imagines. She has sexual, nurturing, and punitive aspects. This mother imago thus also has an oedipal function. In the ballad, Juan is accordingly not murdered by the king; indeed,

[22] Rank 1975, p. 96.

Fig. 3 François Boucher: Dreaming Shepherdess (1763). Residenzgalerie Salzburg. Photo © Ulrich Ghezzi, Oberalm

the king fails even to take notice of him. Rather, the murder is narrated in an entirely indeterminate manner, and can therefore also be assigned to the preoedipal, phallic mother: "A killing dagger finds his breast" (Da trifft ein Mörderdolch die Brust). In

this verse, the German adverb *da*, which is elided in the English translation, is wonderfully vague since it can indicate a spatial, temporal, or causal relation. At some place, at some time, and somehow, Juan meets his fate. In the penultimate stanza, the two rhetorical questions framing an exclamation refer to the three functions of the mother imago; this is supported by the impure rhyme *meiden–bereiten*:

Stanzas 21–22

Er liest das Blatt mit leisem Beben	He reads the page, gently trembling
Und liebt's, und drückt es an sein Herz.	Loves it, holds it to his heart.
Gewaltsam theilet sich sein Leben,	His life is violently divided
In große Wonne — tiefen Schmerz.	In great bliss – deep pain.
Solt er die Theuerste nun meiden?	Should he now avoid his dearest?
Kann sie dies Trauern ihm bereiten!	How can she cause him this sorrow?
Soll er sie nimmer wieder sehn?	Should he never see her again?
Er geht nun, wie sie ihm geboten;	He goes now, as she bade him;
Da trifft ein Mörderdolch die Brust.	A killing dagger finds his breast.
Doch steigt er freudig, zu den Todten	But to the dead he rises gladly,
Denn der Erinn'rung süße Lust,	For memory's sweet passion,
Ruft ihm herauf die schönste Stunde,	Calls up to him the loveliest hour,
Er hänget noch an ihrem Munde;	He still hangs on her mouth;
Entschlummert sanft in ihrem Arm.	And gently slumbers in her arms.

In the last stanza, the actual vanishing point is not sexual union with the shepherdess, which Juan recalls in dying with the repeated rhyming words *Stunde–Munde*, but the imagination

of death as sleep. The ballad establishes the pictorial connection between madness, "slumber," and death already in the seventeenth stanza in the image of the "crypt." The figura etymologica of *Schlummer–entschlummern* repeats this connection in the last stanza and assigns it to the mother imago. Rank, by the way, also notices the chthonic, maternal symbolism of the crypt in Mozart. This imago is omnipresent in the cultural memory around 1800. For example, the classicist painter Asmus Jacob Carstens links individual psychological regression with pagan and Christian mythology in a famous drawing of the chthonic, maternal goddess of the night. Nyx is the mother of Hypnos, the god of sleep, and Thanatos, the god of gentle death (Fig. 4). This scene also reflects the type of the Virgin of Mercy from Christian iconography (Fig. 5). By superimposing the unconscious of the individual

Fig. 4 Asmus Jacob Carstens: Night and Her Children, Sleep and Death (1794). Kunstsammlung Weimar. Photo © Kunstsammlung

Fig. 5 Piero della Francesco: Virgin of Mercy (1460/1462). Museo Civico, Sansepolcro. Photo © Museo Civico

and the immemorial of culture, Günderrode stages a regressive Juan, who imagines a preoedipal world in which there is not yet a father. Rank also notices this potential of the Don Juan figure and elaborates upon it:

> As the fantasy also clearly reveals, this unattainability does not refer to sexual possession, to which there is certainly no barrier in primitive times and character. Rather, it involves the deeply-rooted biological wish for the exclusive and complete possession of the mother, as once experienced in the pleasure of the prenatal situation and forever afterward sought as the highest libidinal satisfaction. (Rank 1975, p. 95)

