

The Hermetic Self and the Creative Reader: Metanarrative Discourse in Tieck's *William Lovell*

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Since its conception in the Winter of 1793/94 and its first publication in 1795/96, *William Lovell*, Ludwig Tieck's epistolary novel about the physical and metaphysical excesses of a young nobleman, has been regarded by many critics to be Tieck's most immature work, hiding behind tortured prose his own chaotic perception of himself and social realities during the dying days of the eighteenth century. Friedrich Schlegel called it a "Selbstvernichtung der Poesie" (66), and for Hans Eichner the novel "is as unromantic in its technique as in its message and most readers will be bored by it" (67). Positive evaluations of the text have traditionally maintained that *William Lovell* is the young Tieck's veiled autobiography, a "Bekanntnisdichtung" (Beckers 16) providing "die Geschichte einer Krise ... nicht nur des Helden, sondern auch seines Autors" (Pikulik 114). In his *Lebensläufe der deutschen Romantik*, published in 1986, Hans A. Neunzig still maintains a biographical bias by calling Tieck's novel "[e]in Porträt William Lovells, in dem sich einmal mehr Tiecks Ängste wiederfinden" (64). Going beyond a purely autobiographical reading, William J. Lillyman has pointed out that Tieck was as innovative in his narrative fiction as he was in his dramatic writings by displaying a "preference for a 'scenic' form of narration" (27) and by allowing "his anti-hero to comment on a question of narrative form directly relevant to the technique employed in the novel itself" (25), i.e., the question of the doubtful possibility of writing an autobiography which can be read as a truthful representation of the author's/narrator's mental landscape. Lovell is, according to Lillyman, comparable to "the typical hero of the modern psychological novel" since he is "aware of the inadequacy of language as a means of communication between himself and others" (28). Walter Münz has offered a psychoanalytical reading and recognizes oedipal structures in Lovell's biography, whereas Eric Blackall sees "a powerful dialectic at work in the novel" (157) which "is full of the romantic dissatisfaction

with the prose of life, the lure of the uncanny, and the fascination of the unknown, but ... also presents the destructive nature of the dissatisfied imagination, the destruction of self in the attempt to transcend the limits of self" (158). For Ernst Ribbat, *William Lovell* is the young Tieck's description of the writer's search for authentic expression in the later stages of the enlightenment: "Die Problematik der Subjektivität wird als Verständigungsschwierigkeit und Sprachnot erkennbar, der Emanzipationsversuch eines sich radikal isolierenden Ichs wird als ein sozial vermittelter durchschaubar" (63). Ribbat acknowledges the "implizite und explizite Reflexion über Sprach- und Verstehensprobleme" in the novel, its "immanente Hermeneutik" (49), which manifests itself in the portrayal of communication failures and the unsuccessful "Suche nach einer authentischen Sprache" (63).

Rather than trying to answer questions of the type "Is *William Lovell* a romantic or unromantic novel?" or trying to decide whether a biographical, psychoanalytical, or socio-historical approach is more appropriate, I shall suggest a different reading of this text that will attempt to relate its seemingly disjointed epistemological, psychological, and hermeneutic levels of discourse to each other. Expanding on Ribbat's and Lillyman's suggested metafictional bent, I shall try to demonstrate that *William Lovell* can be read as a predominantly hermetic work of fiction which questions and reaffirms at the same time the validity of any of the above mentioned approaches. The question, then, to be answered in this essay is: "What do the metanarrative passages embedded in the text tell us about reading *William Lovell* and the act of reading in general?" It will be assumed that metanarrative passages can provide us with clues as to how the relationship between the text, the fictional readers – in the case of *William Lovell* the readers of letters – and the actual reader is to be perceived; or, as Gerald Prince states: "if metanarrative signs guide our reading, they also help us understand better the stance taken by a narrative with regard to its own communicability and legibility as well as to the activity of reading in general" (127). It is my contention that the novel contains a hermeneutic level of discourse reflecting not only on the problematic nature of writing but also of reading fictional texts. Furthermore, I shall try to show that there is a link between the treatment of sexuality, body awareness, and identity, and those passages in the novel which reflect on the writing and reading of literary texts. *William Lovell* will be seen as a noteworthy step in the development of a reader-oriented aesthetics and as an early manifestation of the self-conscious novel, providing us with further textual

