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Pre-established harmony between parental and personal choice of the partners

Masked encounters in Ludvig Holberg's *Mascarade*, Carlo Goldoni's *I Rusteghi* and Georg Büchner's *Leonce und Lena*[1]

For Jonathan Israel, masterful interpreter of the European Enlightenment and splendid defender of Reason

The activity of comparing, in natural history, in the social sciences, and in the humanities, consists in finding both similarities and differences between the objects of comparison. Such similarities and differences exist between any two objects, for they share necessarily the common trait of being an object; and if Leibniz' principle of the identity of the indiscernibles is true, there must be also some differences between them. This entails that finding similarities and differences does not yet make a comparison fruitful; otherwise every comparison, even the most arbitrary one, would be interesting. Certainly the relevance of a comparison is increased when its results allow us to state genealogical relations; for sometimes the similarities found are so close that one cannot avoid the conclusion that one of the two objects is genealogically dependent on the other, either directly or indirectly, or that at least they are both relying on a common ground (be it an ancestor or a source). Sometimes, however, even surprising similarities may be simply typological and be grounded in nothing other than common laws of nature or common tendencies of the human mind. Comparisons between such objects can increase our insights as well, if not even more than genealogical analyses. The comparison among a definite set of objects clearly is more promising when the common properties are not obvious, but quite rare, in the ideal case even limited to the objects compared; for then the choice of these objects makes perfect sense and need not answer the charge of being arbitrary. If the differences between the objects, furthermore, exhaust a conceptual realm and/or shed light on a general tendency of development, then the chances increase that one is engaged in a meaningful comparison.

The following essay in comparative literature focuses on three comedies that perhaps satisfy the aforementioned conditions, namely Ludvig Holberg's *Mascarade* of 1724, Carlo Goldoni's *I Rusteghi* of 1760, and Georg Büchner's *Leonce und Lena* of 1836. My interest is typological, not genealogical, i.e. I do not claim that the later authors knew the earlier dramas; for the three authors belong to different cultures and write their texts in different languages - Danish, Venetian, and German. Still, even if I am not interested in the question, I cannot exclude such knowledge either. There are similarities not only in the main structure, but also in the details; and Holberg is possibly known to Goldoni and certainly to Büchner. Already in 1746 Gotthard Fursman has published in Copenhagen the first (and only) volume of his projected six-volume French translation of all twenty-six comedies by Holberg in existence at that time; it includes *Mascarade*. It is unlikely that Goldoni ignores the Italian translations that Elisabetta Caminer Turra made of Holberg's *Den Vægelsindede* and *Den politiske Kandestøber* (works included in Fursman's volume, which was clearly used by Turra). These translations appear in Venice in 1775 and 1776 respectively, and Turra is a famous intellectual of her times (cf. Clausen 1994). In Germany, Holberg was a major influence already in the 18th century. One should not forget that German literature lagged behind the literature even of its smaller Germanic neighbors not only in the 17th century, when Gryphius learned from Vondel, but still in the first half of the 18th century, when Gottsched recognized that Germany did not have really good comedies.[2] In 1743 and 1744 Johann Georg Laub translated eighteen of Holberg's comedies into three volumes in German, among which was *Mascarade*, and in 1752-1755 Gabriel Christian Rothe published a five-volumes-translation of all of Holberg's comedies; twenty-five of his comedies were re-translated by Adam Oehlenschläger in 1822-1823, again including *Mascarade*.

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He was also a strong presence on stage - we know that »between 1748 and 1865, more than 2,000 Holberg performances took place in Germany« (Greene-Gantzberg 1994, 83). Not only Gottsched, also Johann Elias Schlegel critically admired Holberg, whose *Den politiske Kandestøber* exerted a strong influence on Goethe's comedy on the German reaction to the French Revolution, *Die Aufgeregten* (1793). Lenz, the hero of Büchner's story, studied Holberg, and so the assumption is cogent that Büchner must have heard of Holberg. How many comedies of him he read, though, is difficult to know, and so, again, I do not claim that Büchner read *Mascarade*.[3] Even less am I convinced that he knew Goldoni's *I Rusteghi*. It was included in the 11-volume German translation of forty-four of his comedies, done by Lessing's friend Justus Heinrich Saal from 1767 to 1777, with the German title *Die vier Grobiane* (Hösle 1993, 377, fn. 11), and besides Büchner knew Italian. But Goldoni's star sank in the early 19th century both in Italy and Germany (see Petronio 1958), and it is not likely that Büchner read much of him, even if he certainly knew his name. This is shown by the epigraph of *Leonce und Lena*, consisting of quotes from Alfieri and Gozzi: »E la fama?« - »E la fame?« In 1976, Kurt Ringger showed that the Gozzi to whom Büchner's reference would better fit (even if it is unlikely that he had him in mind) is not Goldoni's rival Carlo, but his brother Gasparo, an admirer Goldoni's, whose very favorable review of *I Rusteghi* in the *Gazzetta Veneta* of February 20th, 1760 is regarded by Giuseppe Ortolani as having inaugurated »la critica teatrale in Italia« (Goldoni VII 1385). But certainly Büchner cannot have known this review.

So, why choose these three texts (which have all become the basis for operas) for a comparison? Well, they have a peculiar trait in common that few other comedies share. Of course, I cannot mean that they end with a wedding - after all, since the Hellenistic New Comedy this has been the classic ending of innumerable European comedies. The conflict between the young generation, which finds itself in love, and the parents, who do not acknowledge the loves of their children and try to subject them to their own marriage plans, is the life-blood of the comedy since Menander; and the triumph of the children, usually helped by astute servants, is what grants this type of drama the happy ending and thus the comic flavor. *However, the paradoxical point in our three dramas is that the clash between the parents and the children arises despite the fact that the parental and the individual choices coincide.* But how is in such a case a conflict possible? Fundamentally, there are two possibilities. Either the children do not know that those chosen by their parents are those they have fallen, or will fall, in love with and thus revolt - this is what occurs in both Holberg and Büchner, even if the two dramas are radically distinguished by a different, even opposed reaction to the final discovery of the coincidence of parental and personal choice. Or, as in Goldoni's plot, it is the parents who revolt to the discovery of such a coincidence, because the personal love added to their plans is gained in a way that violates the decorum and challenges their authority.

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[2] *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst*, 2nd part, 11th chapter (Gottsched 1973; VI 2, 346, 359). In the chapter Holberg, too, is quoted (352f.).

[3] Majut (1932, 8) and Hinderer (1977, 133f.) only generically mention a possible influence by Holberg on *Leonce und Lena*.

But there is a further trait connecting the three dramas, namely the *importance of masks*. Holberg's and Goldoni's comedies play during carnival, and even if this is not the case in Büchner, his Leonce and Lena marry while masked and discover their true identity only afterwards. This point is clearly connected with the earlier one, for it is important that in Holberg and Büchner the lovers meet each other in a context where they do not know each other by full name and are attracted to each other by their personality, not by their social status. In Goldoni, on the other hand, the two lovers, who know who they are, can meet each other before the wedding only secretly; the bridegroom has to come masked and even disguised as a woman.[4]

In the following I will discuss those traits of the three comedies that are most interesting from a comparative point of view. I will sum up in detail the plot of the first, for it is the least likely to be known by the reader in a time in which literary studies are structured more and more according to national languages and Danish is not widely read.