The ballad thus does not lead into a heroic world but into a preoedipal one. The real point here is that Günderrode explicitly marks—not least because of its serious deviations from the tradition—an intertextual relationship to the greatest tragedy of German classicism. For in her ballad, Günderrode overlays "Don Juan" with Friedrich Schiller's dramatic poem *Don Carlos* (*Dom Karlos, Infant von Spanien*), which was published in 1787, the same year that Mozart's opera premiered. A syllepsis leads from "Philip," who is mentioned in verse 29 of the ballad, to King Philip II of Spain, who in Schiller is the antagonist to his son Don Carlos, the crown prince (Fig. 6). But if this Philip is the husband of the adored and coveted queen, then Juan's position is quite precarious. Günderrode's Juan would either take the position of Carlos of Asturias (1545–1568; Fig. 7), who was King Philip's son and the prince of Spain. Then Philip's wife, Queen Elisabeth of Valois, who had been Carlos's former fiancée and whom he still desired after she had married his father, would take the symbolic position of Juan's mother. In this case, the ballad of Juan's love would narrate a story as old as time—the oedipal story of rivalry and incest. Or Juan can take the position of John of Austria (1547–1578; Fig. 7), who was the half-brother of King Philip. With an equally original and lucid move, Günderrode also brings this alternative into

Fig. 6 Titian: Philip II (1549/1550). Museo del Prado, Madrid.
Photo © Prado

play, because the "Philip" in verse 29 can also be an allusion to William Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado about Nothing*, written in 1588/1589 and first published in 1623: Juan "features as a villain (Don John, the Bastard Prince), and, after Günderrode's time, he

Fig. 7 Alonso Sánchez Coello: Prince Don Carlos (1555/1559). Museo del Prado, Madrid. Photo © Prado

appears in mid- and late-nineteenth century works featuring a love rivalry between Don John (sometimes written as 'Don Juan' or 'Don Giovanni') and King Philip."[23]

These intertextual allusions through the "Philip" syllepsis are a game changer, because Günderrode endows the protagonist with

[23] See Anna C. Ezekiel's introduction to her translation of Günderrode's poem in Günderrode 1990.

"constitutive ambiguity"[24] by mapping his political power onto his sexual potency or, should I better say, his potential political power onto his potential sexual potency. This strategy is convincing since John of Austria and Carlos of Asturias were of exactly the same age, and, what really matters, both lacked sovereignty. With regard to power and with regard to potency, Philip is the one and only master in the ballad. The illegitimate brother of the king can never obtain political sovereignty because dynastic laws forbid it. His actions are motivated by his envy of his brother's political sovereignty, which is the basis for his social authority. Admittedly, the son of the king has it even worse. While he is the potential sovereign and was also almost the legitimate husband of the woman who is now his mother, he is both politically and sexually emasculated. And Günderrode squints at Schiller with an evil eye. Don Carlos's desire for the married queen in the symbolic position of his mother is his tragic flaw (hamartia), and it establishes the oedipal conflict with Philip. Although he is willing to replace his love for Elisabeth with a sublimated love for his fatherland, the son is handed over to the Inquisition at the end of the tragedy by his jealous, vengeful father.

Historical portraits of premodern rulers provide noteworthy clues about this symbolic knowledge of political and sexual disempowerment. Their iconography inscribes the difference between political power and male potency into the representation of the sovereign—with more or less ambiguity. The portraits thus relate political power and male potency as if they were already the two sides of the master. In Titian's painting *Philip II* (1549/1550), the insignia of political power, the scepter and sword, frame the sovereign's clearly visible genitalia (Fig. 6). In typical fashion for the time, his genitalia are in their own casing, a codpiece that covers them and at the same time displays them in the covering. The painting thus depicts the male body twice: as the body of a man

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[24] See Berndt and Sachs-Hombach 2015.

and as the body of the sovereign. This doubling of the body is structural for premodern political theory, as Ernst Kantorowicz points out in his classic 1957 study *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*.[25]