evidence of the importance of Early German Romanticism for modern literary theory. By using Walter Münz's easily accessible Reclam edition, which is based on the *Erstausgabe* of 1795/96, I hope to show that Tieck's novel can be viewed as a significant contribution to the theory and practice of metanarrative discourse, thus establishing Tieck next to Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis as an author with a distinct metafictional consciousness.

From the outset one can identify in *William Lovell* a clear connection between three popular motifs of eighteenth-century literature: boredom, melancholy, and scepticism. Although no explicit causal relationship is stated, boredom with everyday existence and melancholy serve as the backdrop for the protagonist's scepticism, which eventually turns into radical doubt concerning the validity of any external or internal perception. William Lovell's "süße Schwermut" (26) and his desire to escape boredom (34) lead him into excessive emotional reactions and extreme scepticism. Already very early in the novel (Volume I, Book 2), his letters increasingly become introspective examinations of his thought processes and dreams, culminating in the loss of a secure sense of identity. At the beginning, the epistemological discourse in the novel is – as has been pointed out before (e.g., Pikulik 120) – mainly based on the Kantian imperceptibility of the "Ding an sich." William questions the validity of sensual perception in general by doubting the accuracy of visual perception: "aber unser Blick dringt ... nicht durch den Vorhang, – und wenn er es könnte, würden wir mit diesen körperlichen Augen etwas wahrnehmen? Ist der Mensch nicht zur Täuschung mit seinen Sinnen geschaffen ... ?" (50). As long as William regards his self as the focal point of any possible perception, be it true or false, he accepts the dissolution of the boundary between internal and external reality:

Freilich kann alles, was ich außer mir wahrzunehmen glaube, nur in mir selber existieren. Meine äußern Sinne modifizieren die Erscheinungen, und mein innerer Sinn ordnet sie und gibt ihnen Zusammenhang. Dieser innere Sinn gleicht einem künstlich geschliffenen Spiegel, der zerstreute und unkenntliche Formen in ein geordnetes Gemälde zusammenzieht. (167)

The recurring image of the mirror representing an internal sense of perception that structures chaotic external impressions paves the way towards total solipsism. External reality does not, like Fichte's "Nicht-Ich," exist as a mirror in order to facilitate the development of a self

through the process of reflection. Tieck's *William Lovell* is Fichte reversed: it is the "Ich" that structures external chaos without in return being defined as a self through the process of limitation. Free will turns into arbitrary action, life becomes a dream, systems of beliefs are now interchangeable, and all philosophies are equally valid. Initial scepticism has turned into radical doubt concerning the existence of any reality that transcends the self:

Der Mensch muß denken und eben darum glauben, schlafen und also träumen; es ist möglich, daß alle Gestalten nur in mir wandeln, alles ziehende Schattenbilder in der Höhlung meines Auges, Schwingungen meiner Gehirnfiebern, die ich nach dem allgemeinen Übereinkommen die äußern Gegenstände benenne. (357)

It is not surprising that the dominance of internal perception as the faculty which creates structure and meaning allows imagination to claim superiority over reason. Imagination, "jenes schöne Morgenrot der Phantasie" (25), is, however, in *William Lovell* not yet the magic wand of the later Tieck, confronting everyday reality with the realm of the supernatural. Here it has its inherent dangers since it not only disconnects the self from external reality but also deprives it of the categories of space and time. The boundary between internal and external world disappears, and time loses its continuity, dispossessing the individual of his history. This is precisely what happens to William.

