

Interrogating Modernity: Hermann Broch's Post-Romanticism

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Abstract The present article makes an original and wide-ranging contribution to scholarship by examining, for the first time comprehensively and in the context of what the author defines as the “post-romantic syndrome,” Hermann Broch’s position vis-à-vis Romanticism. The focus is on Broch’s trilogy *The Sleepwalkers*, but the article also considers the relevant essays on Hofmannsthal, on kitsch, and on myth and late style.

Key words Hermann Broch; post-romanticism; modernity

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Broch and Romanticism has by now become almost a subfield of research.¹ Yet we still lack a comprehensive account of how Broch positioned himself, through immersion but also distantiation, vis-à-vis Romanticism, searching for a specific location within what one must see as a *post-romantic* intellectual and artistic landscape. If anything, Broch’s work, above all his magisterial novel *The Sleepwalkers*, presents a full-fledged interwar embodiment of post-romanticism as what we can call a complex discursive formation, “complex” in the sense that it self-consciously orientates itself towards, and involves, another, past (yet far from

¹ See, most recently, the articles collected in *Hermann Broch und die Romantik*, ed. Doren Wohlleben and Paul Michael Lützeler, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014.

dead) discursive formation (the “historic” Romanticism of the late 18th and early to mid-19th century). But how should one define post-romanticism, and why should one seek to interpret Broch’s novel as an iteration of this particular discursive formation? To begin to answer these questions, in the first part of this article I make the case for the significance of post-romanticism and its differentiation from both Romanticism and aesthetic and ideological formations such as neo-romanticism;¹ doing so amounts to recovering and articulating a previously under-reflected cultural phenomenon that could best be captured as a syndrome of both returning to, but also fleeing from, Romanticism, of acknowledging its ineluctable and continuous presence, but also, in the same breath, critiquing it through numerous creative gestures of realignment and (dis)continuation. In the second part I proceed to detail and substantiate this phenomenon through closer examination of Broch’s major novel, and also with reference to some of his essays. I endeavor to establish the semantic compass of the appellation “romantic” in the essays and in the trilogy, to analyze the way in which the trilogy parodies and undermines two central Romantic motifs, and, finally, to position *The Sleepwalkers* in the wider framework of a post-romantic interrogation of modernity that highlights the problematic confluence of rationality and irrationality since the Reformation.

1. The Post-Romantic Syndrome

Romanticism occupied a unique place in the cultural formation of modernity. Not only did Romanticism enjoy — like so many artistic currents from the 18th century onwards — a resurrection in periods of imitation and emulation in literature, music, and the arts; unlike all later currents, Romanticism became an attitude, a wider cultural reality, one might even say, a life-style. It branched out with equal force into philosophy, the sciences, and social theory; it established its own code of social intercourse and intimacy, its own privileged heroes and villains, in short — a whole philosophy and ideology of culture. Aesthetic and cultural modernity, most of us would agree today, began with the Romantics, even though its roots lay in an earlier defense of the autonomy of reason.

Romanticism’s relations with modernity are much more complex than the picture painted by those asserting it as a promoter of the process of modernization (the tenor of Broch’s major essays on human rights and international relations fits this pattern of offering conservative solutions to major political challenges). In

1 For consistency, I only capitalize Romanticism (“proper”/“historic”), leaving derivatives that signal a specific (later) relationship with Romanticism (e.g. post-romanticism, neo-romanticism, etc.) uncapitalized.

Germany and Britain, this ambiguous dynamic is particularly evident: the very same generation of poets and thinkers that began by embracing the French Revolution ended up bitterly opposing its ideals; in Germany, some of the major Romantics went as far as undertaking religious conversions (to Catholicism) to seal their change of heart and mind. It would thus be much fairer to describe the stance of Romanticism towards modernity as profoundly contradictory. Romanticism did not always play into the process of modernization; much of its energy was spent doubting, criticizing, or simply rejecting it. The French Revolution, with its radical agenda, served not as the cause but as the point of crystallization; latent social and intellectual forces gathered and focused on an event of enormous momentum, thus revealing the entire spectrum of reactions to modernity, from passionate embrace to uncompromised resistance.

This is certainly nothing new for students of Romanticism. What needs to be emphasized instead is the fact that Romanticism, with its dual attitude towards the Revolution, presented a laboratory case of reaction towards modernity. In a way, Romanticism was the first such reaction that would display the whole gamut of enthusiasms and critique. Behind the particular responses to the Enlightenment belief in the universality of reason embodied in the acts of the Revolution, there lurks a paradigm-setting instance of responding to modernity. It is this paradigmatic nature of the Romantic attitude to modernity and the Revolution that has not been sufficiently recognized before. Pulling out the implications of this paradigm-setting process is an indispensable step in appreciating the longevity of post-romanticism in the multitude of forms and guises it took long after the Romantic movement itself had ceased to exist. Romanticism, one may suggest, was an examination of modernity, a check on its performance, an inspection of its resources. Such an examination was bound to take place with renewed vigour in different circumstances every time a society and a culture would find themselves at a critical juncture in their modern history. Being an evolving and “incomplete” process, as Habermas has called it,¹ modernity is subject to these regular performance tests throughout its history. Because Romanticism was historically the first such critical assessment, the features and the parameters of the test, as well as the mode of formulating its questions (and often also the answers), would be drawn upon and would resurface in an ever-changing fashion every time modernity would be subjected to such an examination. This continuous after-life of the Romantic intellectual legacy, at a time when Romantic responses to the new social and cultural agendas would no longer

1 Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity — an incomplete project,” *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto, 1985) 3-15.

do, constitutes the essence of the post-romantic syndrome. To put it in today's terms, checking on the performance of modernity has proven to be intimately dependent on mobilizing and carrying forward the arguments and the style of argumentation — at times in the guise of severe critique — worked out in the various strains of Romanticism.