I.

Mascarade begins with the young hero Leander waking up, rubbing his eyes and asking his servant Henrich for the time. The watch shows four, but Henrich interprets it as 4 a.m., and when his master tells him that at that time in January there could not be so much light, Henrich insinuates: »Then the sun cannot function right. It is impossible that it is already afternoon; for we just got up.« (»Saa maa Solen ikke gaae rigtig da. Det kan jo umuligt være Eftermiddag; thi nu stod vi først op«, I, 399; the translation is mine). When Leander responds that he is sure that at least his English watch does not run wrong, Henrich proposes to set the sun back; for since watches are supposed to follow the sun, then his watch would also run back in time. This brilliant beginning shows in few strokes the relation between master and servant. Even if the servant has to satisfy the needs of the master, in this case answer his question, he does it in a way that quickly shows that he is more witty and resourceful than Leander. He does everything to satisfy his own need to continue to sleep by giving answers that are obviously absurd, because they invert and deny the usual causal relations: even if Leander believes that he is still drunk from the masquerade, from which they returned on 4 a.m., I think that Henrich consciously and ironically suggests the power of the human mind to detach itself from reality - an inventiveness that somehow mirrors that of the artist.[5] In the whole drama Leander will rely on Henrich, who dresses up twice to achieve his ends and even represents to his master a short comedy about the likely consequences of his refusal to marry his fiancée, playing himself all the different roles. It is even explicitly stated that this comedy is in three acts - exactly like *Mascarade* itself (II 4; I 423). Henrich is, incidentally, the only figure to speak another language (as fake rabbi in III 6 he does not only utter pseudo-Hebrew words, but converses also in a decent German) - again like Holberg himself, who was a remarkable polyglot and indeed a true European.

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[4] Somehow related to the three comedies is Marivaux's *Le jeu de l'amour et du hazard* (1730), in which two young persons who have been chosen by their parents for each other and have never met before dress up as their respective servants and fall in love with the right character, whom they believe to be their potential spouse's servant. Here, too, there is masking and pre-established harmony, but the latter connects the lovers, not the lovers and their parents. In fact, the bride's father, Orgon, knows about both disguises from the beginning.

Henrich is one of Holberg's funniest creations. A descendant of the slaves of the New Comedy and of Arlecchino, he is more a brother of Truffaldino in Goldoni's *Il servitore di due padroni* (to name only one of his servants) than of Büchner's Valerio, who in his melancholy and depth is an heir to the fools of Shakespeare, particularly Jaques in *As you like it*. Holberg does not seem to know Shakespeare, even if he studied in Oxford and is familiar with, e.g., Ben Jonson and George Farquhar (cf. Argetsinger 1994, 148). His models are Plautus and Terence, later in his life Aristophanes; among the moderns mainly Molière and the *commedia dell'arte*. The impact of the latter becomes clear when one looks at the names of the majority of Holberg's personae: they are Danish transpositions of their Italian models. In many of them the *amoroso* is called Leander, the *amorosa* Leonora, their respective servants Henrich and Pernille (in *De usynlige* their names are still Harleqvin and Colombine); the severe father, instead of Pantalone, is now called Jeronimus. Still, despite the functional equivalence of the homonymous personae in different plays, their character is often quite different (Argetsinger 1983, 69f.; cf. also Campbell 1914, 139-196). As Goldoni, Holberg aims at individualization: the Henrich of *Mascarade*, as I said, is more fascinating than many of his namesakes.

Comedies live from contrasts, and if we compare the first and the second scene, we easily discover that in a typology of such contrasts, contrasts between persons in an asymmetric relation are to be distinguished from those between persons on equal footing. For Henrich does not only contrast with Leander, but also with the other servant, Arv, who appears in the next scene and sides with Leander's austere father Jeronimus. Nothing shows the difference between the two servants more than the wry answer he gives to Leander's admittedly superfluous question, whether noon has past: »After an old calculation it is after noon, when it four o'clock in the afternoon.« (»Efter gammel Regning saa er det over Middag, naar Klokken er fire om Eftermiddagen«, I 400). When Leander mentions that his father is now meeting his future father-in-law, Leonard, Henrich asks him whether his bride, to whom he is formally engaged, is beautiful. Leander has to answer that he does not know, for he last saw her when she was six years old, twelve years ago. Henrich finds it strange to marry a person whom one has never seen or at least when one cannot be sure that the gilt has not worn off. One feels in such remark a subtle feeling of superiority of the servant, for even if he belongs to an underprivileged class, whose plight he eloquently depicts in II 3, he is at least spared the necessity of marrying a person he does not know. But Leander insists that he reserves the right to say no to his bride, if he does not like her, when he visits her tomorrow.

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[5] In I 10 (I 407) Leander praises, albeit ironically, Henrich's art and invention. Leonard commends the quality of his head, when Jeronimus threatens to break it into pieces (II 3; I 418). The latter regards Henrich as the driving force behind what is going on (III 7; I 440 and III 9; I 442).

Still, he does not seem to be very interested in the meeting, for he thinks about going this evening to the next masquerade, even if he regrets that many common girls also go. But this, Henrich insists, is the best feature of masquerades - that everybody is treated alike (I 401). One feels that the Christian carnival has traits of the Roman Saturnalia, and in fact Henrich voices the hope that he might dance, under the cover of a mask, with the mother of his master. His hope is not ungrounded, for Magdelone appears in the next scene and confesses that she would like to join her son in the masquerade. He reassures her that both young and old people are welcome: the carnival bridges the generational no less than the social divide. But it also creates tensions between persons of the same status. The comical contrast between Henrich and Arv is repeated on a higher level when Leander's father Jeronimus appears and forcefully expresses his disapproval of the carnival, praising the austere mores of the earlier times. His wife, who had just begun to dance Folie d'Espagne, hypocritically joins in: »Oh certainly, I lived in my parents' house like in a monastery.« (»Jo vist, jeg levede i mine Forældres Huus ligesom i et Kloster«, I 4; I 404). But she is ›unmasked‹ just in the moment in which a woman and a man appear who bring her the clothes and masks she had ordered. (It is important that there are two figures; for she could handle the situation with the first person; but the repetition, an important factor of the comic, undoes her.) The only excuse that she can find is that she wanted to look at the masquerade to find better reasons to condemn other people; i.e., she pretends to be a moralist voyeur. Jeronimus does not believe her and sentences everybody to stay at home; Arv must guard the door. But Henrich dresses up as a ghost who proves extraordinarily familiar with the moralist Arv's sins and thus, after unmasking and blackmailing him, gets to leave together with Leander. The first act ends with a silent masquerade during which Leander falls in love with another mask. Both take off their masks and exchange rings. The stage direction betrays that the girl in question is Leonard's daughter, but neither the couple nor the public in the theatre is given this piece of information.

