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Bracketing Irony: Schleiermacher's Heterochrony[1]

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On November 1, 1797, the morning of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher's twenty-first birthday, a surprise party was held at the home of the (future) Schlegels, Friedrich and Dorothea. Attending the party were Schleiermacher's closest friends, who had decided to force the surprised—and possibly insulted—honoree of the party to publish a book in which he would publicly proclaim his thoughts aired during endless discussions in the salons of Dorothea Veit and Henrietta Herz, and at the home of Rahel Levin-Varnhagen (later von Ense). According to a predetermined sign, the party was cut short abruptly, whereupon Friedrich Schlegel accosted Schleiermacher and demanded, "You must write a book." Schlegel refused to relent until Schleiermacher pledged to follow through.

A clearer understanding of what really happened in that informal yet highly coercive moment will reveal that it may well have been one of the most significant and determinative events in the history of hermeneutics and phenomenology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[2] First, however, it is necessary to clarify what I believe to have been the contribution or role of Schleiermacher in German Romantic circles of the last quarter of the eighteenth century. With the publication of the book *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, Schleiermacher's image as a vehement proponent of Romantic thought was radically transformed. In retrospect, he emerges—despite his physical presence in the salons—as having viewed himself not as part of that group of intellectuals, but as one who sought to change it fundamentally from within.

In this book, which he was forced to write, he chose to re-establish Christianity as the foundation of hermeneutics, as it was the only crucial subject that the Romanticists refused to discuss. Schleiermacher was therefore unveiled as an earnest advocate of religion (Herrnhutian Protestantism, to be precise), addressing its detractors who viewed

[1] I would like to thank my colleague and friend Ms. Jessica Bonn for her help with the editing and translation of this article and for her sharp eye and enlightening comments.
[2] Jack Forstman, foreword to Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

themselves as elevated, while using their reasoning and the critical underpinnings of their philosophy to undermine their collective *Geist* from the inside. This was no sweeping *ad hominem* maneuver, since it was not directed at a particular person. Quite to the contrary, he addressed his claims to no one, reducing the salons he had been frequenting, with their physical attributes and spatial and temporal predicates, to "cultured despisers" rather than individuals, annulling them just as they had annulled him. In so doing, he was attempting to turn the physical salon into a textual product—what those who so aggressively demanded that he set his ideas into writing did not do themselves.

The collective coercive act may have been viewed by some of the birthday party guests as somewhat ironic; it is likely that even Schleiermacher viewed this act, at least initially, as such, and saw himself as the victim of a clique of cynics. And yet, Schleiermacher was not the only victim. Every person at that party was ultimately a victim of Schlegel's irony, since in every ironic act, as I hope to elucidate in what follows, all of those present, to the very last, become its victims.

We might have chosen to begin demonstrating Schleiermacher's role in the Romantic circles with Diderot's (1713-1784) *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1758). This paradox, as formulated by Diderot and his successors (Konstantin Sergeyevich Alekseyev Stanislavsky, 1863-1938, and his student Yevgeny Bagrationovich Vakhtangov, 1883-1922), was developed as a practical tool for the actor seeking to elicit an affective response[3] and audience involvement. Diderot understood that in order to bring about a significant emotive reaction among varied audiences, the actor must refrain from making the spontaneous, perpetual visible gestures and dynamic emotional expressions that are critical qualities of humanness. In other words, if the actor wishes to prompt the spectators, he must remain immobile, binding himself with fasteners of consciousness to avoid even the smallest movement. By way of his own suspension, he activates these same reactions in the audience.

This paradoxical posture epitomizes Schleiermacher's self-appointed role within the group of hermeneutists of the late eighteenth century. Although he initially began frequenting the salons out of a genuine desire to join as a full participant, his inherent differentness—a blend of strict Herrnhutian (Moravian Protestantism)[4] conservatism in the form of a very special type of exegetical irony—was a kind of suspension of self. Although it is questionable when he himself became aware of it, it must have been apparent to his friends when they demanded—in an act that could be understood as simultaneously supportive and aggressive, even ostracizing—that he finally publish his first book.