Let me dwell at this point a little bit on the word “syndrome” that is so central to the title of this article. There are at least two likely objections to this term: a) that it naturalizes rather than historicizes the phenomenon I am discussing; and b) related to this: that it is turning the phenomenon into some kind of clinical predisposition to illness, evil, or other undesirable conditions. “Syn-drome” comes from the Greek *syn* “with” and *dromos* “a race”; running; race-course; or even “a public walk.” The verb, *syndromein*, means “running together,” “meeting,” or “running along with,” or “following close.” The noun, then, has accrued the meaning of somebody or something that runs along but maybe still just behind something or somebody else. In other words, a response that is not late in coming, but also a set of features that occur simultaneously and characterize a particular phenomenon, usually seen as some kind of “abnormality.” This brief etymological excursus is needed in order to demonstrate that at its very origin the term “syndrome” has a diachronic dimension built into it: “following close,” “unfailingly appearing just behind” something. I thus insist that writing about a “syndrome” does not naturalize the phenomenon, as it actually allows us to follow the curves of the race, with our eyes fixed on the run and the response of the chaser. This is exactly what we do when we interpret Romanticism and post-romanticism as discourses that represent responses to modernity in its historical evolution — but also as discursive formations characteristic of modernity and tracing its dynamics as an integral part of it. To some extent, Marx captures this — although in negative terms and from premises I do not entirely share — when he writes in the *Grundrisse* that “The bourgeois viewpoint has never advanced beyond this antithesis between itself and this romantic viewpoint, and therefore the latter will accompany it [i.e. the bourgeois viewpoint] as legitimate antithesis up to its blessed end.”¹

What is more, I deliberately choose to speak of “*post*-romanticism,” thus placing the emphasis on the notion of distance, transformation and non-identity vis-à-vis Romanticism, rather than of, say, “neo-romanticism,” which both narrows down the scope to literature and the arts, excluding sociology and political and

1 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973) 162.

economic thought,¹ and also — equally unacceptable — stresses repetition and identity through imitation and emulation.

Still, what about the likely reservation that “syndrome” is redolent of disease, of an unhealthy condition that is dormant available and awaiting actualization? This impression is further corroborated by the resilient link produced in scholarship between Romanticism and Nazism, in the case of Germany. Indeed, there has been a long tradition in seeking and locating the longevity of Romanticism and its supposedly baleful impact precisely and solely in Germany. One has to re-examine this connection and rethink this bond that seems so deeply entrenched. There are two crucial implications to asserting, as I do, that Romanticism and post-romanticism are evolving responses to modernity: one is that Germany cannot be singled out as the sole target of analysis, and as the only host tissue in which post-romanticism recurred; rather, the intimate link between modernity and post-romanticism can be observed across the cultural, ideological, and geographic divide, and throughout the 20th century: the examples of this article are drawn almost exclusively from Austria and, later, from the work of a transnational exilic community in the US, but we encounter different manifestations of post-romanticism also in the intellectual and artistic life of France, the Soviet Union, and other countries (as I briefly demonstrate below). In a sense, the geographical distribution needn’t even matter: what is really at stake is the pervasive nature of the post-romantic syndrome that permeates modernity at each critical juncture of its evolution. The second implication, going back to the *Urszene* of Romanticism responding to the French Revolution in ways that set the parameters for future responses — both for and against — is that post-romanticism should not be seen as linked exclusively to Conservatism and the Right, as has been the case for so long. In equal measure, albeit in a more complicated fashion, it was also linked to Left (usually Leninist or social-democratic and reformist) thinking and action, a connection that has so far remained largely unexplored. Thus the wider target of our concern with post-romanticism as a complex discursive formation must become the double misconception that post-Romanticism is a specific German malaise, and that it was nurtured by an exclusive alliance with Conservatism and the Right. In the present article, I seek to address the first of these misconceptions, focusing on Left post-romanticism elsewhere in my work.

But if this is the case, the word “syndrome” warrants rethinking, in the sense

1 For a still rare interpretation of post-romanticism (and not just of Romanticism) that extends beyond the domain of literature and the arts, see Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter, Durham, NC and London: Duke UP, 2001.

that it no longer originates in post-romanticism as such but in modernity, whose structural problems post-romantic ideologies come to reflect and engage. I am here evoking the work of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman who, in what is one of his most seminal books, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, made the case for the structural deficiency of modernity, or to use his stronger word, its “pathologies.”¹ It is this deficiency that generates the discourses of post-romanticism which function as a syndrome to the extent to which they accompany, or “follow closely,” modernity at different junctures of its history, by critiquing its various deep-seated problems — sometimes latent, sometimes manifest — from vantage points across the ideological spectrum.

The pattern of drawing on Romanticism in formulating and dealing with twentieth-century concerns could be observed, as I have already suggested, across European cultures and intellectual traditions. In France, Baudelaire and the surrealists re-discovered Romanticism and revived its critical potential.² In Italy and Scandinavia, a range of fin-de-siècle writers availed themselves of the Romantic legacy to articulate new anxieties and to diagnose new social problems.³ In Russia, where in the nineteenth century a string of writers partaking — to a different degree — of the Romantic movement built the national poetic canon (thus fusing indiscernibly Romanticism and the classic), the post-1917 age called into being a state-sponsored stream of “revolutionary romantic” (*revoliutsionnaia romantika*) which was more than a mere artistic current and stood for an entire world view and a broader life-attitude.

