

Poet, Mother, Child: On the Romantic Invention of Sexuality

The Middle Ages had something called the *Clan*. Since the eighteenth century, the code for kinship has been called the *Family*. Clans were connected by the law of exogamy, which linked them and inscribed scions along the axes of generations and races [*Geschlechter*]. Families, on the other hand, introject norms and imagoes into offspring, thereby subverting binary sexual difference [*Geschlechterdifferenz*] and generating souls sexualized by incestuous desire.¹

When Parzival is born, Wolfram von Eschenbach simply mentions that his mother and her ladies-in-waiting spread the legs of the infant. When they discern the *visselin* (which translates into today's English as "willie"), they lavish affection on the child. Coded in terms of sex, the boy receives a phallic attribute that symbolically couples desire and power: now he is destined for exogamous alliances and knightly adventures. The clan is governed by the metaphor *visselin = swert* ["sword"],² a figure running this way and that—which Freud took up to his own ends and confused with natural fact.

Instead of promoting the play of metaphor, Herzloyde, out of love and fear, clothes the adventuresome boy in a fool's garb, so that its worldly echoes may bring him back to her.³ She does so to no avail, however, for an *ars amandi* and law that are one and the same remove Parzival from the double bond with his mother. Condwiramurs (whose name says what it means—"to conduct love") initiates him into strictly exogamous eroticism—and as *amor de lonh* ("love from afar") at that. Taking the place of Parzival's father, old Gurnemanz prohibits the youth from appealing to childhood and motherly words at all, in order to inscribe him into the axis of succeeding generations. Finally, the boy's uncle on his mother's side—who (as in other cultures) wields greater symbolic power than a biological father precisely because he is not the child's actual sire—articulates, in the capacity of father confessor, debts of blood to relatives [*Verwandtenblutschuld*] and, as a genealogist, the alliances between two clans.

Parzival's innocence [*Tumbheit*] ends when the symbolic order, which Herzeloyde has kept silent, is voiced. And because Trevrizent tells Parzival of his expectant mother's dreams, which she never revealed to her son,⁴ there is no unspoken remainder that might haunt the hero and open the way for psychology or psychoanalysis. The incestuous double bond vanishes without consequence.

The code governing the conjugal, nuclear family—which emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the intellectual bourgeoisie and became universal in the nineteenth—stands opposed to the code of the clan on every point. Now political, juridical, and economic power are no longer linked to kinship structures. The household becomes the family unit, which assumes all tasks of socializing a small number of children—who, moreover, are planned. Burdened with the responsibility of being more symbolic than ever, the biological father surrenders his preeminent position to the mother. She, in turn, as the new center of the family, takes the place of the nurses of old. (Paradoxically, then, an origin substitutes for a replacement.) Intimacy and education tie the few children in the family to parent imagoes and eclipse the law of exogamy (which Freud interpreted as incestuous itself, if by transference). In order to be able—indeed, in order to wish—to become mothers or fathers, Lessing's virgins dream of a Father and Goethe's youths dream of a Mother. The phantasm of the Family obscures exchange that occurs between many families (which culturalizes them).

In the process, infantile sexuality—which previously was just as public as it was unexamined—becomes worthy of mention in the first place. The nuclear family becomes a complex relay that produces the children's mobile and fragmentary sexualities through records [*Aufschreiben*] made from the standpoint of the conjugal norm. The separation between parents and the world of childhood enables loving mothers and fathers, pedagogues, and psychologists to store the children's declarations of love to the authors of their days. There results, especially for mothers, a microhistorical archive that drills family romances into children as their own "experiences." Children become individuals who interpret—instead of the accidents of birth and race—"developments" and origins "within" themselves according to the rules of "reflection" and hermeneutics.

This coupling—of sexuality that derives from cultural coding and of speech that, when it involves self-declaration and self-interpretation, goes by the name of "poetry"—is to be investigated by means of discourse analysis. Neither social psychology, which presupposes that the discourses in question have already

emerged, nor psychoanalysis, which presupposes the sexualization of children, can analyze how such a link (and nothing else) is bound to texts (and nothing else). In terms of discourse analysis, Romantic poetry is the effect of a semio-technics that made the conjugal family matrilineal around 1800. The recoding itself was enacted by Novalis's novel, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*; the effects were articulated in the works of Clemens Brentano, Friedrich Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck, Achim von Arnim, and E.T.A. Hoffmann.