Schleiermacher's procrastination before publishing the book that was originally meant to reflect the views of his friends cannot be viewed as

[3] Affective memory is a term coined by Théodule-Armand Ribot and adapted by Stanislavski as a rule for theatrical practice for overcoming the paradox of the actor so that it can become a useful aid for actors on stage.

[4] The Moravian Church (Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine) is an evangelical Protestant denomination of which Schleiermacher's father was an adherent, founded in 1457 in Kunvald, Bohemia. Its official name is *Unitas Fratrum.*

coincidental. The somewhat violent act of his friend, Schlegel, surely brought the dissonance of his presence as an Orthodox Protestant in the group into relief, and made him fully conscious of his role, if he had not been so before. Nine months passed before he took pen to paper. The composition of his speeches addressed to the "cultured despisers" of religion took an additional eight months, and on April 15, 1799, he wrote to Henriette Herz that he had finally delivered a "decisive strike to religion," the poetic irony of which will shortly become apparent.[5]

Even a cursory reading of this brilliant book privies the reader to the nature of the *coup de grâce*[6] delivered by Schleiermacher to those who viewed him as part of their philosophical movement. In his forceful exposition on Christianity, Schleiermacher paraphrases the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians regarding the existential necessity of the Christian religion for every person, including those of his friends who held all religion in contempt. The blow was particularly harsh since Schleiermacher's book made a most sophisticated use of the very tools of cultural criticism developed by his enlightened friends in order to breathe life into the question of religion—particularly Protestantism, as developed in the most "impressionist" of the Protestant churches, the Moravian Herrnhut Church—imbuing it with new momentum and visibility.

Schleiermacher uses the rhetorical strategy of ironic Socratic Elenchus in order to enfold the "cultured despisers" into the ranks of the church, against their will and without protest. His *coup de grâce* emerges as an act of appropriation, no less violent than Schlegel's, carried out by an ostensibly ordinary man trying to make an honest living as a hospital chaplain and as a tutor for the family of Count Dohna-Schlobitten in eastern Prussia.[7]

Schleiermacher's maneuver, following the public challenge by his colleagues from the Romantic hermeneutical salons to "convert" and declare his allegiance to them, was, in my opinion, a principled act of rebellion. In order to understand the complexities and multiple ramifications of the growing consciousness that led up to the writing of what in the eyes of many is the most important of Schleiermacher's works, we must first elucidate the almost synonymous relationship between the concepts of irony and forgiveness. Schleiermacher was one of the few to discern this etymological-hermeneutic coupling and was among its most important modern formulators. One of the first acts in his composition on religion is the public act of forgiveness by Schleiermacher the clergyman, initially vis-à-vis himself, and subsequently vis-à-vis his friends who scorned the Church and its adherents, whom they viewed as ignoramuses. Schleiermacher's treatise drew his unwitting friends—victims of his irony—back to Christianity, outside of

[5] Although the statement can be understood as ironic, it is also plainly true, for as we will see below, while Schleiermacher's treatise re-injected the Church into hermeneutics, it was also to become a stand-alone hermeneutics, which could be practiced *ex-ecclesiaste*. For my understanding of this irony as well as many other subtleties of the text, I am indebted to John Oman's brilliant translation.

[6] Every possible understanding of "death blow" is valid in this context: out of mercy, out of cruelty; a finishing or decisive stroke (of rhetorical or ideological motive), quietus or defeat.

[7] In addition, Schleiermacher preached regularly, chiefly on ethical themes, and continued his philosophical study with a focus on the question of human freedom.

which, in the words of Saint Cyprian, there is no salvation (*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*). Schleiermacher's book is based on a preliminary, *a priori* assumption that just as forgiveness is not possible outside the realm of religion, neither is interpretation, and, by extension, all other discursive activity. In Schleiermacher's view, it is impossible to properly understand any discourse outside of the framework of Christianity and without Divine providence.[8]

A Discourse of Immunity

In order to demonstrate the impossibility of his friends' hermeneutics, Schleiermacher invented a new discourse during the months that passed between the party and when he began writing. Schleiermacher's new discourse was characterized by immunity, in the sense used by both Schleiermacher and Schlegel, i.e., immunity from the imposition of any traditional interpretative limitation on a key concept in a discourse that the two developed in any realm of knowledge: religious, aesthetic, ethical, folkloric, historical or scientific. This immunity corresponds to an early etymological connotation of incomprehensibility, a sense that is distinct from its usage in modern parlance—namely, the impossibility of interpreting and reaching a valid understanding in one of the various fields of knowledge, whether of a word or complete work.