In all these countries, the resurrection of the Romantic legacy at various points of their cultural history in the twentieth century was the inevitable result of these societies' complicated dealings with modernity. If there is some distinctiveness in the case of Germany — a distinctiveness that does corroborate the larger pattern of actively reengaging the Romantic intellectual legacy in order to formulate twentieth-century cultural and political agendas — then it must reside in the fact that Romanticism, as the first consistently articulated and large-scale reaction to the philosophical project of modernity, was fused in Germany with the rise of a cultural-political nationalism (Fichte, after all, wrote his *Addresses to the German Nation*

1 See Zygmunt Bauman. *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.

2 On this, see Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Die Kritik der Romantik. Der Verdacht der Philosophie gegen die literarische Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989) 39–61, 72–83.

3 This process is explored in Mario Praz's classic study *The Romantic Agony* (1930–33), which was the first broad survey of the after-life of Romanticism in European literature (as such, it also contains some inevitable exaggerations and oversimplifications).

while looking through his window on the French troops marching outside). The larger pattern, however, compels us to recognize the fact that every time the project of modernity was being revised, critiqued, or assessed — and not just in Germany — the spectre and the resources of Romanticism in philosophy, economic thought, sociology, literary theory, historiography, and theology would be revived in turn.

All this accounts for the unique longevity of Romanticism, and for the extraordinarily value-laden notion of Romanticism as a cultural code that stands for a recognizable range of responses to the perpetual crises of modernity. This is why Romanticism became such a contested axiological territory in the twentieth century. In the next and final part of this paper, I attempt to exemplify this working hypothesis by briefly looking at Broch's *The Sleepwalkers* and some of his essays.

2. *The Sleepwalkers*: Post-Romantic Iterations

Hermann Broch's *The Sleepwalkers* is a novel inscribed in the wider framework of post-romantic interrogations of modernity. To situate the novel within the post-romantic syndrome, one needs to go beyond Broch's novelistic work and recognize the fact that the appellation 'romantic' served at his hands as a diagnostic tool with which he was gauging the progress but also the inherent problems of modernity. In this, he was not alone; notable contemporaries, including Carl Schmitt, Georg Lukács, Irving Babbitt, and Eric Voegelin (the latter a fellow exile in the US who had known Broch from their time in Vienna and corresponded with him), were all engaged in thinking about modernity and the turns of Western history through the prism not just of Romanticism as a historically identifiable epoch (albeit one demarcated by chronologically porous boundaries), but also through the lens of Romanticism as a broader category that stands for particular attitudes whose resilience outgrows narrower temporal frames. This multiplying of the meaning of "Romanticism" — both as an appellation of a specific epoch and as a way to refer to larger attitudes that transcend this particular period — is a defining feature of their attempts to define the "romantic." Coming from very different political perspectives, they would see in the "romantic," more often than not, an epitome of the many undesirable aspects of modernity. The "romantic" to them was a synonym of unhealthy overexcitement concealing inactivity, exhaustion, and barrenness, or of hubris and concomitant confusion, engendering a dangerous drift away from reality. Indicatively, Broch, in his long Hofmannsthal essay and in the essays on kitsch and myth, was also at pains to differentiate between Romanticism as a more or less clearly delineated period in cultural history (to which he tends to relate more sanguinely, without accusatory pathos), and Romanticism as shorthand for a bundle

of attitudes that continue to manifest themselves and shape the cultural landscape long after Romanticism proper had come to an end. This latter notion, the “romantic” understood as a lingering cultural force, he was at times prepared to celebrate as wholesome conservatism, while being at others highly critical of it, seeing in it no more than a condensation of imitation, repetition, and voluntary surrender to clichéd tradition. His 1933 essay “Evil in the Value-System of Art” clearly demonstrates this bifurcation. It acknowledges the capacity of Romanticism (interpreted as a demonstrable period in cultural history) to implement art’s continual mindfulness of “what has been,” in other words to remain in touch with the past in a productive manner (Broch’s example here is Romanticism’s turn to the Gothic). What is more, Broch is just as inclined to assign positive value also to Romanticism understood as a time-transcending manifestation of the inherently “irrational and conservative in the work of art,” two essential features that are portable across periods and epochs: “For everything conservative goes back as well to the irrationality of man, and if we call the conservative maintenance of old values and attitudes “Romanticism,” then it is an essential component of this Romanticism to locate its sense of the world not in rational thought but in human feeling, in the intuitions and premonitions of the blood.”¹ Yet, importantly, while Romanticism’s openness to the past is celebrated, in the same essay Broch finds the forward transfer of Romantic *écriture* beyond Romanticism deeply problematic and unacceptable; it is this unholy transfer that issues in kitsch. His example here is the historical novel, and this example is extremely significant given the fact that *The Sleepwalkers* is a narrative about historical processes and events, which, however, Broch vehemently (and successfully) resisted turning into a historical novel. *The Sleepwalkers*, from this perspective, is a novel that deliberately opposes the inertia of imitation (and kitsch) — it is an avowedly *post-* and not *neo-*romantic text. The historical novel as genre, Broch avers,

can be seen as the product of a quite legitimate Romanticism that clings to the values of the past and sees the continuous unfolding of history as a reflection of the eternal. But this completely legitimate and in principle unchangeable attitude of the conservative spirit is discredited the moment it is employed out of personal motivations: for example, in times of irrational and revolutionary