The second act begins with Jeronimus triumphantly reporting that till midnight he has been preaching morality to his wife. But when he discovers that Leander and Henrich have been out again, he becomes furious and wants to beat up Henrich. Fortunately, however, Leonard appears, who explains that he himself allowed his daughter to go to the masquerade yesterday. After all, he enjoyed himself as a young man, and if he now denied the contemporary youth the right to the same behavior, only because he himself is now no longer physically able to engage in it, he could rightly be accused of envy - or, as Nietzsche will later say, of resentment. Henrich, whom Leonard extracts from Jeronimus a promise to spare, in the next scene will echo the idea and insist on the necessity of pleasure also for servants, who will then better serve their masters. Henrich himself does not want to moralize - the Danish has ›moralisere‹ - but wants to point to the contradiction in those drunken old men, who moralize against the youth's vices. Jeronimus' main concern is that the masquerades foster unchaste behavior, but the experienced Henrich points out to him that Danish young people do not need to wait for carnival to be able to engage in it; it may be different in Spain, where women sit closed in their houses. Leonard, the friend of the middle way, defends the masquerades by addressing their therapeutical function and even getting at what one could call the metaphysical basis of the institution:

> It presents to humans the original equality, in which they found themselves at the beginning, before pride got the upper-hand and one human regarded himself as too good to deal with another; for as long as the masquerade lasts, the servant is equally good as the master. Therefore I do not condemn masquerades, but their abuse.
> (»Thi de forestiller Menneskene den naturlige Lighed, hvorudi de vare i Begyndelsen, førend Hovmod tog Overhaand og eet Menneske holdt sig for god at omgaaes med et andet; thi saalænge Mascaraden varer, er Tieneren lige saa god som Herren. Jeg fordømmer derfor ikke Mascarader, men deres Misbrug«, II 3; I 420).

Henrich adds that masquerades do not harm other people, and when Jeronimus mentions that their participants harm themselves, because they lose money, Henrich insists that he lets his money circulate, which is more virtuous than giving alms as Jeronimus does. For, he explains to him, in accordance with early modern defenses of capitalism à la Mandeville, there are two types of poor people, lazy ones and diligent ones. Through charities one encourages the first type, but by taking part in festivities one obliges them to work as tailors, shoemakers, etc. If all people lived as withdrawn as Jeronimus, all such people would die of hunger (II 3; I 421). It is not clear to me whether Holberg sides with Henrich - Jeronimus' retort that card-players are not motivated by the desire to create jobs for card-makers makes the valid point that what counts in ethics are intentions, not consequences; but he shows his enormous capacities as dramatist in ascribing the different positions to the appropriate characters. For it is true to life that a person who has to work as hard as Henrich does is usually less generous than wealthy persons towards those poor that he, rightly or wrongly, perceives as lazy.

No less true to life is Henrich's reaction when Leander confesses to him to have fallen in love for the first time. He makes fun of his own earlier loves, which he sweated out in dancing; he declares that sudden loves cannot last; he insists with all possible earnestness that it is not a good idea to fall in love with another on the eve of a wedding. But he is most worried that the unknown woman his master has chosen may belong to a lower class (II 4; I 422). This is again a realistic feature of a faithful servant, who may enjoy the temporary leveling in carnival, but does not want to see the class order, and certainly not the life chances of his master, endangered. Leander, however, is unshakeable; he is sure that the woman he encountered was chosen for him by heaven itself, even if love is fundamentally something inaccessible to rational analysis. In the fictitious comedy he now plays before his master, Henrich represents the lawyers of the two parties; and when Leander's lawyer claims that his client cannot hold his promise because he has been overcome by a stronger love, the opponent sarcastically remarks that everybody could avail himself of such an excuse. When his adversary declares that he does not understand anything about the power of love, he retorts that he is as expert as the other; and in a scene of enormous *vis comica* on stage, Henrich, who had run from one side to the other to represent the two figures, begins to beat himself up to symbolize the altercation of the two lawyers. But when Leander remains as determinate as before - a seriousness contrasting strongly with the hilarity of the public - Henrich gives in, acknowledges the absoluteness of his master's love, and promises to help him despite all the difficulties that he foresees. Indeed Jeronimus, when informed about the new situation, insists that the wedding with the fiancée take place the same evening and threatens to deliver his son to the authorities if he disobeys. Only Leander's thinly veiled allusion to his suicide is able to check his father. Leander's threat is one of the two most tragic moments of the drama, but it is rendered immediately comic by Henrich's echo.

It does not come as a surprise that the third act begins with a scene mirroring II 4: it is now Leonard's daughter Leonora who confesses to her servant Pernille the insane love she has fallen prey to, also for her the first love ever. The difference from II 4 is that Leonora has already spoken with her father, whom she has never in her life seen so enraged, and, as she herself recognizes, with good reason. When Pernille suggests that, this being so, perhaps she should obey him, Leonora, similarly to Ovid's Medea (Metamorphoses VII 20), declares: »Oh, Pernille, I see and approve what is useful for me, but I follow what will harm me. My heart has wavered for a long time between reason and love; but love has found its victory.« (»Ach Pernille, jeg seer og approberer det som mig tienligt er, men følger det som mig er skadeligt. Mit Hierte har ballanceret længe mellem Fornuft og Kiærlighed; men Kiærlighet har vundet Seit«, I 429). Since Leonora condemns her own love, she expresses the hope that she would have died before meeting her lover and that he would now prove unfaithful; but just in that moment Leander appears with Henrich and reasserts his love. Leonora, who does not know herself anymore, declares that when he took off his mask, she, too, felt that a judgment was pronounced on her that she should love this man; heaven itself obliged her to love him against her own will. Why against her own will? Leonora avers that she is formally engaged to someone else. Leander is fascinated by the similarity of his own situation and promises to die rather than to marry someone else. Since Leonora wants to know the name of his fiancée and her rival (it is significant that the woman, not the man, asks this question), the comedy comes dangerously close to its dénouement, but happily Leander cannot answer, for Leonard is approaching and he thus has to run away.

Leonard's ensuing outrage at the masquerades represents a comic revenge for Jeronimus, to whom he had felt so superior. He is no less aggressive to his daughter than Jeronimus has been to Leander, reproaching her of being the sort of woman to fall in love every evening with another man, even though he must know that this is not true. When Pernille tries to defend her mistress's choice and to point to her new lover's merits, Leonard makes a brutal joke that Leonora's new lover will rob also Pernille of her virginity, if she still happens to be a virgin. While Jeronimus threatens the use of physical force, Leonard employs psychological violence - at the end of the scene he does not want to be Leonora's father anymore[6] - and that is hardly better. He is certainly more polished and cultivated than Jeronimus, but the explosion of wrath in such a person is often more shocking because less expected and because more repressed material has accumulated. When Leonora points to fate, Leonard cries out that we always find a pretext for our desires in fate; but Pernille insists that there is fate in love - even if neither her father nor her mother have been Calvinists. Of course, the remark is funny, because the appeal to complex inter-Protestant discussions on free will and determinism is inappropriate in the context of a seemingly simple love-story; but the deeper meaning of the remark becomes clear at the end when a pre-established harmony indeed seems to have warranted the coincidence of personal and parental choice.