The loss of one's private history links the epistemological to the psychological discourse. During the course of the novel, the increasingly radical nature of William's scepticism is paralleled by the erosion of his identity, his growing inability to define himself as a unique self. From very early on in the novel, the loss of memory is closely associated with a threat to one's existence, or, as William Lovell writes to Amalie Wilmont: "in dem Augenblicke da Sie mich vergessen, bin ich allen Gefahren preisgegeben ..." (42). The image of the mirror is used frequently within the psychological discourse of the text as well. William's father writes: "die ganze Welt umher war nur ein Spiegel, in dem ich meine eigene Gestalt wiederfand" (130), and Rosa, William's Italian friend, advises him: "Man sollte sich überhaupt von Jugend auf daran gewöhnen, die äußern Gegenstände um sich nur als Spiegel zu betrachten, in denen man sich selber wahrnimmt ..." (265). If, however, external reality is always just a mirror in which the self sees its own reflection, an erosion of the self's identity will inevitably be the result since the definition of the self depends on the ability to define

what is distinguished from the self. Before leading to a temporary loss of identity in William or an escape into insanity, as is the case with Balder, a figure whose fate resembles that of Lenz and Hölderlin, the blurring of the distinction between external and internal reality evokes in the individual the notion that the self can assume any possible social mask; in fact, the self is nothing but the total sum of adapted socio-theatrical parts. This deterioration of social identity through the assumption of an infinite number of public identities culminates in William comparing himself to a chameleon that changes colour according to the amount of light available (425) and in his assertion: "ich bin wandelbarer wie Proteus oder ein Chamäleon" (484).

The deterioration of social identity finds its parallel in the gradual disappearance of internal identity brought about by lost memory. Reminiscent of Hume's concept of identity based on an individual's unique collection of impressions, there is a strong emphasis in the text on memory as the stabilizing factor within the process of identity formation. When he feels most alienated from himself and external reality, he writes: "Zukunft und Vergangenheit sind erloschen und die Spuren von beiden gleich unsichtbar" (594). The loss of a secure sense of identity leads to extreme forms of alienation in William, e.g., to a metaphorical perception of external reality – the world becomes a puppet play and factory of machine-like human beings (81, 240, 299, 486) – and into a melting-pot of mental states. Dreams, visions of childhood utopias, journeys of the imagination, and self-reflection all blend together, creating in William a divided self, or, as he puts it after a dream-like rescue of his first love Amalie: "eine wüste Dunkelheit erfüllte mein Inneres, ich war von mir selbst abgetrennt, und betrachtete und bemitleidete mich als ein fremdartiges Wesen" (464).

The development of a hermetic self in the psychological discourse of the novel can best be seen in its treatment of body awareness and sexuality. Since sexually excessive behaviour is for a long time William's *raison d'être* – he calls sensuality "höhere Gottheit" (92) and the motivating force behind all human activities (200) – one would expect to find a variety of sexual images at least in those passages of the text which describe the physical encounters of the protagonist. Yet, a closer examination of William's erotic escapades, narrated like the whole text from an internal perspective, reveals a strangely distanced treatment of sexuality. Compare the following almost stereotypical depictions of physical contact: "... ich sank an ihren Busen ..." (36); "Unsere Lippen begegneten sich, ihr Mund brannte auf dem meinigen ..." (37); "... unsre Lippen begegneten sich" (78). Where erotic experiences are

described in more detail, the point of view is that of the voyeur who finds sexual fulfillment in the visual anticipation of pleasure. The two key passages in the description of William's seduction of Rosaline – in the first he secretly watches Rosaline through a window as she undresses and in the second he completes the process of seduction by disrobing her in her bedroom (247ff. and 287ff.) – are visual discoveries of the female body in the twilight zone of secret desires projected onto external reality as a movie is projected onto a screen. "Wenn ich sie sehe, mit all ihren Reizen, und die Phantasie mir die heiligen von keinem Blicke entweihten vor die Augen zaubert! Wenn ich mich in ihre nackten Arme, an ihren entblößten Busen denke ..." (283) – William's voyeuristic anticipation of pleasure, always mediated by mental processes, reduces even human sexuality to a mere visualization of pleasure within the internal reality of the individual.