1. Matrilineal Recoding

Klingsohr's tale [*Märchen*] has the function of symbolizing the primary socialization that Heinrich's mother was supposed to narrate at the end of the novel.⁵ In a reverse mirror image, it presents the constellation of figures in the work as a whole. Now the patrilineal pattern of initiation that occurs in the *Bildungsroman* is replaced by matrilineal sexualization. For this reason, the tale constitutes a discursive event. For the first time in literature, a family appears that *articulates* all the stirrings [*Regungen*] and regulations that occur between mother and child from "the cradle" (338) up to the consolidation of the Oedipus complex.

Thereby, the bourgeois family obeys a mandate. It must take over the task of cultural reproduction, for the era of dynastic alliances has come to an end. The bourgeois family unit occupies a position between an "afamilial" and barren underworld of archaic mothers, on the one hand, and a heavenly dynasty that has grown sterile, on the other. Dynasties do not produce; they combine: stars and figures—signs and signs. This play of alliances comes to a halt as soon as Arcturus, who "cannot be king alone" (308f.), loses his wife to the bourgeois family and his only daughter—for whom he cannot find a husband of equal birth (cf. 214f.)—to the slumber of death. The order of alliance literally falls apart in its hypergamy: to make known and put an end to Freya's unredeemed status, the ancient hero (a symbolic father) must break the phallic sword of the dynasty.

The end of the law that codifies bodies as signs and punishes transgressions of the code by the sword inaugurates the norm that sexualizes children and makes them into individuals. The bourgeois family does not combine and distribute signs. Instead, it produces: children and imagoes. What is at first a nuclear family—"the Father," "the Mother," and their son, "Eros"—is augmented by Sophia, who comes from heaven, the Scribe or Death (303), Ginnistan or

“Fantasy,” and little Fable, whom the Father sires with Ginnistan. Initially, Ginnistan is only a nursemaid for the Son, who makes up for the Mother’s lack of milk. Soon, however—and to put matters in Freudian terms—she becomes sensuality [*Sinnlichkeit*], to which the Mother opposes interiority [*Innerlichkeit*] and familial cohesion. Familial eroticism, that is, plays out between the weakness [*Mangel*] of infants (which makes them dependent on others), the inability [*Mangel*] of a mother to nurse, and paternal desire: it couples child care and eroticism. For this reason, the culturalization of children that it effects takes the form of love for the breast—and not of their own mother, but of a Mother (294).

Orality is followed by the *mise-en-scène* of the phallic-narcissistic stage. In keeping with a pedagogy tailored to children, Ginnistan makes the sword fragment that the Father has found—and the Scribe archived—into a toy.⁶ The splinter becomes a magnetic snake that phallically extends to the North; that is, it rouses “Eros” for the future beloved, Freya. Eros himself, in this phallic game, suddenly becomes a youth. The phallus, then—which is synonymous with the name “Eros”—means becoming the object of desire for a/the Mother. This inducts the precocious youth into premature oedipality: into a round dance [*Reigen*] of heterosexual pairings that cycles through all combinations between Father and Son, Mother and Nurse. First, Ginnistan abducts Eros into the bedroom; however, she obeys a wave from Sophia and replaces sensuality with tenderness. The “quiet embrace” (295) between the Mother and Eros, which echoes an imaginary dyad, steers the desire of the Father back to Ginnistan, so that the agent prohibiting incest simultaneously affords an example of its transgression. And because the desire of speaking beings is the desire of the Other (Lacan), the example arouses a forbidden desire in the Son. On the orders of Sophia, the Mother and Ginnistan have to exchange forms so that he “will not be led into temptation” (296). Unlike the gesture of the wave, however, the prohibition is violated although—and because—it is articulated. Since “all barriers are there only to be overcome,”⁷ they sexualize the Mother, who was “quietly embraced” previously. The act of uttering the prohibition creates, in the first place, what it declares unattainable: the imago (“gestalt”) Mother.