By focusing on the male genitalia, the portraits of rulers bring into view what complicates the doubling. For not only the body politic but also his male body are symbolic. The doubling thus does not concern a given body as the body of the sovereign but rather encompasses two different symbolic systems, the system of politics and the system of masculinity. While the body politic is constituted by the traditional symbols of sovereignty, the male body is constituted by the phallus, which is never real. Significant semantic tensions arise in the interaction of the symbols of sovereignty and the phallus, in both Juan Pantoja de la Cruz's painting *John of Austria* (1547/48) and Alonso Sánchez Coello's *Prince Don Carlos* (1555/1559). Particularly noteworthy is how the cut of the codpiece in Coello's painting makes Don Carlos's phallus appear enlarged (Fig. 8), while, as in Titian, only the pommel of the sword, the symbol of political power, is depicted. In addition, the cut of the pants imitates the scrotum. By fixing the phallus in a highly erect position, the symbol of male potency lends its power to the symbols of political power.

In his painting, Pantoja also celebrates a symbolic overkill: the lion at the lower edge of the picture invokes the Habsburg heraldic animal. The military leader John of Austria—who, as I just mentioned, could not become the sovereign—does not, however, lean on a scepter, like Titian's Philip, but rather on an ordinary wooden stick. Here the symbols of sovereignty and the power of the body politic affect the representation of the male body. Again, it is the codpiece and pants that stylize the scrotum. In addition, the cut

[25] For an investigation on the aspect of clothing in the process of symbolization, see Kraß 2006. For an analysis of the "carnal" dimension of this structure in the ethics of modernity, see Santner 2011.

Fig. 8 Anonymous (sometimes attributed to Juan Pantoja de la Cruz): John of Austria [Don Juan de Austria] (1575). Museo del Prado, Madrid. Photo © Prado

of the breastplate points like an arrow—meaning deictically—to the phallus, which symbolically interacts with the other parts of the armor on the right edge of the picture. However, apart from the sword pommel, which symbolizes the body politic, there is another weapon in this painting: the dagger that pierces the right pant leg. In a metalepsis that bridges the ontological boundary between the body of the sovereign and the body of the man, the dagger connects the two systems of politics and masculinity. While Coello valorizes the phallus by presenting it in an erect position, Pantoja devalues the phallus by wounding the genitalia. The dagger penetrates the body in such a way that the wounding of the male body means at the same time the wounding of the body politic. Or put differently: the dagger castrates the sovereign. Whether valorization or devaluation: through the interaction of the two symbolic systems, it seems that the body politic cannot be thought without the male body. And I am not just concerned here with a banal gendering of power but rather with the fundamental question of whether sovereignty presupposes the exact blind spot that Günderrode illuminates in her ballad, thereby demonstrating the necessity of revising this key concept.

It is such a murderous dagger that costs Juan his life. His murder also represents a castration that is carried out symbolically, as in Pantoja's early modern painting. For while there is also a semantic connection to Philip II, the sovereign, in both Pantoja's painting and Günderrode's ballad, there is not a real connection. In the ballad, the dagger strikes the rival's chest both masterlessly and unerringly. In any case, Günderrode has shrunk her Juan to such an extent that both eros and thanatos refer back to the oedipal triangle. When Juan finally dies, it is not because he has waged a heroic struggle against his ego ideal and has thus identified with the father, who is both powerful and potent. Rather, the ballad deheroizes Juan and completely banishes the father from the scene. In its three parts, the ballad is dominated by an overpowering mother imago of a preoedipal world. Not only

is he not the dick that picks up all the chicks, to put it vulgarly, he actually lacks any dick at all. Due to the constitutive ambiguity, which comes with the generic forms of the anacreontic ode and tragedy, Günderrode's Juan can neither be a powerful nor a potent master. Thus, at the end of the ballad, she literally puts an end to tributes to the concept of the master like those by her contemporary Hegel and German classicists like Schiller. No matter which regressive hero is idealized as a "master" following Hegel or in literature, they all do not attest to political power or male potency, but rather to the powerlessness and impotence of a male consciousness that remains regressively attached to the mother until the very end.

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