There are also numerous references in the novel to body awareness. Balder's loss of identity results in a dissociation of mind and body. Trapped in a neverending flow of nightmares, he observes: "ich fahre erbleichend zusammen, wenn ich meine Hand aufhebe: wer ist der Fremdling, frag' ich erschrocken, der mir den Arm zum Gruße entgegenstreckt? – Ich greife ängstlich darnach und ergreife schauernd meine eigne, leichenkalte Hand, wie ein fremdartiges Stück, das mir nicht zugehört" (174). The same concept of a self divorced from its body reoccurs in a later letter written by William to Rosa:

Wer ist das Wesen, das aus mir heraus spricht? Wer das Unbegreifliche, das die Glieder meines Körpers regiert? Oft kommt mir mein Arm, wie der eines Fremden entgegen ... Warum sind wir uns selbst oft so fermd, und das Nächste uns so fern? Wir sehn oft in uns hinein, wie durch ein künstlich verkleinerndes Glas, das die Hand, die ich mir vorhalte, tausendmal kleiner macht, und wie auf hundert Fuß von mir entrückt. (324)

With the separation of body and mind within the internal reality of the self, all access roads to external reality have been closed.

In *William Lovell*, both the epistemological and psychological discourse move towards the total collapse of any frame of reference that would allow the individual to perceive external reality and develop a secure sense of identity. There is, in my view, a third discourse present which can be defined as the metanarrative reflection of the validity of autobiographical writing and of the reader-text relationship. In addition to juxtaposing the self-confident life of the country

gentry and the self-parodistic exchange of letters between the leader and disciples of the secret society to William's and Balder's epistemological and psychological anxieties, thus questioning the validity of the concept of a hermetic self, the novel contains a more explicit attack on the reader who believes in the truthfulness of his understanding of the text. Placing the reader in the middle of intimate letter exchanges, the form of Tieck's epistolary novel seems to suggest that the different inner landscapes communicated to the fictional and actual readers are adequate descriptions of mental states. There are, however, several gaps in the smooth voyeuristic surface of the text that challenge the naive perception of both the fictional and actual readers. Already very early in the novel, the fictional quality of autobiographical writing is made explicit by equating the written account of personal states of mind to the production of fictional texts: "ich will Zeug durcheinanderschwatzen, daß Du glauben sollst, ein Fragment aus einem unsrer neusten Romane zu lesen" (69). This initial hint at the problematic nature of autobiographical texts in regard to their validity as trustworthy descriptions of the landscapes of other minds is carried a step further by Balder, who, in a letter to William, maintains that any text is produced only in the reader's mind, be it a letter or a purely fictional work: "Du liesest den ganzen Brief nämlich nur aus Dir heraus und ich schreibe Dir im Grunde keinen Buchstaben. ... Bin ich doch auch wohl ehemals ein Tor gewesen, ganze Bücher mit Vergnügen durchzulesen, und mir einzubilden, daß ich den Geist des Verfassers dicht vor meinen Augen habe" (207). Neither the text in itself nor the intention of the author produces meaning; only the reader's mind can be the creator of a structured fictional world that is valid precisely because it is a meaningful system constructed internally without any reference to external reality.

William remarks in a letter to Rosa that because of the entrapment of the soul in an alienated body true communication or "Verstehen" is not possible between human beings. Using the Phalaris metaphor of the tortured man whose cries of suffering – he is imprisoned in a burning hot brazen bull – appear to the spectators as roars of the beast, William demonstrates the distortion taking place when internal reality is to be communicated to other minds. He then continues: "Doch ich vergesse ganz, was ich erzählen wollte. Man vergißt über Worte sich und alles übrige, wir sprechen selten von uns selbst, sondern meist nur darüber, wie wir von uns sprechen könnten, jeder Brief ist eine Abhandlung voll erlogener Sätze mit einem falschen Titel überschrieben ... " (359). Here, the epistemological, psychological, and

hermeneutic levels of discourse converge. The divided self, alienated from its physical link to external reality, can only send out its distorted messages which are then read by other minds within their own internal frame of reference. Therefore, it does not matter any more whether these messages are true or not. The same applies to a reader reading a text. Towards the end of the novel, William briefly considers writing his autobiography but then discards the idea: "Doch, keiner wird so närrisch sein, sich um mich und meine Geschichte zu bekümmern; im Herzen eines jeden Bekannten steht sie anders geschrieben, und alle, nur ich selbst nicht, lesen sie vielleicht falsch" (542).