Accordingly, the “Fantasy” of Mother, writ large, stages a play that steers the infantile wish that is “Eros” from the image of the nurturing-washing Mother—by way of a “forbidden thrill [*Rausch*]” (305)—toward the future image of amorous union with Freya. In this process, Ginnistan plays the part of all female imagoes. “Fantasy,” then, is not merely the unconscious fantasy of

the author; it symbolizes the sexual rite of initiation itself under the conditions of the nuclear family.⁸ The path to reproduction must be staged before the eyes of the speaking being; it does not follow instinct, but fantasy. The infant—whose senses and motor skills are still disorganized after a painful and premature birth—achieves the social identity function [*Einheitsfunktion*] of “I” only when others inscribe it with phantasms and present a deceptive image of integral corporality beforehand. The scenario of Ginnistan offers a historical variant of the mirror stage Lacan describes: her gaze and desire steer Eros’s eyes onto the prefiguration [*Vor-bild*] of unity that he does not possess. He “thanks” her “with a thousand delights [*Entzücken*]” (300) for sexualization. Hereby, the Mother, Ginnistan, and Freya—as well as natal and “target” families—become confused.

The end of the tale consolidates the child’s sexuality, which has been produced maternally: it constitutes the very basis of a new Golden Age. Unlike traditional fairy tales, which simply end with hierogamies, Klingsohr’s narrative subordinates the couples—Eros and Freya, Arcturus and Sophia, and the Father and Ginnistan—to Motherly Love [*Mutterliebe*]. Because there is no room for Eros’s mother among the couples, Sophia—the Heavenly Mother—promotes her to a position where, present in absence, she stands at the origin of the entire system; that is, the Mother becomes the Mother of All, including figures who have “other mothers.” All the characters drink from her ashes in the baptismal ritual; after the fact, this inexhaustible beverage makes up for the Mother’s lack of milk and for the pains the children experienced in the process of birth. With delight [*lustvoll*], they feel their *generatio continua* from the Mother, who “underlies” all marriages in the form of imaginary incest. The children’s love for each other is love from and for the Mother.⁹

The Universal Mother [*Allmutter*]—continuously giving birth, heightening sensation, and producing phantasms of incest—takes the place of the Symbolic Father who formerly distributed his seed among the races [*Geschlechter*] and generations. Accordingly, the correlate of the Mother’s ascendancy is the elimination of the Scribe (i.e., Death), the sole figure the tale fails to assign a place in the final tableau. His textual archive is done away with so that the incestuous nature of the new norm will remain a “secret” to the precise extent that it stimulates (ongoing) orality. Hereby, the Mother becomes the signified for all sounds that are made: “her presence” (315) is felt in the amorous whisperings of the endogamous couples. Orality and the poetry of discourse become one and the same.

2. The Voice of the Mother and the Poetic Individual

Matrilineal recoding follows and celebrates the rules of communication in a culture that “invents motherly love for infants.”¹⁰ The coupling of orality and poetry stems from a psycho-pedagogy that, since Locke and Rousseau, has prescribed that mothers themselves should nurse and speak to the being without language (*infans*) in their charge. At the end of Klingsohr’s tale, the matrilineal and fatherless siblings/couples sing and whisper instead of performing a speech act that would promise loyalty, and the “milk-blue stream” (300) of the Mother herself replaces that of the Nurse. These narrative events take contemporary critiques of the unmotherly mothers of old literally:

[They] fulfill these duties, and with exactness, but they do not go beyond them; they neither sing nor speak to the child; they do not seek to awaken its senses; they do not have the intention of developing the sensations it has through . . . the incitements [*agaceries*] of maternal tenderness.¹¹

The center of the nuclear family—the Mother—becomes the relay point for a new kind of productivity, which rouses the senses in threefold manner: to individual perception, to sexuality, and to aesthetics. That Romanticism considers poetic discourse to be individual expression and the bearer of elementary sensuality derives from the communicative matrix formed by a nursing, loving, and speaking mother and an infant. Drinking at Ginnistan’s bosom, Fable gives thanks for the “unbreakable thread” that “seems to wind forth from her breast” (314) and makes a pure idiolect of poetry. Likewise, Brentano’s Godwi nurses at the breast of his beloved as the “source of all sustenance and voluptuousness [*Nahrung und Wollust*]”—“all the power of the word, all the magic of poetry.”¹²

Matrilineal recoding changes the status of literature. The poetic function posited by Roman Jakobson—previously a matter of the autonymy [*sic*] of cultural symbols—becomes phatic in nature. Accordingly, in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the “secret word” (or signifier) *Mother* replaces “numbers and figures” (344) and in so doing opens communication between “lovers.” As Heinrich Bosse observes:

While to classical thought the institution of signs rendered possible human communication, it is now the very fact that man communicates with man which will define the signs.¹³

Just as the speech prescribed for new mothers, because it produces linguistic competence in the first place, shares no positive content, poetry itself becomes

a play of sounds [*Lauten*]. That it “speaks in order to speak”¹⁴—as Novalis puts it elsewhere—brings back the intransitive quality of the initial situation of communication. Sounds melt with nature; noises murmur and whisper with the maternal voice, which induces harking [*hören*] and not hearing [*hören*] in the infant. The matrix of motherly lullabies—which take the place of less complicated methods of quieting children—gives rise, at the border between speaking and sleeping, to a new lyricism that has existed ever since “Wanderer’s Night Song,” by Goethe.

To be sure, humanizing [*hominisierend*] speech in order to make (infants) speak had always occurred. Only now, however, was it bespoken—that is, discussed. Herder derived “the I” from learning to feel [*Empfindenlernen*] at the mother’s breast, and “the knowing and feeling of the human soul” [*Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele*] from acquisition of language in the infant.¹⁵ Such psychologizing of discourse displaced the ontogenetic thresholds of what—and who—can be addressed [*Besprechbarkeit und Ansprechbarkeit*]. Rousseau, in turn, considered self-consciousness the effect of complete alphabetization,¹⁶ and Brentano’s traveling student even recalls how he read the first sounds from his mother’s lips.¹⁷ Bespeaking initial speech makes it worthy of mention in the first place. It opens space for the free play of little geniuses who arouse admiration, not by performing speech acts that are binding but through toying with sounds [*Lautspielen*] and infantile words.¹⁸ Of course, it is mothers who protect and promote the dreams and dream narratives of their poetic children against the incursions of prosaic or evil fathers.¹⁹

With this displacement of the threshold of socialization, a parameter of discourse that is corporeal (and not digital) won power over mute bodies. Voice transformed into the *mythos* of a theory of lyric that discerned “the secret-filled depth of human spirit and poetry”²⁰ in its murmurings; likewise, it whispered originary truth to a linguistic science that explored Indo-European languages as a family—and investigated “language” in general (instead of letters as sounds). The celebration of the voice amounts to the rejection [*Verpönung*] of writing: the voice’s presence and individuality deny the absence and the symbolism of the signifier. In Klingsohr’s tale, Fable—who sings—unseats and replaces the Scribe (295, 308). Similarly, Brentano’s *Chronika des fahrenden Schülers* begins with a mother who teaches her infant to sing and pray, and it ends with a siren whose book lures a youth far away, into erotic ruin.²¹

In poetry [*Poesie*], the poet [*Dichter*] becomes another. If, as Julia Kristeva has claimed, Western literature translated the conjunctive hierogamy of Ori-

ental texts into a disjunction between the One and the Other—the speaking poet and the mute woman²²—Romanticism marks the moment where the former becomes a childish individual, and the latter a mother. Henceforth, “the dear woman exists” as a “mother” who addresses her words when she talks; she does so, “as everyone knows,” in order to “make the speaking being . . . speak.”²³ Instead of being defined by the binary code of sex, the poet is defined by his matrilineal individuality. Klingsohr’s tale depicts the poet in Heinrich as “little Fable”; that is, it does not portray him as her half-brother. This is also how the possibility of female poets arose: Goethe left the “*aristeia* of mothers”—the blind spot in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*—for Bettina Brentano to write.

If poetry repeats the voice that has sexualized its speaker, then its utterance already contains the eroticism invoked by what is uttered. If it *reproduces* what words merely *represent*, no word can reach where it originates. Poetry is an origin as omnipresent and as hidden as the Mother in Klingsohr’s tale: a vocal shadow that the words cast yet never can express directly. Tracking the sexuality that inhabits it as a voice, poetic discourse generates the very thing it claims it cannot say. Such positive feedback between speaking and sexuality occurs in the chapter “Devotion and Jest” [*Treue und Scherz*] in Schlegel’s *Lucinde*, where the eponymous character—who is called “a child,” after all—is enjoined to “caress” a “motherly” beloved²⁴; another instance is the eroticizing confession of incestuous sexuality that Medardus makes as a scribe in *The Devil’s Elixirs*, by Hoffmann.²⁵