Leonard's wrath is caused by seeing his welfare as well as his honor endangered (III 3; I 433). He particularly fears Jeronimus' reaction, as he does not know that the latter finds himself in the same situation; as often, the anticipated negative reaction of the other makes one behave worse. In III 4 both men appear on stage, but they do not see each other and alternately express analogous sentiments. Inversion is a well-known comic structure; and the vis comica of the scene rests on the fact that their fears must vanish in the moment in which the two persons recognize that they are shared. When they meet each other, they try to propitiate each other by gestures of utmost humility - they fall both upon their knees - and can only interpret those of the other side as mockery. When finally the situation in which both find themselves becomes clear, they decide to force their children to keep their engagement. It is interesting that it is Leonard who first declares this intention, even if he then has some afterthoughts, since he fears his daughter might harm herself. But Jeronimus tells him that nothing is more absurd than letting one's children hope that one believes in their threats.

The lovers decide to flee and to marry without parental consent. But Henrich is captured, and under torture he must confess the hiding place of his master and his lover. While Jeronimus waits for them to be brought back, he tells Leonard, who has been made to believe that his daughter will agree to his plans, that he would die of grief if his son did not return. Leonard is admonishing him to behave as a Christian and not to let himself be overcome by depression, when he gets a letter by Pernille claiming that his daughter has drowned herself and stating that it is a sin to force one's children into marriage. Now it is his turn to fall into utter despair, the more as he recognizes his own guilt in his daughter's presumed death (III 11; I 444). Leonard is honest enough to recognize that behind all the pretended care for one's children were massive economic interests, and he wants to follow his daughter by killing himself. But now Leander is brought back with his girlfriend. The two lovers recognize that their chosen partners are those from whom they had run away and that the people the marriage with whom they revolted against are those they love most. »I am simultaneously Leonora and Leonora's rival.« (»Ja jeg er Leonora og Leonoras Rival tillage«, III 13; I 446). In a final reflexive passage, Henrich declares that a comedy has been played, and he adds to the general joy by asking for Pernille's hand. He remarks that it is only upper-class people's love that can make the subject of a comedy and he ends by praising the masquerade, which increased the love of the higher couple and allowed him to find a wife.

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6 Jeronimus makes an analogous remark in III 9 (I 442), but at least not in the presence of his son.

II.

The main difference between Goldoni's and Holberg's dramas has already been mentioned: Lucietta and Felippetto never doubt that the person they fall in love with is the one chosen by their fathers. Their disobedience is not directed against the parental choice; they only desire to see their spouses before the wedding. While Felippetto at least has been told beforehand that he is to be married, even if he will meet his bride only at the wedding, Lunardo plans to inform his daughter only when she has to sign the marriage contract. For he is the boss, as he says twice: »Son paron mi.« (I 3; VII 636) Felippetto's request to see his bride before he marries her is rejected by his father, and while he confesses to his aunt Marina that he reserves the right to say no, (I 6; VII 642) Lucietta, who from the beginning scene onward is subtly depicted as ready for marriage, does not seem to take the possibility seriously that she might dislike Felippetto and explicitly excludes that he might not like her - a self-confidence that makes her stepmother Margarita envious (II 7; VII 669).

In her long speech in the last act Felice will make the same point. Girls have to be married by their fathers, and they ought to obey them; but they should be able to meet their spouse beforehand, for it is possible that they will dislike him. »Seu seguro, *vegnimo a dir el merito,* che el gh'abia da piàser? E se nol ghe piasesse?« (III 2; VII 687f.) The challenge to the paternal authority is thus far more limited than in *Mascarade.* In *I Rusteghi* it is the fathers (and their two friends) who want to prevent the marriage of the loving couple when they discover that the two young people have met. They are far more authoritarian than Jeronimus and Leonard, whose outrage is more justifiable, when they find out that their children plan to break an engagement (organized by the parents, but still with the children's formal consent), marry someone else and elope. Still, their motives are similar. Leonard sees his honor at stake, if his promise is violated; and Lunardo begins the third act with the the following remark: »Se trata de onor, se trata, vegnimo a dir el merito, de reputazion de casa mia. Un omo de la mia sorte.« (VII 681) No less brutal than Leonard's allusion to Pernille's loss of her virginity is his sarcastic remark, when his wife hesitantly asks whether it would not be appropriate to have the spouses first meet: »Cossa voressi? che i fasse prima l'amor?« (I 3; VII 637)

The real encounter between the two spouses is in truth as chaste as possible. Felippetto appears in female mask and is too shy to take it off; only through the trick of offering him tobacco does Marina induce him to do so. As in Holberg, the unmasking has a profound symbolic valence; for the undressing of the body as well as the shaking off of social roles belong to the essence of love.[7] Felice pretends that the visitor is her sister, and when Lucietta laughs, Felippetto is enchanted by her pure laughter: »(Oh co la ride pulito!)« (II 11; VII 676) Goldoni seems to allude to the deep psychological truth, certainly obvious to a person who professionally makes people laugh, that how we laugh says much about who we are. After many asides, Felippetto finally has the courage to address directly his spouse, who derides his clumsiness in reassuming the *bauta* (the carnival hooded cloak with mask) - partly an expression of his unwillingness to part, partly again of symbolic value. He asks her: »Me burlela?«; when she answers »Mi no«, but in contradiction with her statement continues to laugh, he adds »Furba!«. This is all that they say directly to each other - according to Goldoni, not only pure laughter, but also the capacity of laughing at each other are important factors in forging the bond of love. When they are discovered by their fathers, they will not speak to each other anymore (Felippetto will silently greet Lucietta, when he is led away), but they will fall unto their knees before their fathers (II 14; VII 680) - two parallel asymmetric acts that contrast well with Jeronimus' and Leonard's symmetric falling unto their knees before each other.

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[7] Think of Octave in what is perhaps the greatest film of all times, Jean Renoir's *La Règle du jeu.*

Lucietta could never think to escape with a lover chosen by herself, because she lives almost as a prisoner in her father's house (a life form Henrich ascribes to Spanish women). When her father considers putting her into a monastery to punish her for behavior, he is absolutely serious, while Magdelone was making fun of her husband when she told him that her parents brought her up like in a monastery. (Her recollection of her juvenile enjoyments in I 4 corresponds to Margarita's memories in I 1, but need not point to a direct influence, since such remembrances are both psychologically natural and dramatically plausible.) Neither Lucietta nor her step-mother are allowed to enjoy the carnival and see comedies (I 1), while Leonard encourages Leonora to go to the masquerade (even if he later has his qualms about having been too permissive). Lunardo's severity corresponds rather to that of Jeronimus, but the latter is outwitted by his son and particularly by Henrich. Lucietta, however, has no servant, and her step-mother is a dubious ally. Still, it is the carnival that makes it possible for Felippetto to mask himself and to come to Lunardo's house; in both comedies the carnival has the effect of bringing people together who otherwise could not meet. The differences partly have to do with the different national cultures, but even more important is the class aspect; for Lunardo, Maurizio, Canciano and Simon are not representatives of the average Venetians of their time. The morale of the drama is, thus, outdated, as Goldoni himself recognized already in 1787 (*Mémoires* II 34; I 393). His heroes are themselves fully aware of the fact that they are regarded as »salvadeghi« by their wives (I 5; VII 640 and III 1; VII 681). Even after they have finally consented to the marriage, they still refuse to invite also Felice's cicisbeo, Count Riccardo, to the wedding dinner, and Felice repeats her complaints about »sta rusteghezza, sto salvadegume«: »Ve farà esser rabiosi, odiosi, malcontenti, e universalmente burlai.« (III 5; VII 695)[8]