1 Hermann Broch, “Evil in the Value System of Art,” *Geist and Zeitgeist: The Spirit in an Un-spiritual Age. Six Essays by Hermann Broch*, ed. and trans. John Hargraves (New York: Counterpoint, 2002) 22; the nominative construction, “irrational and conservative in the work of art,” serves as a title (20) for one of the sections of this essay.

turmoil, if it is used as an escape from the irrational, as a flight into the an idyllic historic past, where fixed conventions still applied.¹

Thus Romanticism is here once again revealingly split between a swathe of historically situated cultural and artistic conventions, on the one hand, and a vehicle for reflecting the “eternal,” on the other. The trouble does not lie in the “eternal” which a particular genre captures at a particular moment in history; the trouble begins when this same genre and its historically circumscribed conventions are employed at a very different historical juncture with the same intention of “reflecting the eternal.” Instead of securing such a reflection, this mechanistic transfer of cultural and artistic conventions ends up producing kitsch, “kitsch-romanticism,” in Broch’s words. A lot of the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, Broch suggests in his Hofmannsthal essay, is filled by this “superannuated romanticism,”² the Romanticism of repetition, kitsch, and a perfunctory transfer of cultural and artistic conventions beyond their historically and socially circumscribed context. Broch’s essays thus offer clear evidence, through their multiple and often bifurcated use of “Romanticism” of his resolve to approach literature and the wider domains of culture and ideology as a *post-romantic* thinker who insists identifying and preserving not just the energies of sublation but also, arguably even more so, those of discontinuity and breakup within the seemingly unbroken.

In comparison with the essays, the semantic compass of “romantic” in Broch’s trilogy is equally broad yet relatively stable; there is an overlap of three distinctive meanings, all of them with pejorative connotations. The first one thinks the “romantic” as something obsolete, dying out, or, not unlike “kitsch-romanticism” in Broch’s essay “Evil in the Value-System of Art” something that had been turned into mere convention. Examples abound, but here are two characteristic instances, both clustered around Bertrand, the most powerful critic of the “romantic,” especially

1 Ibid. 34.

2 Hermann Broch, “Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time,” *Geist and Zeitgeist: The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age. Six Essays by Hermann Broch*, ed. and trans. John Hargraves (New York: Counterpoint, 2002) 174. Hofmannsthal was amongst Broch’s central intellectual preoccupations during his exile; reportedly, he told Egon Vietta that “eighty percent of Hofmannsthal is dated, and twenty percent the best in contemporary German literature” (“ich erinnere mich an seinen Ausspruch, daß achtzig Prozent Hofmannsthal veraltet seien und zwanzig Prozent das beste an gegenwärtiger deutscher Literatur”; cf. “*Sich an den Tod heranpürschen...*” *Hermann Broch und Egon Vietta im Briefwechsel, 1933–1951*, ed. Silvio Vietta and Roberto Rizzo (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012) 290).

in the first part of the trilogy. When Bertrand accompanies Ruzena to her house, he waits a while in the hope to see the light of her room on; since this does not happen, he goes home thinking that he had “paid the romantic [etiquette] its dues” (*fand er, daß er damit für die Romantik genug geleistet worden sei*).¹ The romantic is here cast as no more than a behavioral convention, an ossified etiquette that demands — and receives — lip service. Earlier in the first part, Bertrand points to the existence of “a dead and romantic convention of feeling” (*einer toten und romantischen Gefühlskonvention*; 60) — note his coincidental usage of “dead” and “romantic” in this sentence, an immediate parallel to which he sees in the resilient but dated belief, indeed an insufferable “feudal prejudice” (*das feudale Vorurteil*), that agriculture is morally and existentially superior to trade (61). There can be little doubt that the precise address of this ironic remark is Adam Müller, the Romantic political economist and sociologist who had gained prominence and enjoyed a spectacular revival in Germany and Austria during the years Broch was commencing work on his trilogy. Müller (1779–1829) is best known to historians of German literature for his friendship with Kleist, the co-editorship of *Phöbus*, and his lectures on rhetoric and aesthetics.² Müller’s important work in sociology and politics had been discovered by Friedrich Meinecke when the latter was researching his book *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* (“Cosmopolitanism and the National State”) published in 1907. A few years later a vogue of some momentum was already in evidence if one is to judge by the fact that, as Meinecke’s memoirs record, at a Faculty costume party in Freiburg the historian appeared dressed and made up as Adam Müller. Carl Schmitt’s interpreters and commentators might be well advised to keep in mind that *Political Romanticism* is a book that cannot be understood without the background of this vogue around Müller. In attacking Adam Müller, Schmitt had chosen a public figure of the past, whose ideas were gradually gaining the status of common currency in the present; Schmitt’s own argument thus enjoyed the added resonance that Müller’s resurgent popularity would generate.

1 Hermann Broch, *Die Schlafwandler* (Kommentierte Werkausgabe, Vol. 1) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 91. All further references to Broch’s roman trilogy are to this edition, with page numbers indicated in brackets in the main text.

2 For an outline of Müller’s life and work, see Jakob Baxa, *Adam Müllers Philosophie, Ästhetik und Staatswissenschaft: eine Gedächtnisschrift zu seinem 100. Todestage*, Berlin: Junker & Dünhaupt, 1929. In English, see Othmar Spann, *Types of Economic Theory*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (London: Allen and Unwin, 1930) 158–70 (strongly biased in favour of Müller), and, more recently, Richard T. Gray, *Money Matters: Economics and the German Cultural Imagination, 1770–1850*, Seattle: U of Washington P, 2008.