3. Hermeneutics of the Origin and the Norm

According to standing ideas, sexual matters came to penetrate literary discourse to the extent that bourgeois society prohibited their expression. Foucault demonstrated that the opposite is the case. Sexuality is an effect of discourses. To affirm that its origin is unspeakable is to call forth discourses about it—which, because they are sexualized themselves, can never end. Sexuality, then, functions within a machinery that makes bodies speak and incorporates them into a new organization of power and knowledge. In contrast to cultures that let live and make die, our culture—and only our culture—has transformed into “society” [*Gesellschaft*]: it “makes live” and avoids killing [*macht das Leben und läßt das Töten*]. Planning conditions of and for life encompasses fields that did not pass into record under the law of Sword and Alliance. Moreover, it produces and stores knowledge that Aristotle deemed impossible: understanding

what is individual [*das Wissen von Individuellem*]. Accordingly, “man” represents a recent invention in epistemological terms. “He” becomes a “subject” (in the double sense of the word) only through knowledge that declares “him” subject to the conditions of life governing “him” and, at the same time, the master who can recognize and change these conditions. Since 1800, literature and the human sciences have treated “phenomena of our being that actually turn out to be us, since they condition us—and we them—each in turn.”²⁶

The concept of sexuality represents one of many such instances of empirical-transcendental doubling. It relates bodies to a force of production that both precedes them and at the same time is derived from them. Without end, knowledge cycles between sexual origin, where the “human being” (in general) is produced, and the individual, whose origin seems to be unique. The dichotomy between law and transgression transforms into reciprocal reference between the norm and individual deviancy. This gives rise [*zu Wort bringen*] to new situations of communication and hermeneutics: on the one hand, rituals of confession and recollection, and on the other, analyses of the “Unconscious.” These discursive events presume that sexuality voices the truth about us—which we cannot express when we articulate the truth about it, which it cannot speak itself.

Klingsohr’s tale presents [*konstruiert*] this transformation of knowledge and power. It leads from juridico-political culture into the realm of familiarity, sexuality, and productivity. The tale’s incestuous norm involves transgressing the law of old, and it culminates in installing the human being on the throne. Eros ascends as “the new king” (314), yet his rule is paradoxical: he reigns only insofar as he is subject to a maternal origin which, for its part, only has “presence” to the extent that it comes to power in Eros. The individual *is* its history. The text reaches back to the cradle and forward to the Golden Age. Thereby, it transfers the ancient myth of the ages of the world [*Mythos der Weltalter*] into a logic of production: when the goal of the Romantic triad is achieved, human beings “dwell” (315) in temples; their sexual productivity is one with physical-chemical nature and organic life.

The tale performs the matrilineal recoding of characters/figures in simultaneous and transparent fashion. Thereby, it erects a dispositive that other works of Romanticism can cycle through in anamnestic and asymptotic ways. The maternal origin—which the tale names and at the same time places within the figures’ interior lives [*Innerlichkeiten*—]becomes both the historically “sunken” *movens* and the goal for endless hermeneutic explorations. Following this shift

from simultaneity into temporal profundity, the originary Family dwells within the Individual as its secret. Romantic works do not, like courtly romances, affirm genealogical identities through a succession of parents' and children's lives. Instead, they posit identity by means of an empirical-transcendental folding of the individual. As the process unfolds, however, it reveals just how much the sexualized family serves instances of power and knowledge.

Tieck's "Eckbert the Fair" offers a direct continuation of Klingsohr's tale. Both works transfer the conjugality of the fairy-tale form, which Klingsohr's predecessor and model, Goethe, had preserved, into endogamy. Whereas Novalis locates incest at the end of the narrative, as codification that occurs through Mother Sophia, Tieck makes it the unthinkable beginning of events, which is only (re)discovered later. Eckbert and Bertha have always already had the same father and been siblings—except that this fact is decoded only at the very end, by a witch, who is herself the vanishing point for all the childless couple's phantasms. The Witch is a Mother who can display both female and male traits, and therefore dominates the patrilinearity that the narrative preserves genealogically.