With the exception of Canciano, the only ›cittadino‹ in the drama, the ›rusteghi‹ are, despite their acquisition of a certain wealth, of backward provenance, as Padoan has shown by analyzing their last names (see Padoan 2001, 154). Leonard and Jeronimus, on the other hand, are, first, Lutherans, who several times express their religious feelings, while such feelings are completely absent in Goldoni's text.[9] They also belong to a higher social rank, even if both the Venetian and the Danish father give a considerable dowry and inheritance respectively to their daughters and thus have a strong business interest in the interaction. But in Goldoni's drama the issue is mentioned quite early (I 5; VII 638f.), while in Holberg's comedy it is conceded only at the end with feelings of repentance on the side of Leonard, who believes he has driven his daughter into death (III 11; III 445). We have already seen that Holberg masterfully first opposes the two fathers and then lets the differences between them appear less impressive than they seemed at first sight: when challenged in his honor, Leonard does not behave better than Jeronimus, even if the fear of having lost his daughter at the end reawakens his nobler instincts. Goldoni is even more artful by introducing four characters, who, even if they are all more similar among themselves than Holberg's two personae,[10] still are shaded as unmistakably different: Lunardo by his desire to exert power over other human beings; the widower Maurizio, who cautiously suggests an encounter between the spouses before the wedding (I 5; VII 638), by his pride in his limited pleasures; Simon, who even resents a visit by his wife's relatives, by his solitary rudeness; Cancian, the one least fitting into the group, by an awareness of the superiority of his wife, who artfully plays with him.[11] Goldoni knows that persons of similar social status and similar character may become quite different due to their spouses. In his *Mémoires* he writes:

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[8] The last attribute has to be read reflexively as an allusion to the result of Goldoni's comedy, which makes this type of people ridiculous. Also the last sentence of the drama makes sense both within the literary universe as well as in relation to the audience of the representation. Other reflexive passages - allusions to the comedy played within the drama, exactly analogous to Henrich's final remarks - are found in II 11 (VII 676) and II 13 (VII 681). They are spoken by Count Riccardo and Felice respectively, the two most enlightened figures of the play. One shall not object that the category of reflexivity is a later imputation, alien to Goldoni. In a note to the Pasquali edition of 1762 Goldoni writes to Felice's remark »Eh, chi l'ha ordenà, no xe alocco«: »Qui l'autore parla di se stesso, che non si scorda ciò di cui ha parlato«.

[9] This is true in general of his work; see Dazzi 1957, 207: »Escluso dal suo teatro ogni riferimento, anche esteriore, alla religione ...«

> Ce sont quatre Bourgeois de la ville de Venise, du même état, de la même fortune, et tous les quatre du même caractere, hommes difficiles, farouches, qui suivent les usages de l'ancien tems, et détestent les modes, les plaisirs, et les sociétés du siecle.
> Cette conformité de caractere, au lieu de répandre la monotonie dans la Piece, forme un tableau tout-a-fait nouveau et fort plaisant; car chacun d'eux se montre avec des nuances particulieres, et j'ai prouvé par cette expérience, que les caracteres sont inépuisables. [...]
> Les femmes, par exemple, contribuent infiniment à radoucir la rudesse de leurs maris, ou à les rendre plus ridicules. (II 34; I 392)

This indeed is the main difference between Holberg's and Goldoni's comedies. While the former grants in good *commedia dell'arte* tradition a decisive role to the servants, they are conspicuously absent in Goldoni's play. What he offers instead, are the activities of the three wives (see Fido 1977, 41f.). Again, their differences are remarkable. Margarita is the weakest character - she vies with her step-daughter, she is inconsistent in her choices, and she never tries to resist Lunardo's impositions. Marina is more courageous; she sincerely wants to help her nephew Felippetto. But when he is discovered in Lunardo's house, she is utterly helpless (II 14; VII 681). One could compare these two women with Magdelone, whose rebellion against her husband is limited to small lies; when they are discovered, she immediately gives in.[12] The real heroine in Goldoni's play is Felice, the most intelligent and self-assured of the personae, whose emancipation is manifested also by her having a cicisbeo. It is she, who organizes Felippetto's and Count Riccardo's masked visit; and she herself comes masked, thus suggesting a more complex identity, to Lunardo's house (II 8; VII 670). She has traits of that type of person in a drama who fulfills a role analogous to that of a stage director, since he or she organizes the action of the other people; Shakespeare's Prospero is the most famous example. But the difference is that Felice fails in her attempt, because Count Riccardo comes out from his hiding place when his character is abused; for he, too, is picky about his honor.

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[10] They all hate modern freedom: »E tuto xe causa la libertà« (II 5; VII 663).

[11] See particularly I 9 (VII 646ff.), but also the way how she silences him, to the utter surprise of his friends, in III 2 (VII 685f.).

[12] Holberg also knows stronger women. Lisbed's mother Magdelone in *Erasmus Montanus*, for example, insists on the rights of a mother, and when her authoritarian husband Jeronimus claims that a father is always more than a mother, she disagrees: »For nobody can doubt that I am her mother, but that you - but I do not want to say more, for I am getting upset.« (»Thi at jeg er hendes Moer, derom kand ingen tvile; men om I - ja jeg vil ikke sige meer, thi jeg ivrer mig.« III 6, III 35). One feels Strindberg's *Fadren* lurking in the background of this remark.

Felice's greatness consists now in the fact that she does not resign herself to having been defeated, but assumes, together with Count Riccardo (III 2; VII 688), responsibility for the havoc she has wreaked upon the young couple. She decides to speak frankly and openly with the ›rusteghi‹. The courage she musters when in the decisive scene III 2 she enters the four lions' den is remarkable. Canciano, under peer pressure by his friends, even threatens her physically,[13] but she insists on reciprocal respect as basis of every marriage: »Son vostra muggier; me podè comandar, ma no me vôi lassar strapazzar. Mi no ve perdo el respeto a vu, e vu no me l'avè da perder a mi. E dopo che sè mio mario, no m'avè mai più parlà in sta maniera.« (III 2; VII 685) After having silenced him, she addresses the other two men, showing a remarkable perspicacity with regard to their character differences and warning them against creating discord between Canciano and herself. She appeals to the Golden Rule, which, however, is not at all linked to the Gospel, but seems to function as a principle of inner-worldly morality.[14] »Quel che no voressi che i altri fasse con vu, gnanca vu coi altri no l'avè da far.« She then concedes her responsibility in what has happened, even if artfully involving also the other two wives, and recognizes that she will judge herself according to right reason: »Se gh'ho torto, me darè torto; e se gh'ho rason, me dare rason.« She then defends the principle that spouses must meet before they marry in order to find out whether or not they like each other and says that also Margarita thought so, but did not have the courage to act accordingly. The wives behaved appropriately, and Felice's intentions were pure: »Mi ho operà per bon cuor.« It is not difficult to find in Felice's speech the basic features of modern ethics: the principle of autonomy of reason, the courage and willingness to assume responsibility, the intentionalist point of view, the idea of reciprocal respect as an emanation of a secularized Golden Rule - ideas which will find its most complex expression in Kant's ethics - fit very well with the modern postulate that marriage must be based on consensus and even love among the spouses. The idea for which Felice fights corresponds exactly to the means she uses.