A key feature of Adam Müller's work in economics is his disagreement with Adam Smith on the central issue of wealth and capital. In a number of shorter polemical pieces, notably his essay "Adam Smith" (1808), Müller moved away from his early appreciation of the Scottish economist, arguing that it is not the freely circulating, mobile and portable wealth measured by money and advanced by trade that matters most; rather, it is the possession of land and immobile property that should be considered the true measure of wealth. Not only do land and immobile property offer a better guarantee at a time of crisis; they also concentrate in themselves the invisible added value of time-honoured attachment, family links, and rootedness. The "wealth of nations" is thus made up of tangible property, preferably land and durable infrastructure, and — in the same proportion — of intangible emotional wealth that resides in the awareness of tradition, immutability, and a most valuable community spirit. Material wealth would not be upheld and would not survive without the essential support of the emotional economy of attachment, familiarity, and dedication to a piece of land consecrated by uninterrupted family possession and care.¹

It is not by chance, then, that Broch, who mentions Adam Müller in what is, on balance, an affirmative manner in his Hofmannsthal essay (and whose early appreciation of Adam Müller's renewed importance in the first quarter of the twentieth century must have been sharpened by Carl Schmitt's publications in *Summa*, the Catholic magazine edited by Franz Blei, to which also Broch contributed articles),² should offer his readership the same symbiotic vision of obsolete "romantic" conventions that yokes together a particular "emotional convention" (*Gefühlskonvention*), highlighting loyalty to tradition (for Betrand,

1 Müller's writings on economics are most easily accessible in Adam Müller, *Nationalökonomische Schriften*, ed. Albert Josef Klein, Lörrach: Albert Kern, 1983; see there especially Müller's essays "Adam Smith" (1808), "Vom Nationalkredit" (1810), and "Streit zwischen Glück und Industrie" (1809).

2 The biographical aspects are captured in Wolfgang Graf Vitzthum, "Hermann Broch and Carl Schmitt," *Wege in die Zeitgeschichte. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Gerhard Schulz*, ed. Jürgen Heideking, Gerhard Hufnagel, Franz Knipping (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989) 69-99. While in 1932 Broch inscribes Schmitt an offspring of one of his essays, it is much more consequential to note that Broch's later work on human rights and international relations (which Hannah Arendt deemed at the time overoptimistic and, politically, insufficiently realistic) should be read as a tacit rejection of Schmitt's anti-cosmopolitan blueprint for a new foreign (and domestic) policy that ignores human rights (cf. Paul Michael Lützeler, *Hermann Brochs Kosmopolitismus: Europa, Menschenrechte, Universität* (Vienna: Picus, 2002) 42).

in the meantime, tradition had been degraded to sheer “inertia”: *Trägheit*), with a particular economic habitus that glorifies the solidity of agriculture over the spurious virtues of trade.

The second meaning of “romantic” in the trilogy equates it with something remote from reality, exotic, and escapist. Ruzena, one should not fail to emphasize, is the focal point of this somewhat orientalist version of love portrayed in the first part of the trilogy: hailing from the provinces of Empire, a Bohemian (*eine Böhmin* 57), she is an example of difference, even exoticism, and of escaping into that world of difference. She exemplifies what Bertrand elsewhere in the first part, with reference to economic life, calls the “colonial romantic” (*Kolonialromantik* 32). Yet in a subversive reading against the grain, a reading that constitutes an almost materialist “deconstruction” of this orientalizing of the romantic, Joachim begins to be aware of the phonetic accord between “slave” and “Slav” (*an den Gleichklang von Sklaven und Slaven denken* 63). Ironically, the colonial connotation of “romantic” intersects with the meaning of “romantic” as an obsolete convention and etiquette already discussed above: Joachim’s brother dies in a duel (an increasingly obsolete behavioral convention) with a Pole in Poznań.¹

Finally, there is a third recognizable meaning of “romantic” in *The Sleepwalkers*: as a marker of inefficiency and failure to perform. Joachim thinks of Bertrand as someone who remains an alien to Ruzena yet manages to do more for her than he himself was able to in the “inertia of his romantic phantasy” (*in der Trägheit seiner romantischen Phantasie* 72). Here a telling connection is produced between inertia and “romantic” (which we have already noted elsewhere in the novel); this connection flies in the face of Novalis’ “Phantasie an die Macht” (“power to the imagination”) as a principle encapsulating romantic activism. The same notion of inefficiency and failure to perform resurfaces in Bertrand’s words to Ruzena: “no one can be helped through the romantic” (*mit Romantik kann man für niemanden sorgen* 88). Thus not only is the romantic at odds with imagination and activism; it also sits uncomfortably with love: two pillars of the Romantic outlook — imagination and love — are undermined and brought down in the same breath.