The same also holds on the level of events in the tale. A single witch replaces both foster parents to whom Bertha's father has given her, an illegitimate child. The dominant party is the foster father, who wants to raise Bertha only for work. Bertha, however—like the heroine of "The Elves"—flees into a fairy-tale world that the foster father's word(s) cannot reach. The world of childhood is one of the phantasms that derive from socialization in the nuclear family; here the distinction between adults and children²⁷ is reproduced in the wish to stay a child forever²⁸—a matter that remains a phantasm because the children fall prey to an unsymbolized Mother. Just as Novalis equates childhood "development" that occurs without parental intervention and "education" that the father "has left entirely in the hands of the mother" (326), the Witch dominates the "small family circle" consisting of Bertha, the dog, and the bird. Accordingly, Bertha—their "daughter"—cycles through pre-oedipal sexualities. The animals, as "well-known friends,"²⁹ become narcissistic mirror images because a Mother coordinates [*inszeniert*] identification with them. Here differences are so slight that love can abruptly turn into paranoia. The bird—which lays eggs containing pearls and sings a song whose "words are constantly repeated" like dream poetry and lullabies³⁰—displays both anal and oral traits.

Likewise, in Achim von Arnim's "Isabella of Egypt," the dyad between the parentless Bella and a witchlike foster mother produces narcissistic doublings

such as the Golem Bella, anal beings like Bearskin [*Bärnhäuter*], and phallic ones like the gold-finding Mandrake [*Alraun*] (whose marriage concludes in thumb-sucking).³¹ These worlds—the grotesque one and the fairy-tale one—both *are* and *have* productivity. Bella's lover, a ruler under the conditions of early capitalism, prefers polymorphously perverse and productive sexualities to the love of, and marriage to, Bella. Similarly, in Tieck, the fairy-tale bird makes possible what Bertha “only dreamed of in childhood”: to bestow (her father's) “wealth”³² on her foster parents—the measure by which they had evaluated her and found her lacking. Regression to the archaic Mother, then, is what enables the child to fulfill the mandate of productivity that the discourse of others has instilled [*einfleischte*].

Like her act of theft and her flight from the Witch's house, Bertha's narrative about events is subject to [*untersteht*] the discourse of others. Only for the sake of intimacy, whose norm is the Family, does Bertha tell parties other than Eckbert about her childhood. Beings possessed of interiority [*Innerlichkeiten*] who think that they “share themselves entirely [*sich ganz mitteilen*]” when they recall their origins embody the compulsion to repeat a situation of infantile communication: time and again, they speak about the family circle in order to integrate strangers *into* it as “friends.”³³ At the same time, however—and in line with the operations of the mirror stage—narcissistic identification transforms into paranoia. Eckbert murders the man who has heard Bertha's confession, and he flees the party who has heard his own confession of killing because he fears the “misuse” of a “confidence [*Vertraulichkeit*]” that he himself has produced.³⁴ Communication that only intensifies feelings and reproduces the intimacy of nuclear families is just that paradoxical. In Novalis's novel, it entails eliminating a writer (the Scribe) for whom endogamy would still mean endogamy, and in Tieck's tale, it entails the murder of witnesses who might make the phatic speech of the endogamous couple into a public “text” capable of transmission.

The matter without precedent, however, is that hermeneutics of the Family addresses the very instance of power whose initial speech it interprets. Bertha's auditor mentions, in passing, a detail from childhood that escaped her: the name of the dog that had been her playmate. This item of inexplicable knowledge makes the man a member of the Family—indeed, it makes him the incarnation of the Witch. In the idiolectal name “Strohman,” the maternal point of origin [*der mütterliche Ursprung*] catches up with the girl who has fled and confessed. “A letter always arrives at its destination.”³⁵ With a word that proves

meaningless as a signifier, the Mother—in Romanticism—signals her status both of being the origin and of commanding speech. The phantasm is pathogenic and lethal: Bertha suffers a hysterical fit and dies.

The same thing befalls her brother and husband. The course of flight from confession and murder—which is meant to erase the traces of confession and murder—leads straightaway to the Other, whom Eckbert can neither murder nor flee because she gives chase and deals death herself. The Witch reveals that all parties who have heard the fugitives' confessions were incarnations of her, and that Eckbert and Bertha are siblings. Her genealogical discourse makes words fail Eckbert [*ihr genealogisches Wort macht Eckbert das Wort verwirken*]: mad and in the throes of death, he hears the voices of Mother Nature and his own phantasms melting into one. He could not have so much as “suspected [*ahnden*]”³⁶ incest, because language has always already commanded him. Indeed, it named him in the first place: “Eckbert” and “Bertha” are half homonymous.³⁷ “One is only ever in love with a name [*On n'est jamais amoureux que d'un nom*].”³⁸ Spellbound to their family through Christian and pet names, those who interpret them meet with death—death that occurs through words alone. A victorious Mother speaks first and last.