The newborn secular hermeneutics, in Schleiermacher's view, too closely resembled its stepmother, the hierarchical exegetics of the Catholic Church, in that it assigned interpretive authority to a privileged group of individuals rather than to a particular method. Schleiermacher was baffled by his friends' hermeneutical praxis: the "cultured despisers," in their collective act of interpretation, not only failed to rebel against the limitations of strict traditional exegetical discourse, but did not suggest an ordered and coherent method of their own (while demanding this of Schleiermacher). Exchanging dogma for a hermeneutics defined by group affiliation, they effectively instituted an imitation of its practices that was quasi-religious. Romantic hermeneutics were distinct from Protestant and perhaps even Catholic exegetics only in the vociferous derision with which salon-goers railed against the religious institutions, at the same time exchanging them for false enchantments in the form of abandoned and ruined temples (as in, for example, the art of Caspar David Friederich).

One of the most difficult limitations inherent in the secular interpretive process, as Schleiermacher understood it, was the absolute necessity of transcending time as a preliminary step for every interpretive act, known as the *hermeneutic circle*. This problem was a common denominator

[8] During this opportunity, he (subtly) attacks Moses Mendelssohn, the father of two of his friends, salon women, whose philosophy, baseless in Schleiermacher's view (particularly the suggestion to view the Jewish community's process of conversion to Christianity as a secular route to citizenship) planted the seeds of trouble that ultimately led him to write the book. Mendelssohn, I believe, is one of the more concealed members of Schleiermacher's intended audience, and rhetorical tools and idiosyncratic ways of thinking can be identified that Schleiermacher borrows from Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*. I will elaborate on this matter in a separate article.

between Catholic and Protestant exegetics, and it also existed in the scholarly pursuits of traditional Judaism. The quintessential example of the absolute necessity of the interpreters' metamorphosis into a time-transcending entity is the ritual of forgiveness: *penance*, as it is known in Church parlance, or *teshuva* ("returning") in Judaism.

What is it about the ritual of penance—an essentially interpretive process—that gives it the power to invert or retroactively erase a sin that occurred in the past? How can one realign reality and "undo" the act of sin in a manner that will ensure that it never returns, even in the distant future?

The key to these and other related questions relates closely to the critical feature of Schleiermacher's invented hermeneutical discourse: severing the sinner from the bonds of time. This was the forerunner of Husserl's "suspending reality," and the equivalent of ironic "bracketing" in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, as will become clear below. The essence of this ritual of penance that results in severance from the bonds of time is the metamorphosis through which the believer, after confessing his sins, transforms himself into a text, while undertaking a series of activities prescribed to him by the religious institution before which he has confessed.

One of the acts of incarnation into text, often prescribed by various Christian authorities, is a process of epideictic repetition of a particular verse or verses from the liturgy or the New Testament. The goal of repetition is to meld the believer to the text by reciting it incessantly, without pause, until even the text deviates from the limitations of form (beginning, middle and end) imposed upon every text. In this manner the text is delivered from its diachronic linearism, one of its fundamental characteristics, and becomes one with the person reciting it, a melded, single entity where both individual and text, one might say, are divested of the predicate of "being given in time." During the epideictic process, the believer, who is suspended in a kind of "trance of penance" is essentially sacrificing the repeated text (that chosen for him by the pastor or according to his understanding of catechism) and at the same time, the text is sacrificing the penitent-turned-automaton or the dimly conscious verse-machine. The penitent and the text itself are thus both rendered impervious to interpretation (incomprehensible), as well as lacking cultural boundaries and context, and, above all, lacking a temporal predicate.[9] Given such a state of affairs, a new, improved order can be established, one that defends against the recurrence of sin. This is the understanding of ritual on which Schleiermacher's fascinating move is based.