The pathos of reason in *I Rusteghi* detracts from its dramaticity; for the audience of a comedy prefers inventive intrigues to subtle character studies, not to mention moral sermons. Holberg's comedy is funnier; in Mark Roche's path-breaking typology, it is a comedy of coincidence (the latter term should not be taken as excluding some form of divine guidance),[15] while Goldoni's drama would be, in his terminology, a comedy of reduction. But even more important for Goldoni than ridiculing the ›rusteghi‹ is pointing out that people do not have to be ruled and thwarted by hazard (such as the discovery of Felippetto's forbidden visit). As a representative of Enlightenment, Goldoni thinks that people can take their fate into their own hands. It is almost impossible not to compare Felice with Goethe's Iphigenie, who also rejects intrigue and communicates her plan to Thoas. Of course, Felice has first engaged in an imbroglio and tries now to save a situation seemingly hopeless; she does not sense the profound feeling of love that Iphigenie feels for Thoas. Even in her honest speech she remains somehow manipulative, and certainly ironic, when she imitates, e.g., Lunardo's mannerism. After all, it is a comedy, not a tragedy or drama of reconciliation. Her aside »I ho messi in sacco, ma con rason« (III 2; VII 688) is typical of her: She sees herself in a situation of struggle and never entrusts herself completely to the decision-making of the male world, as Iphigenie does, but she thinks herself justified by reason in behaving as she does. And indeed, Thoas is a man of another dignity than the ›rusteghi‹. Still, Felice and Iphigenie are two of the greatest symbols of the Enlightenment belief in reason and its capacity of taming wildness. Close-minded Venetians as well as barbaric Scythians can be swayed by the charm of communicative reason, which will achieve more than all the intrigues of strategic rationality. As Kant did not understand, but as both Goldoni and Goethe represent in their dramas, such a charming reason, which rejects both violence and fraud, is expressed best by a female character. Goldoni speaks in his *Mémoires* of difficult husbands and wishes them wives who resemble Félicité (II 34; I 394) - in the French version the name tells us even more explicitly that it is reason that builds up happiness.

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[13] On domestic violence in Goldoni, including also our comedy, see Günsberg 2001, 86ff.

[14] On the debates of the early 18th century about a morality not based on religion, see Israel 2006, 663-696. Israel's two path-breaking books will be the standard work on Enlightenment for decades to come.

[15] See the analysis of *Mascarade* (which is compared with *Leonce und Lena*) in Roche 1998, 14f.

III.

If one looks at the particular shape of the genres in European literary history, one finds that the type of comedy inaugurated in the fourth century BC has remained astonishingly constant more than 2000 years. In his important study of the comic, Horn distinguishes three phases in the history of the genre: the Old Comedy, preserved only in Aristophanes' dramas; the comedy from Menander up into the 20th century; and the modern absurd comedy of authors like Ionesco and Beckett. He rightly claims that this modern comedy is more similar to the Aristophanic type than to the New Comedy (see Horn 1988, 265-280). His tripartition is fundamentally correct. However, one should add that some features of modern comedy appear already in the few Romantic comedies of the last decade of the 18th and the first decades of the 19th century. Tieck's *Der gestiefelte Kater*, e.g., is more a drama about the public's reaction to the theater than about what its title suggests - not very different from Pirandello's *Ciascuno a suo modo*, even if without the dramatic power of the latter that results from the connection between the two strands. Romanticism contributed to the downfall of the New Comedy-like drama not only by its revolt against realistic constraints and its continuous violations of the mimetic illusion; extremely important was the discovery of a new concept of love. This discovery can be traced at least back to Shakespeare, who in fact breaks several of the conventions of the new comedy and was therefore loved by the Romantics and Büchner, while Holberg ignored him and Goldoni respected him from afar (V 1018-1020). But Shakespeare's comedies still end in weddings, and he clearly shares the belief of his time in the indissolubility of marriage. Romantic love, on the other hand, becomes a far more complex affair than one that could be settled by a simple marriage; a wedding is no longer an ending that settles a tension and elicits pure joy. The more profound the love, the deeper the pain, the stronger the desire for death - this new characteristic renders love a topic problematic for a comedy. Tristan and Isolde are not characters that fit into that genre, even if Isolde had never married Marke.[16]

Of all German Romantic comedies probably the only one that has survived on stage is Georg Büchner's *Leonce und Lena*. (One will add *Der zerbrochne Krug*, if one counts Kleist as a Romantic.) This is amazing, since Büchner is usually regarded as the German author who did most to overcome Romanticism. It does not come as a surprise that, when Büchner was discovered posthumously, *Leonce und Lena* was widely neglected up to the second half of the 19th century. Naturalism could be inspired by *Woyzeck*, not by our comedy. Indeed: If *Woyzeck* and *Leonce und Lena* had been preserved as anonymous texts, I do not think that a critic stating that they are the work of the same author would have met with success, for the world-views behind them seem widely at variance. One way of bridging their difference is to say that *Leonce und Lena* is a persiflage of Romantic comedy. This is doubtless true, but the problem is that self-parody is one of the basic features of Romanticism. Tieck, Brentano, and obviously Heine, and outside Germany Kierkegaard and Gogol, know full well - at least as long as they remain great artists and avoid the temptation of becoming bigoted - that their new form of sensibility has a tendency to become comic, and therefore they themselves make fun of it. This capacity of self-irony, on the other hand, makes them become aware that they are really extraordinary individuals, and so it may re-enforce their tendency to look into themselves. The oscillation between depression and megalomania is a basic feature of the Romantic subjectivity; and thus the elements of self-irony in Büchner's comedy are not very different from its closest model, Alfred de Musset's *Fantasio*.[17] Even the social satire is not alien to Musset (think of I 3); but his Bavarian king is a decent person, while Büchner makes only fun of King Peter and his court. The scene with the peasants in III 2 has a peculiar flavor pointing to the co-author of *Der Hessische Landbote* and is more rooted in immediate historical reality than Musset's drama, namely the wedding of prince Ludwig of Hessen-Darmstadt with princess Mathilde of Bavaria in 1833.