Matrilineal recoding, then, has the function of extracting [*entreissen*], from its products, the words it has beaten into [*einfleischen*] them. It is a machine that generates admissions and confessions—and, in so doing, generates the particular form of individuality which Romanticism deemed productive. When father confessor Trezvirent tells Parzival of a dream that was never revealed to him, he inscribes the youth into the Symbolic. Naming a forgotten [*entfallen*] name, however, performs the function of individuation because a family's memory [*Familiengedächtnis*] “spills” what it formerly declared secret. To ascribe meaning to the words and events of childhood to the extent that they are (“objectively”) insignificant means making the family into the archive of criminological clues and sexological norms. It is not important whether the recollection of forgotten details from childhood affirms guilt or denies it.³⁹ It is itself a discursive event, and only the interiority that it has generated can call it a faculty [*Vermögen*] of its own. When interiority speaks, a culture speaks—one that accords the Family the production of all “meaning” to the same extent that other functions vanish.⁴⁰

The matrilineal family becomes a relay for transmitting knowledge and power. The compulsion to confess—which ties Bertha to infantile sexuality, and sexuality to a mother—is no fairy tale. “Mademoiselle de Scudery,” by

Hoffmann, continues Tieck's fairy tale in the framework of the institutions of Law and Psychology. The series of murders in Paris that undoes the holiest of bonds—that is, once more, that of the Family⁴¹—escapes the torture of the ancien régime. In contrast, what manages to get behind them is a speech act that answers for deeds forbidden by law. What escapes the established conception of truth are individual and unconscious motivations, which prohibit verdicts based on deeds alone, as well as productive aspects of criminals that promise future improvement and utility. Accordingly, the jurisprudence of Enlightened Absolutism decides to have the accused confess—without chains or witnesses—to a female writer who counts as a mother to him. When Mademoiselle de Scudery recognizes a child she once cradled, the psychology of crime is born.

The psychological account is itself familial. Once more, a mother has encoded what a mother in turn decodes. The goldsmith Cardillac—whose identity the accused man concealed, as if out of love for a father—has robbed his patrons and customers and stabbed them to death. He has done so in order to repeat a prenatal scene. Cardillac's mother, while pregnant with him, was seduced by the sight of jewels presented by a nobleman she had previously rejected—an embrace that lasted forever because death befell her lover. Now the son “embraces” and murders noblemen as they make their way to assignations with their mistresses. The newly minted pervert eliminates the libertine of the ancien régime because he unites criminality and productivity. Jewels, as the object of the mother's desire, entail fetishism of the same.

From childhood on, Cardillac has plied his trade/craft [*Handwerk*] as an art. The jewels the mother desired—as the phallus of a lover (and not of her husband)—led Cardillac to identify with her desire. Consequently, he embraces as a lethal mother. Matrilineal, then, are a craft that undoes borders between estates and a crime that does not occur simply for gain. The eccentric [*Sonderling*]⁴²—for whom the law makes no provisions—becomes the norm, and this entertains no relationship with repression whatsoever. The primal scene, perversions, and matrilineal art both *are* and *enable* juridical, psychological, and aesthetic forms of individuation. A culture that claims to be able to say how a “narrative” [*Erzählung*] told by a mother makes her child productive can optimize the choice of profession without invoking the order of estates. That said, it does well to have the mouths of “wise men” (as in *The Serapion Brethren*) offer instruction about the power of primal scenes—which it then confirms through the ears and writings [*im Ohr und Dichten*] of wise mother confessors.

4. Romantic Texts and Knowledge of the Soul

“The doctor is a second father confessor,” one of Hoffmann’s many personal physicians exclaims to a princess—who has reserved the sexual secret of her hysteria for priests. The alliance between the nobility and the church, whose statutes view bodies only in terms of blue blood and sinful flesh, yields to the alliance between family, psychology, and medicine, which investigates the “putty” [*Kitt*] sticking together “body and soul”⁴²—the individual and sexuality. *The Devil’s Elixirs* describes an endogamous family that brings forth eccentric souls [*Ausnahmeselen*] and artists, revealing their—and its—productivity orally to “ingenious” psychiatrists and monks who cannot read genealogical texts.⁴³ Only in the newly established madhouse,⁴⁴ and not in the royal dungeon, can knowledge be obtained about knowledge that has been bought at the price of incest.