[9] In the sense of *kairos*, the fullness of time. Paul Tillich describes *kairos* as a crucial component in the believer's transcendence to another level of existence in which his transformation to a textual being is enabled. Tillich designated this other level of being as "*gestalt of compassion*" which lacks the diachronic predicate of time. See Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), xv-xvii. For the importance of Tillich's concept of *kairos* and to the understanding of Modern Hebrew culture criticism and modern Jewish theology, see Moshe Goultschin, *Baruch Kurzweil as a Commentator of Culture* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009), 103-106.

Successive Victims of Ironic Manipulation: Galatians-Romantics-Schleiermacher

At this point I would like to detour from the unfolding story of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and its relationship to the title of this paper, "Bracketing through Irony," to present a sub-text, a bracketed narrative that tells the story of the textual legacy or chain in which "On Religion" is a link.

It is well known that Schleiermacher, in his sermons and other writings, referred heavily to the Pauline epistles. The text underlying the composition, "On Religion," is *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, and the former echoes its predecessor not only in that it, too, is a text arguing for the existential necessity of Christian religion for every person, but in the many ironic devices it employs, a literary affinity that has been addressed in prior scholarship and whose scope exceeds the bounds of the present paper.[10]

One of these devices is the conscious and calculated re-editing of a canonical text for the purpose of skewing the emotive content elicited by the text towards the theological horizon intended by the author. In Paul, this manifests in his misguiding the reader to believe that Jesus did not observe the *mitzvoth* (commandments), when in fact he continued to uphold them fastidiously throughout his life:

> I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; *but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.* But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ (Gal 1, 6-10).

This misrepresentation is continued throughout the Pauline discourse, in which Paul carries out a revolution whose scope and importance regarding the question of the continued observance of the *mitzvoth* by the newly converted Christians cannot be understated.[11]

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[10] The devices, addressed variously in this paper are: (a) multiple simultaneous—and often diametrically opposing—addressees (see note 10, below); (b) the use of irony whose goal is creating "interpretive immunity;" (c) an act of transforming the human into the textual in order to enable a re-editing of one's history/biography; (d) conscious and calculated re-editing of a canonical text for the purpose of skewing the emotive content it elicits towards the theological horizon intended by the author (in the case of *Galatians*, the Jesus text). This might be termed "manipulative editing" without the pejorative connotation; and (e) additional reference to a very particular audience: Jews at various stages of assimilation.

[11] Paul's discourse addresses different and even opposing audiences, each of which hears what Paul intended for it. The Christians that he converted to a compassion-based Christianity without observance of the commandments are strengthened and comforted by his words. The Christians who continued upholding the Jewish commandments see his words as clever rhetoric whose logic has the power of convincing them that in their two-faced religious observance they are achieving the opposite of their original hearts' intentions. Listeners in a state of indecision might find some kind of resolution in his words, or, at least, clarity that their

Schleiermacher, for his part, as explained above, carries out his ironic coup by using secular hermeneutical tools to discredit secular hermeneutics. But the cycle does not end here, as Schleiermacher himself becomes a victim of 'rewriting' perpetrated by his successors: the espousers of Schleiermacher's theological phenomenology and 'sacred' hermeneutics, including his rivals, did with his philosophy and writings as Paul did with the words of Jesus.[12] Dilthey, Husserl and Gadamer[13] relate to Friedrich Schleiermacher as one of the most important figures of the early German Romantic period, yet they undervalue him. This is brought into stark relief by the few occasions on which they tried to bring his texts on religious philosophy and hermeneutics to the center of phenomenological, hermeneutic and aesthetic attention.