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[16] A remarkable criticism of a pre-figuration of Romantic love can be found in Holberg's *De usynlige*. While Leander is right in idealizing his invisible lady, his servant Harleqvin, who breaks with Colombine in order to love a masked lady because he finds normal love without mystery too boring (I 3, II 2), is cruelly abused by an old and ugly woman and obliged to marry his earlier fiancée under humiliating conditions. Holberg teaches that romantic ideals, which are traced back to Spain, may be good for the higher, but certainly not for the lower, classes. The Danish term is ›Romansk‹ (I 5; III 233) or ›Spansk‹ (I 1; III 224 and III 6; III 253). - In Goldoni, the Cavaliere di Ripafratta in *La locandiera* might have Romantic inklings; Mirandolina certainly does not.

[17] The intertextual allusions to Musset, but also to Goethe, Jean Paul, Tieck and Brentano are legion; the love scene has aptly been called by Dedner (1987) a »Zitat-Furioso« (170). Not only Büchner, but also Lena is literarily educated (II1; I 113).

Not only the tendency to self-mockery is implicit in Romanticism, but also Büchner's interest in a character like Woyzeck is influenced by Romanticism, as much as his treatment is different. The psychopath of humble origins would not have been regarded by Goethe, even in his *Sturm und Drang* time, as a legitimate subject for a tragedy; while Romanticism becomes aware of abysses of the human soul and society that earlier times had preferred to overlook. The ways in which one can react to this new discovery are manifold: They encompass both a new form of religiosity, no longer based primarily on reason, as well as atheism; Wackenroder and Schopenhauer are both Romantics. Büchner's Payne in III 1 of *Danton's Tod* has nothing to do with the historical Thomas Paine, but much to do with Schopenhauer: »Nur der Verstand kann Gott beweisen, das Gefühl empört sich dagegen. Merke dir es, Anaxagoras, warum leide ich? Das ist der Fels des Atheismus.« (I 58) Suffering can be limited to a brief amount of time. It becomes more problematic when it is extended, and even more so, when, as is probably unique to humans, someone is aware of its future extension. Boredom can probably be defined as a feeling of pain caused by the consciousness of a pure extension of time that will not be filled by anything intrinsically valuable.[18] Since it is less painful than other forms of suffering, it can become an appropriate subject of a comedy, and indeed *Leonce and Lena* is fundamentally a comedy about boredom (I 1; I 96).[19] Leonce will answer Rosetta's question whether he loves her out of boredom: »Nein, ich habe Langeweile, weil ich dich liebe. Aber ich liebe meine Langeweile wie dich. Ihr seid eins.« (I 3; I 101) Even God is supposed to have created the world out of boredom (III 3; I 127).

As already mentioned, *Leonce und Lena*'s immediate predecessor is Musset's *Fantasio*. It makes perfect sense that the latter's drama avoids the happy ending of a marriage: Elsbeth is saved from the necessity of marrying the despicable prince of Mantua; but Fantasio, who has brought this about and who has features both of Leonce and of Valerio, is not even willing to become the princess's buffoon. »J'aime ce métier plus que tout autre; mais je ne puis faire aucun métier.« (II 7; 135) Fantasio is constitutionally unable to love, because he is no longer religious and knows that love presupposes religion: »L'amour n' existe plus, mon cher ami. La religion, sa nourrice, a les mamelles pendants comme une vieille bourse au fond de laquelle il y a un gros sou.« (I 2; 112) Büchner's drama, on the other hand, continues the millenary tradition of comedy by ending with a wedding. It is only one, though, and not two as in Holberg and in many other comedies (Clemens Brentano's *Ponce de Leon*, the other model of *Leonce und Lena*, ends with five); and indeed it is hard to conceive how Valerio could ever marry Lena's governess. What justifies Büchner's change with regard to Musset?

Leonce and Lena are royalty, and as such they would have not been regarded by earlier comedians as proper objects of a comedy. As far as I can see, classical tragedy has dealt mainly with the *renunciation* of love by a prince for the reason of state (as in Racine's *Bérénice*). Before the rise of the romantic ideal of love, the mere necessity of marrying a person one does not love would hardly have been experienced by a prince as something unbearable, the political importance of the matter being obvious and the male prince being always allowed to keep a mistress. In Musset and Büchner, however, it is felt as intolerable. Leonce and Lena decide to flee in order to avoid a marriage imposed on them. The difference from Leander and Leonora is that the latter protest only *after* they have fallen in love with someone else; Leonce und Lena have not found someone else (Leonce has just sent Rosetta away). Still, Lena refuses:

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[18] I do not know any Greek text describing boredom. The first analysis can be found in Lucretius (3.1053ff.).

[19] Poschmann argues plausibly for his decision to follow mainly Ludwig Büchner's, and not Karl Gutzkow's, edition (I 586-600).

> O Gott, ich könnte lieben, warum nicht? Man geht ja so einsam und tastet nach einer Hand, die einen hielte, bis die Leichenfrau die Hände auseinandernähme und sie Jedem über der Brust faltete. Aber warum schlägt man einen Nagel durch zwei Hände, die sich nicht suchten? (I 4; I 109)

The religious metaphoric is continued by the governess, who compares Lena to a sacrificial lamb; but when Lena, inspired by the »Rede des toten Christus« in Jean Paul's *Siebenkäs*, interprets the world as a crucified savior, she uses religious language to subvert religious feelings of harmony with the world. But already in the next scene she praises the world as beautiful - an inconsistency not rare in romanticism, which tends to build generic statements about the world on passing moods. No less contradictory are Leonce's assertions. On the one hand, he makes fun of ideals when he meets Valerio for the first time: »Unglücklicher, Sie scheinen auch an Idealen zu laborieren.« (I 1; I 97) On the other hand, he confesses having the ideal of a woman, even if at the same time he subverts it by juxtaposing infinite beauty with infinite lack of spirit: »Ich habe das Ideal eines Frauenzimmers in mir und muß es suchen. Sie ist unendlich schön und unendlich geistlos.« (II 1; I 112) Leonce does not believe in ideals, but cannot live without them; therefore he expresses and scorns them simultaneously. It is difficult to interpret Büchner's own attitude to the social utopia sketched at the end differently: He knows both that it cannot be realized and that humans need political imagination. Perhaps one can compare his stance with Niels Bohr's famous answer whether he believed in the power of the horseshoe a visitor found hanging in his house: »Of course not, but the great thing is that it helps even if you don't believe in it.«

When Leonce meets Lena, his melancholy attitude attracts her. »Es kommt mir ein entsetzlicher Gedanke, ich glaube, es gibt Menschen, die unglücklich sind, unheilbar, bloß weil sie *sind*.« (II 3; I 117) The pain of such an existence seems somehow to render a savior necessary. Lena had earlier asked the governess: »Mein Gott, mein Gott, ist es denn wahr, daß wir uns selbst erlösen müssen mit unserem Schmerz?« (I 4; I 110) Now a third possibility seems to present itself to her: neither Christ nor one's own self, but the lover is the savior necessary. Lena's and Leonce's dreamlike encounter celebrates the Romantic connection of love and death and triggers in Leonce the desire to drown himself. What in Holberg was only pretended, because Leonora was *not* allowed to marry the man she loved, is almost implemented in Büchner, because Leonce *has* encountered the woman of his dreams: »Jetzt stirb. Mehr ist unmöglich.« (II 4; I 118) But Valerio saves his master from this lieutenant's romanticism, and Leonce is soon out of the mood to repeat his act. On the contrary, he decides to marry the woman, whose name is unknown to him.