Having considered the cluster of interlocking meanings that the word “romantic” holds throughout the novel, we need to extend this interpretation of the trilogy by demonstrating Broch’s re-evaluation of two staple Romantic motifs. The

1 For other aspects of the “colonial romantic” in the first part of the trilogy, see Paul Michael’s Lützel, “Hermann Brochs ‘Pasenow oder die Romantik’ und Carl Schmitts ‘Politische Romantik,’” *Hermann Broch und die Romantik*, ed. Doren Wohlleben and Paul Michael Lützel (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014) 107-26, esp. 113-17.

first one is the enduring Romantic motif of insanity, which in the Romantic canon is associated with creativity and prophetic powers. The marginal (the insane) is often cast as excessively talented and endowed with the powers of wisdom and a particularly acute vision. The seemingly marginal is thus assuming a position of centrality that occasions a redrawing of the boundaries within the field of cultural production, to speak in Bordieu's language. In the first part of *The Sleepwalkers*, however, this same motif reappears with a negative valence: the old Pasenow's insanity symbolises nothing but frailty, waning faculties, and inevitable demise.¹ The other staple motif of classic Romanticism, the journey(s) of an (often solely imagined) homecoming, traverses the entire trilogy. Homecoming, and the associated connotations of incessant longing and preoccupation with seeking truth and profound meaning that transcends (everyday) reality, is deeply engrained in the canon of European Romanticism. It is to this motif that Lukács reacts in his *Theory of the Novel* when referring to the post-romantic condition as a condition of transcendental homelessness. Very much in line with Lukács's diagnosis, in Broch's trilogy these homecomings are frustrated; longing (*Sehnsucht*) is contaminated with triviality. The first part charts a trajectory that oscillates between the homely and familiar (*heimatlich*) and the impossibility to identify with it: what begins, for instance, as a journey that is supposed to lead into the world of homeliness and custom (Joachim's visit to a countryside estate) ends up in a realisation of homelessness. Joachim, in this passage which plays several times on the familiar and homely (*heimatlich*), dislocated from the domain of nature (represented by the mother) into that of the affective (represented by Elisabeth),² finds himself in the end to be *heimatlos*, as much an alien without a sense of belonging as Bertrand. Homecoming and the sense of alienation and homelessness are never far apart in the trilogy; they appear before the reader often inseparable, deliberately complicating, in a recognisably post-romantic fashion, the foundational myth of natural home and the resulting compulsion and purity of homecoming.

Longing infused with, and eroded by, triviality; homecoming as no more than a painful parody of what was meant to be a transcendental journey; finally,

1 The old Pasenow is modeled, at least in part, on Broch's father who in his final years (he passed away in 1933) "withdrew more and more into the shadowy world of his own eccentricity" (H. F. Broch de Rothermann, *Dear Mrs. Strigl/Liebe Frau Strigl, A Memoir of Hermann Broch by His Son* (New Haven, Conn.: The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, 2001) 35; also 3: "Many features of my grandfather turn up again in the elder Pasenow in *The Sleepwalkers*).

2 The original German must be adduced here: "was bei der Mutter bloß natürlich und heimatlich war, das wird bei ihr [Elisabeth — GT] rührend und heimatlich zugleich" (37).

the “eternal” and “even the godly” (*das Ewige... sogar das Göttliche* 380) as mere stations along the road of the sleepwalkers, forever arrested by earthly and material concerns — Esch, at the end of the second part of the trilogy, epitomizes this frustrated homecoming, in which the homeland (*Heimat*) is debased to a place of forced relocation after the couple's money runs out. Dispelling the mythology around homecoming goes hand in hand with undermining the Romantic myth of a spiritually elevated union between man and woman; the concluding line of the second part rings with unmistakable and cruel irony: in his Luxembourg homeland, Esch “would still sometimes beat” his wife, but less and less than before, and “eventually” he stops beating her “altogether” (*Manchmal schlug er sie noch, aber immer weniger und schließlich gar nicht mehr* 381).¹

The third part reinforces the parodic treatment of the motif of homecoming; and just as at the end of the second part, the unholy marriage of sacred and profane resurfaces once more (in this instance, the idea of home, filled with metaphysic symbolism, is wedded to the sobering notion of money). All this is transposed this time in a light-hearted but no less ironic clef: on a military ticket, Huguenuau had managed to return for free (*kostenlos*) to his Colmar homeland (689). It is this prosaic homecoming with a matching price tag attached to it, suggestive of the trivialisation of a journey supposed to hold the enduring allure of priceless and immaterial gifts, that a post-romantically sceptical Broch so brilliantly stages for his protagonists.

The Sleepwalkers is a post-romantic novel not just in the way it treats particular narrative motifs, but — crucially — also in its wider conceptual framework. Broch's modernist prose, as is only too well known, relies on an uneasily experimental infrastructure that accommodates larger essayistic texts addressing the philosophy of history. The overall tenor of these texts is conveyed in Broch's formulaic interpretation of European history as a process of “disintegration of values” (*Wertzerfall*). Romanticism is at the very heart of this conception, as it is from German Romanticism, especially Novalis, that Broch appears to borrow the major reference point, the unique moment in time, from which on the process

1 On other aspects of Broch's erosion of the Romantic motif of love and intimacy, see Katrin Schneider, “Dornröschen wollte nicht geküsst sein. Romantik und verkehrte Märchenwelt in Hermann Brochs *Die Schlafwandler*,” *Orbis Linguarum*, Vol. 34 (2009): 125-38 (Teksty ofiarowane Profesorowi Feliksowi Przybylakowi).