Schleiermacher indeed deserved renewed attention and consideration free of prejudice (including in the way that Gadamer defined this terminology as pre-existing knowledge devoid of the pejorative meanings), since he anticipated—even prophesied—almost perfectly, the central line of development of ethical-theological consciousness and the hermeneutic-phenomenological horizon as it in fact developed almost until the end of the twentieth century. Moreover, Schleiermacher succeeded, with the help of crude idioms borrowed from late-enlightenment discourse, in formulating basic concepts that two hundred years later would become most central and useful in the Continental and Anglo-American discourse.[14]

The accepted view of Schleiermacher as a theologian, philologist, and a diligent, thorough, and even important hermeneutical thinker, and at the same time lacking ingenuity, has its roots in Dilthey's harsh critique (despite his scattered praise) of the man who was his spiritual teacher. This cannot be dismissed as a simple case of patricide, since Dilthey's critique was not intended to expose flaws in Schleiermacher's method—or, at least, in my view, this was not his main purpose. Rather, it appears that Dilthey sought to downplay the importance of some of Schleiermacher's original intuitions in order to draw hermeneutical-phenomenological-theological attention away from the metamorphic process by which the interpreter becomes text—with its ramifications for the crude phenomenology that he had already established

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very deliberations are illegitimate and even endanger their existence. Among the "cultured despisers," Schleiermacher, on his part, speaks not only to those who were physically present in the Romantic salons, but also to a Jewish audience represented by the Jewish women now embracing Christianity (and to Moses Mendelssohn—see note 8, above, although Schleiermacher had direct contact only with his daughters). In this way, *On Religion* resembles *Galatians*, as a document that manipulates using an ironic process by skewing important and well-known texts in order to advance their agenda among various readerships or their associated communities.

[12] I have no way of determining if this was the reason that Schleiermacher chose *Galatians* as a rhetorical and theoretical model on which he based his speeches to his detractors, nor do I have evidence to contradict this view of his writings.

[13] To whom we might add Prof. Thomas Pfau, an important contemporary hermeneuticist (see entry on Schleiermacher on Thomas Pfaus' website, http://www.duke.edu/web/secmod/pfau/cv.html).

[14] Even though it would have to borrow, due to its lack of familiarity or mistaken understanding of Schleiermacher's ironic discourse, philosophical tools, manners of introspection and expression from teachings imported from the 1920s from the Orient: India, China, and Japan.

at the turn of the nineteenth century—and divert it to a mainly historiosophic discussion.

Dilthey aspired to place his own claims at the heart of Continental hermeneutic discussion, believing, in contrast to Schleiermacher, that the most urgent question to which all hermeneutic tools available at the time must be applied, was not the question of man,[15] but rather the question of time: the experience of the subject's susceptibility to time, which he referred to as *Erlebnis*.[16] Dilthey, who was unable to accept Schleiermacher's theological solution to the question of being given in time, turned this paradoxical impediment into a building block in the image of the new man he wished to sketch, a person who would be permitted to interpret and be interpreted *extra ecclesiae*. However, he inadvertently brought about a regression in hermeneutical development, for although he defied the Church monopoly on hermeneutical authority, he undid the achievements of Schleiermacher and Schegel's irony whereby the interpreter becomes text by a metamorphic process, with its emphasis on the interpretive process, reassigning it a historiosophic significance, essentially not so different than the authoritarian Church model.

In contrast to Schleiermacher's insight, the accuracy of which became fully apparent only after WWI with Heidegger's first lectures and as Central Europe began facing towards the East, Dilthey believed that a separation must be made—not only for methodological reasons—between the question of man and the question of time. More precisely, he advocated placing a barrier between the science of man (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and the study of history, as in Dilthey's description of the difference between the *Geisteswissenschaften* that we understand, and the science of nature, which we explain. Schleiermacher, in contrast, conjectured that such a separation (although it was almost imperative due to the "limits" of the discourse of his time) was not only artificial, but also fundamentally mistaken and that it, in its turn, created an additional layer of paradox that only deepened the interpretive obstacles that in any case stood in the way of any hermeneutic method.

Dilthey's *Erlebnis* masquerades as a preoccupation with the question of man aimed at solving the hermeneutical circle paradox ostensibly left by Schleiermacher's "reconstitutive" interpretation. In effect, however, it is no more than an attempt at conscious exploitation of the discourse created by Schleiermacher for his own new project, continuing the pattern begun with Paul's revisional rhetoric.