Since King Peter wants to have the wedding planned for the day celebrated even if the spouses are absent, he is willing to have it done *in effigie* when Valerio comes in with two masked figures whom he declares to be automata. The last scene describes various threats to stable personal identity. First, there is Peter's empty idealism that refuses to see reality as it is, but subjects it to his own whims. In II 1 he had already thrown around philosophical concepts and found in Fichte's »Ich bin ich« an answer to his tormenting doubt whether it is really he or somebody else who speaks;[20] now he wants to have his ideas implemented at every cost. But while the two persons brought in for him are only images that have to allow him to be happy for twelve hours, Valerio describes them in opposite terms: they are machines, and as such no more real persons than if they were fancies in Peter's mental life. Valerio even declares himself an automaton. Nothing in his inner life corresponds to what he says:

> [...] daß ich vielleicht der dritte und merkwürdigste von beiden bin, wenn ich eigentlich selbst recht wüßte, wer ich wäre, worüber man übrigens sich nicht wundern dürfte, da ich selbst gar nichts von dem weiß, was ich rede, ja auch nicht einmal weiß, daß ich es nicht weiß, so daß es höchst wahrscheinlich ist, daß man mich nur so reden läßt, und es eigentlich nichts als Walzen und Windschläuche sind, die das Alles sagen. (III 3; I 135)

Even the love behavior of the automata is determined by their inner mechanism; and there is no concomitant mental life. The third threat besides the idealist and the materialist could be called the social. (It will later be analyzed in tiresome detail by Pirandello.) The roles that we are obliged to play alienate us from our true self (see Reddick 1994, 215). Valerio, who is afraid of being peeled like an onion, assumes an identity at His Majesty's request, but does not want to be confronted with different images of himself. »Aber, meine Herren, hängen Sie alsdann die Spiegel herum und verstecken Sie Ihre blanken Knöpfe etwas und sehen Sie mich nicht so an, daß ich mich in Ihren Augen spiegeln muß, oder ich weiß wahrhaftig nicht mehr, was ich eigentlich bin.« (I 125) Masks are apt symbols of our social roles, and as in Holberg and Goldoni, the lovers recognize each other when they take off their masks. Büchner's lovers, however, had first met without masks; so the question arises what new information they could get when they unmask themselves. Well, they get it through others' reactions to them. Leonce is recognized by the court as the prince, and the governess clarifies Lena's identity. Everything seems to dissolve in harmony, since the king abdicates in favor of Leonce, leaving room for the playful arcadian utopia at the end, which is analogous to similar visions at the end of some of Aristophanes' comedies. Viëtor writes:

> Die alte Metapher vom Leben als Spiel und den Menschen als Marionetten in der Hand eines unbegreiflichen Geschicks, diese Metapher, die Büchner wohlvertraut ist, schimmert auch in seiner Komödie durch. Aber ihr pessimistischer Gehalt löst sich hier auf in den hellen, gläubigen Klängen eines Mozartischen Opern-Finales. (Viëtor 1949, 184)

One must have strong doubts about this interpretation, which would be more appropriate for Holberg than for Büchner.[21] For Leonce and Lena differ markedly in their response to the discovery that they have found on their own the spouse who had been chosen for them for political reasons. Leonce speaks of flight into paradise, but Lena counters: »Ich bin betrogen.« Leonce echoes it, suggesting an identity in feeling which is deceptive; for while Lena then speaks of coincidence (Zufall), Leonce mentions providence (Vorsehung). The servants' reactions are similarly different: Valerio laughs and hopes that the lovers will honor chance and like each other, while the governess is touched by seeing her romantic fantasies fulfilled. But the most interesting trait of the last exchanges is Lena's silence; after »Ich bin betrogen« und »O Zufall!« she is completely silent. The stage direction says that she reacts to Leonce's fanciful questions by leaning on him and shaking the head. There are different ways of reading this silence: on the one hand, Lena generally does not speak much - much less than Rosetta; and clearly Büchner admires women whose soul does not need reflection but radiates natural grace and strength.[22] On the other hand, the interpreter cannot ignore what her last words are: she is not at all happy at the discovery of the harmony between parental and personal choice. Speaking of fraud, as she does, is inappropriate, for nobody has organized the outcome. It is tempting to link her feeling of unease to Valerio's tale about the automata. By taking off their masks Leonce and Lena have proven that they are living human beings - but at the same time, Lena has discovered that their flight from heteronomy has led them back to the position from which they wanted to escape. Freedom proves to be an illusion. The lovers may no longer be automata, but they are puppets in a story not staged by an astute mind (such as Sarmiento in Brentano's *Ponce de Leon*, who in I 18 appears himself dressed up as an automaton), not even by divine providence, but by chance.[23] Lena is too much in need of love to do anything else than lean on Leonce, but her shaking of the head shows that she does not share the childish political visions of Leonce and Valerio. For Leonce imagines his newly acquired power as the right to play with his subjects as with puppets: »Nun Lena, siehst du jetzt, wie wir die Taschen voll haben, voll Puppen und Spielzeug?« (III 3; I 128). He dreams of repeating the wedding again, obviously because, even while he abhors, he also needs and desires boredom. Lena's silent »nein« to all these proposals has a sadness in it that reminds of Alkmene's famous »Ach« at the end of Kleist's *Amphitryon*.

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[20] Leonce does not doubt that he is the one who speaks, but he would like to be another person (I 1; I 96).

[21] They were already uttered by Fink (1961) and by Benn (1976, 169).

There is a gap in sensibility between Leonce and Lena that does not bode well for their marriage. And this is all the more tragic, as in Büchner's cruel world love is the only hope for finding meaning and a stable identity. If even this hope is shattered, everything becomes dark. The greater the burden of expectation with regard to Romantic love, the more cruel the disillusionment when estrangement follows it. In Holberg's comedy, despite all tensions the generations are reintegrated into the social order; the young people may marry whom they love and can at the same time admire their parents who, even if they violated their autonomy, chose so wisely for them. In Goldoni, the act of reintegration is the result of the conscious effort and appeal to reason by an intelligent and courageous woman. In Büchner, the final harmony has a bitter aftertaste: while one of the spouses now wants to play the puppeteer himself, the other is profoundly humiliated by seeing even her most personal choice as part of a soulless mechanism. She has no other choice than leaning on Leonce, but she cannot nod assent to a world-order that mocks the human desire for freedom and to a husband who plans to do the same in his puny kingdom.

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[22] Think of Lenz' description of Friederike Brion in Büchner's *Lenz* (I 240).

[23] Cf. Büchner's famous letter to Wilhelmine Jaeglé of January 1834 (II 377): »Der Einzelne nur Schaum auf der Welle, die Größe ein bloßer Zufall, die Herrschaft des Genies ein Puppenspiel ...« On Büchner's social determinism, see Glebke 1995, 54ff.

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