The attempt to identify and systematically connect the three major levels of discourse contained in the text in order to create a more structured representation of the novel cannot ignore their contradictions and inconsistencies, since they are as essential to the whole of the text as its coherent parts. By contradictions I do not mean inconsistencies of the plot – which have been sufficiently dealt with by others – but incompatible statements within the discourses caused by an all too liberal melting together of philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic concepts. There also seems to be a basic contradiction between the hermetic quality of the text, i.e., the denial in its three discourses that knowledge, securing a sense of identity, and valid readings of texts are possible, and its ending: William gets killed in a duel. What better proof could there be in order to render radical scepticism obsolete? And yet, the ending is not really incompatible with the basic premise that it is the reader's task to create a meaningful text. Whether one explains the ending in terms of Tieck's use of motifs from eighteenth-century "Trivilliteratur," as an ironic twist of the plot, or as an illustration that radical scepticism can only lead to insanity or death does not make too much difference: competing explanations are equally valid or invalid.

In one of his letters to Eduard Burton, his oldest friend, William Lovell advocates a tolerant attitude towards conflicting views of external reality and gives equal weight to each individual's internal reality: "Das ist eben das Hohe in der menschlichen Seele, daß sich ihr einfacher Strahl in so unendlich mannigfaltige Farben brechen kann; ich gebe dir zu, daß keine von allen die wahre sei, aber ebensowenig kannst Du behaupten, jene ist ganz verwerflich, weil jedes Auge jede Farbe anders sieht, und Du das vielleicht blau nennst, was mir als rot erscheint" (256). Through this gap in the hermetic self the reader gazes at a positive reinforcement of individual identity, and thus the "boredom" of reading *William Lovell* may be relieved by the fact that this novel also provides a glimpse of a still utopian paradise of readers reading texts differently in harmonious mutual tolerance. The herme-

neutic discourse of the novel denies the reader "true" understanding, yet, at the same time, points toward the constructive nature of creative reading. In this sense, the multiperspectivism of Tieck's epistolary novel provides the ideal narrative structure for its hermeneutic message.

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“Die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden”: The Linguistic Question in Kleist’s *Amphitryon*

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Although studies of Kleist’s *Amphitryon* have ordinarily concentrated on its divergences from Molière’s treatment of the *Amphitryon* myth (Streller 80–89; Wittkowski 27–82; Ryan 83–121; Szondi 155–69; Jauss 114–43) or have focused on the problematic relationship between the divine and the human in the play (Arntzen 200–45; Wittkowski 27–82; Graham 81–93), relatively little attention has been devoted to the dialogic structures of the play or to its representation of a linguistic crisis. Moreover, no note has been taken of the parallel thematic and dialogic structures of *Amphitryon* and “Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden.” While scholars have focused often on evidence of language skepticism or linguistic duplicity in Kleist’s works (Kommerell 244; Emrich 11; Holz 23, 93; Seeba 104–50), *Amphitryon* has been largely neglected. This may be due in part to Kleist’s rather extensive reliance on Molière’s *Amphitryon*. Nonetheless a closer examination of the unique dialogic patterns in Kleist’s *Amphitryon* and “Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden” reveals both an underlying warning against the limitations of language and an affirmation of its potentially epiphanic function. In order to demonstrate the linguistic correspondences between the two works, I have chosen to begin with an outline of the view of language which Kleist offers in “Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden” (Compare: Holz 26–33; Turk 35–47; Ide 16–22; Späti 33–39; Gillespie 275–82; Smith 203–13).

In the essay, Kleist discusses, in a rather associative, enigmatic manner, two distinct modes of speech. He juxtaposes a spontaneous, dramatic form of speech to a more conventional, “brooding” type. As we shall see, Kleist’s view of language encompasses both the nature of