of disintegration unfolds unstopably.¹ In the draft of a prospectus of the final part of the trilogy written for the publisher and sent to Daniel Brody on 17 March 1932, Broch describes this disintegration as a “four-hundred year old process, which, directed by the rational, dissolved medieval Europe’s Christian-Platonic picture of the world, a grandiose and frightful process, the end of which is marked by the total fragmentation of values, the unleashing of reason with the concurrent advance of all irrationality, the self-laceration of the world in blood and hardship” (my translation — GT).² Broch insisted that his trilogy is nothing more and nothing less than a depiction of the final stages of this long course history had been following over the last four centuries. Remarkably, from Broch’s standpoint in 1932, this would backdate — without a shadow of a doubt — the baleful process of disintegration of values (note the pessimistic variation on Nietzsche’s call for “transvaluation of all values”)³ to the 1530s, the time of the Reformation. In “Christendom, or Europe” (1799), an essay that in many ways reads as the foundational document of a Romantic philosophy of history, Novalis had suggested that it was in the Reformation and the hubris of rationality and science that the roots of subsequent division, strife, and evil had to be sought. Broch goes back to Novalis’ diagnosis (and even, implicitly, to his exaltation of the Middle Ages), he adopts it, but he also perceives contemporary voices, notably that of Lukács. Also in the early 1930s, Lukács, who had opened his earlier *Theory of the Novel* with a sentence that intentionally echoes Novalis’s essay,⁴ launches his own version of a philosophy of history that seeks to explain the world of remythologization and rising

1 This considerable debt to Novalis would not prevent Broch from referring to Novalis (and Eichendorf) much later, in 1949, in a letter to Hannah Arendt, as “idiots” (an umbrella appellation for all romantics in this letter); he is also critical of them in his 1950 paper “Einige Bemerkungen zum Problem des Kitsches” (cf. Broch’s letter and Paul Michael Lützeler’s comments, in: Hannah Arendt/Hermann Broch, *Briefwechsel, 1946 bis 1951*, ed. Paul Michael Lützeler (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996) 111, 116 n. 4).

2 “[jenes] vierhundertjährigen Prozesses, der unter der Leitung des Rationalen das christlich-platonische Weltbild des mittelalterlichen Europas auflöte, grandioser und fürchterlicher Prozeß, an dessen Ende die völlige Wertzersplitterung, die Entfesselung der Vernunft mit dem gleichzeitigen Durchbruch aller Irrationalität steht, die Selbstzerfleischung der Welt in Blut und Not” (Hermann Broch/Daniel Brody, *Briefwechsel, 1930–1951*, ed. Bertold Hack and Marietta Kleiß (Frankfurt am Main: Buchhändler-Vereinigung GmbH, 1971) 288–89).

3 In “Evil in the Value-System of Art,” Broch explicitly refers to Nietzsche in the section “The Construct of Values: Overcoming Death.”

4 “Selig sind die Zeiten, für die der Sternenhimmel die Landkarte der gangbaren und zu gehenden Wege und deren Wege das Licht der Sterne erhellt” (Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans* (Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1920) 9).

totalitarianism. Lukács's interpretation locates the engine of this process in what he calls the "destruction of reason" as the title of his later eponymous book would have it. For Lukács, there can never be too much rationality; a Hegelian at heart, he traces the turns of history through a litmus test that establishes the presence or absence of reason: with reason defeated, myth and irrationality are on the ascend, hurling humanity into an age of darkness. Broch's scenario is subtler. He believes that myth can also carry positive connotations and be undoubtedly of help if a new balance of enlightenment through the creative illusion of art is to be attained. Not unlike Adorno and Horkheimer (also his contemporaries), Broch is mindful of the dialectic of rationality: for him, the "unleashing of reason" and the "advance of all irrationality" (289) are, after all, concomitant occurrences; irrationality can and does thrive under the auspices of rationality.

It is especially significant that Broch's diagnosis of modernity, going back to Novalis and taking the Reformation and the hubris of rationality as its major points of reference, persists beyond *The Sleepwalkers*. A magnificent example is provided by his 1947 essay "The Style of the Mythical Age," written in English and edited by Jean Starr Untermeyer, the translator into English of Broch's *The Death of Virgil*. Here the schism of the Reformation is presented initially in a more nuanced and balanced way. Protestantism is said to have laid the foundations for "the autonomous human soul"; furthermore, the Protestant epoch produced its own "great style," "actually one of the greatest in all history, that of the Dutch school in painting, of Bach and his predecessors in music, of Milton in poetry, and finally of Kant in philosophy, where we find less a style than the building of a Protestant scholasticism."⁵ Crucially, "[t]he Protestant revolution was one against the hierarchical concept of myth" (105). And yet, in the end, the schism of the Reformation, just as in *The Sleepwalkers*, is taken to be the first step of an "irrevocable process, lasting from the eighteenth to the twentieth century," in which "the Western structure of values lost its Christian centre" (106).⁶ Broch's

5 Broch's essay was first published as "The Style of the Mythical Age. An Introduction to Rachel Bepaloff's 'Iliad'," Rachel Bepaloff, *On the Iliad* (New York: Pantheon, 1947) 9–33. All quotations are from *Geist and Zeitgeist: The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age. Six Essays by Hermann Broch*, ed. and trans. John Hargraves (New York: Counterpoint, 2002) here 106 (future references are by page number only, in the main text).