When literature becomes family hermeneutics—that is, when it investigates the sexualization of children and the hysterization of women in confessions, autobiographies, crime stories, and novels of the soul [*Seelenromanen*]⁴⁵—it has the same address as psychology. That makes psychoanalytic readings of Romantic texts possible, and tautological.

Displacing the threshold of addressability onto the mother-child dyad makes authors and characters “psychoanalyzable” in the first place: Freud’s decodings of infantile sexuality begin exopoetically with Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and endopoetically with Hoffmann’s “Sandman.” A fortiori the connection between author and characters becomes possible only when discourses [*Reden*] are referred to individuals and not to systems of symbols. In this manner, the appearance results that biographies explain texts—even though familial relations [*der Familiarismus*] in the one simply double those in the other.

Psychoanalysis inhabits the same space of discourse that invented and implemented the power of primary socialization. It is only on this basis—as is the case for Cardillac⁴⁵—that text and interpretation coincide. Deciphering imagoes of the nuclear family in texts and the discourses that constitute them is merely a matter of rediscovering the sediments of codification that, around 1800, ascribed a meaning to the Family and especially to the Mother—a process that Freud considered “of paramount importance” for the “whole” of “later life.”⁴⁶ At the same time, however, sexualization is subject to biotechnologies and forms of knowledge that made the Family into the “mother” of all imagoes in the first place. In *The Devil’s Elixirs*, incestuous wishes—which

are forgiven and then archived in monasteries—are aroused by portraits of the ancestral mother [*Ahnmutter*] that these same cloisters display. Likewise, when Heinrich's natal family is depicted in Klingsohr's tale, parental imagoes split between sires and scribes, sensuality and tenderness, only to be correlated, allegorically, to psychic faculties (338). It follows, then, that the multiplication of parental imagoes represents the stratagem of a kind of psychology that forms bodies through images and makes them into addressable souls. When Freud excavated such a process of image production from Hoffmann's "Sandman," he abandoned literary study along the lines of hermeneutics and empathy [*Einfühlung*]¹—but not the space of rhetorical invention [*Rede-Erfindungen*].

If pre-oedipal sexualization constitutes a program and the Oedipus complex represents a staging of "fantasy," then they are subject to a discourse [*einem Reden*] and not to a desire. In order to function, Romantic texts presume that objects of transference be spoken and heard; after mothers and psychologists, psychoanalysts join in. That hides the productivity of sexualizing discourse from exegetes. Psychoanalytic approaches to literature read Romantic texts as expressions of forbidden wishes and as compensation for social constraints. However, the joy that psychoanalysis has in such discoveries conceals a double blindness. An "individual" is assigned wishes that are actually technologies of socialization [*Sozialisierungstechniken*]. Likewise, "society" is assigned prohibitions that are, in fact, obsolete. It is not the ancient law of the Symbolic Father—to which Freud reduced all forms of infantile sexuality—but rather the Norm that governs the texts. It contains positive figures that collaborate [*mitschreiben*] in the production of productivity [*Produktion von Produktion*] and extend invitations to enthrone the same fantasy that already wields power.

Finally, a trait of the psychoanalytic method of decoding is itself tautological. The search for conditions that constitute "the human being"—which at the same time this being makes—renews and prolongs the empirical-transcendental folding that has already occurred in Romantic texts. When Klingsohr's tale posits matrilineal sexualization for the public *Bildungsroman*—splitting and displacing family imagoes in the course of representing it—the work erects the hermeneutic dispositive that Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* transferred into the scientific sphere. Even under the changed parameters that make the articulation of Romantic texts possible and disintegrate their transcendentalism—because writing has replaced the voice, the signifier the signified—interpretation remains a matter of the interplay between the latent and the manifest, the spoken and the unspoken, and "fantasy" and "reality."

Yet discourses have no depth wherein their substance might lie [*in der ihre Sache läge*]. They are surfaces—the juxtaposition of familial coding, maternal memory, poetry, and psychology around 1800. Here, in intertextual space without shadow or shade, is where the philology that Nietzsche discovered could operate: the philology of rhetorical inventions.