6 The Reformation is also a major reference point in Erich von Kahler's ambitious 1945 book *Man the Measure: A New Approach to History* (Kahler was Broch's close friend during his years of American exile); cf. Helmut Kohlenberger, "Hermann Broch und Erich von Kahler: Vordender der Aporie," *Hermann Brochs literarische Freundschaften*, ed. Endre Kiss, Paul Michael Lützel and Gabriella Rác (Tubingen: Stauffenburg, 2008) 245–60, here 249.

retrospective survey of Western cultural history identifies these 150 years as the age of Romanticism, the last (and still on-going) stage in the fragmentation of values that began with the Reformation (“These one hundred and fifty years of disintegration have produced a certain attitude in man which is called romanticism,” 106). The problem is not as much secularization *per se*, the real problem is the loss of spontaneously available universality, as in romanticism “autonomy becomes absolute” (107). With the disintegration of “general” and “eternal validity,” “validity remains insecure” (107). Accordingly, Romanticism shapes the universe “anew for (and from) every particular case” (107), for myth in its universality is no longer available as a binding framework.¹ In what is once more a clear reference to both Novalis and Lukács, Broch sums up the recurrence of the romantic within modernity as an attitude of involuntary withdrawal into, and homesickness for, the past: “Infected by this ultimate insecurity, the romantic artist acquires the characteristic attitude of longing, longing in particular for the religious unity of the past <...>, the romantic in his homesickness is led back to Catholicism, to find

1 Eric Voegelin, another student of the endurance of myth in culture and political ideology (and an attentive reader of Novalis), agreed with Broch’s highlighting of the Reformation and Romanticism as key stages in the “decline of myth” (*Mythenverfall*), although Voegelin was adamant that the mysticism of the 14th century should be assigned even greater prominence in this process (see Voegelin’s letter of 31 December 1947, on reading Broch’s essay, in the correspondence between the two: “Briefwechsel, 1939–1949” ed. Thomas Hollweck, *Sinn und Form*, No. 2 (2008): 149–74, here 169). Voegelin had himself been exposed to Romantic philosophy, sociology and political economy in Othmar Spann’s seminar at Vienna University (cf. Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2006) 34). Voegelin’s reading of Novalis is extensive and well documented; at times he sees him as a predecessor of Marx’s dream of a “patriarchally organized society” working “without state pressure” (cf. Voegelin’s letter to Klaus Vondung of 10 February 1978 in Eric Voegelin, *Selected Correspondence, 1950–1984*, ed. Thomas A. Hollweck (Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2007) 833); or as a close parallel to Simmel (Eric Voegelin, “The Basic Forms,” Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance and Other Miscellaneous Papers, 1921–1938*, ed. William Petropulos and Gilbert Weiss (Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2003) 198); or, finally, as precursor to Hitler’s voluntaristic view of the world (Eric Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, ed. and trans. David Clemens and Brendan Purcell (Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 1999) 88). Voegelin co-edited a volume featuring an article on Broch and the philosophy of history (R. A. Kann, “Hermann Broch und die Geschichtsphilosophie” *Historica: Studien zum geschichtlichen Denken und Forschen* [Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag Friedrich Engel-Janosis], ed. Hugo Hantsch, Eric Voegelin und Franco Valsecchi (Vienna: Herder, 1965) 37–50); the article is critical of Broch’s portrayal of the Middle Ages.

shelter in the Church” (107; this verdict is strongly reminiscent of *The Sleepwalkers*, where in “Zerfall der Werte” (6) the romantic is also portrayed as “fearing discovery” (*die Erkenntnis fürchtet*) and beholden to the past).¹ At a time when the religious system of values had already dissolved and myth was no longer available in its immediacy and universality, the “abstract” had to be reached, Broch’s essay insightfully suggests, “by the detour of romanticism” (107); this forced detour ensued in a constantly increasing “romantic uneasiness” (110). Throughout the last two centuries this anxiety was mirrored in the all too swift succession of a host of essentially post-romantic aesthetic currents: “Art became naturalistic, veristic, scientific in its methods, running through the sequences of Impressionism, until at last, in an ultimate despair of expression, it has become expressionistic. If in all these forms it renders the reality of our time, it does so in fact only as anarchy reflecting anarchy” (110).

The protracted presence of the romantic is thus little more than a response to the vanishing of myth, of the stability and universal validity enshrined in it. The “long century of Romanticism” beyond the mid-1800s has seen an endless rerun of attempts to rebuild myth with the woefully inadequate means of the private and particular. Fifteen years after *The Sleepwalkers*, Broch’s essay confirms his diagnosis of modernity, of which romanticism is but an on-going manifestation. Seen from this vantage point, the trilogy begins to make perfect sense as an example of a post-romantic critique of Romanticism: a critique that draws on the rhetorical and artistic resources of the critiqued, parodies its staple motifs, dispels its “pseudo-myths” that constantly fall short of “*the new myth*” (112), of which Western culture had been so much in need and whose arrival Broch keenly anticipates (let us recall that he hails Joyce, now in a much more qualified way than in his earlier essays, and Thomas Mann, but especially Kafka, as the creators of the new myth). *The Sleepwalkers*, then, with its ironic, but also at times violent, discrediting of the belief in immediacy and organicity amidst a world of particularities and lost totality, should be read as a post-romantic interrogation of modernity; it conjures the spectre of Romanticism, determined to expunge it. In its stead, it leaves behind the

1 Dorrit Cohn comments on this passage in *The Sleepwalkers*: “... Broch uses the term “romantic” in an idiosyncratic way that is almost contrary to its usual acceptance. Not the adventurous outsider is romantic, but the conservative stay-at-home, who sentimentally longs for the return of past traditions” (Dorrit Claire Cohn, *The Sleepwalkers: Elucidation of Hermann Broch’s Trilogy* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1966) 70 n. 20). This stay-at-home attitude presents the ultimate frustration of the process of homecoming; it does not allow the journey away from home to commence in the first place.

footprints of somnambolic apocalypse.¹

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1 On the multiple semantic layers (and intellectual sources) of the metaphor of sleepwalking in Broch's trilogy, including its apocalyptic and neo-platonic symbolism, see Heinz D. Osterle, "Hermann Broch: 'Die Schlafwandler.' Kritik der zentralen Metapher," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1970): 229–68.