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[15] See Thomas Pfaus's enlightening article, "Immediacy and the Text: Friedrich Schleiermacher's Theory of Style and Interpretation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51 (1990): 51-73.

[16] The etymology of this concept in German culture and in various stages of the development of German language comprises various connotations (all as critical predicates of the subject), of which three are most relevant to our present context: "experience" as a unique or one-time occurrence containing some measure of the extraordinary, which requires a future response or one that brings about an essential change in consciousness; "experiencing" in the present (as in ongoing introspection); and "life experience" as something acquired in the past which continues.

Schleiermacher as a Harbinger of Husserlian *Epoché*

The horizon towards which Schleiermacher aimed all his efforts was the development of a sound hermeneutic method that would constitute no less than a perfect reconstruction of the original generative processes. The ultimate objective of interpretive reconstruction, in my proposed understanding of Schleiermacher, was not merely to find a way to infuse an interpretative result with validity or truth-value or knowledge-value. The original importance that Schleiermacher saw in his hermeneutics was the auto-transcendence of the interpreting subject and of the object of his interpretation. As a kind of auto-apotheosis, its job was to grant the interpreter immunity from the "history of [interpretive] influences" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*, as Gadamer would describe it long after him, similar to our above description of the concept of incomprehensibility) as well as to establish for the interpreter and his interpretation a position beyond time that would enable a melding of his consciousness into that of the brilliant author. However, Schleiermacher recognized that he was not in the "best of worlds," but in this world. He therefore proposed a different, retroactive hermeneutics, an interpretive method conscious of its shortcomings, in which irony partially fulfills what religion could have "easily" enabled. Schleiermacher created an early type of *epoché* (long predating the "bracketing of reality" proposed in Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*) based entirely on the secularized ritual of irony replacing the original interpretive practices of the Church. The brackets for suspending the reality, which he created, were used in his speeches against the despisers of religion in order to teach his secularized friends a lesson, and to take revenge on them for forcing him to develop an extra-ecclesiastical hermeneutic method.[17] However, the voices of the cultured despisers drowned out his own, at least, evidently, until Gadamer's time.[18]

[17] This hermeneutical method in retrospect was therefore forced to make only limited and implicit use of the "orthodox hermeneutics" or traditional exegetical practices. Without taking God into account, Schleiermacher stated in his essay, the hermeneutic discussion was doomed to always losing its way in the darkness of the circle. This well-known paradox was essentially identical to the experience of the interpreter split between the desire to appear as a unique individual and, contrarily, to being swallowed into the experience into which he had been cast without being consulted. For Schleiermacher personally, in his endless salon discussions, the hermeneutic paradox was thus an echo and an ongoing painful reminder of this constant splitting of the subject. The hermeneutical reality as Schleiermacher experienced it rendered the hermeneutic paradox an ongoing painful reminder of this constant splitting of the subject. Schleiermacher was proposing, in his *ex post facto* hermeneutics, the mirror image of the emancipatory philosophical move suggested by Moses Mendelssohn, who intended using deism for bridging dialogue between Protestants and Jews. In directing his words to Protestant Christian readers as well, Schleiermacher seemed to be intending to restore hermeneutical prowess to the Protestants, and even to revive their self-awareness as Christians.

[18] Schleiermacher himself may have been responsible for this, since a large portion of his lectures and ideas were published by his students, in many cases, in the form of lecture summaries (all this until Heinz Kimmerle began his monumental project of collecting and editing all that was written by Schleiermacher himself).

Schleiermachers' Apology: The Opening Brackets

In order to better understand Schleiermacher's use of bracketing, we will consider the initial apology in Schleiermacher's book. This apology was the opening ironic parenthesis used by Schleiermacher to suspend the reality or time paradigms of his various readerships, the essence of his chapters or essays (particularly the second and the fifth chapters) being no more than a rehashing of Protestant Herrnhut dogmatic credo.

Schleiermacher's "First Speech" begins with a veiled reference to the circumstances that led to his writing:

> In your ornamented dwellings, the only sacred things to be met with are the sage maxims of our wise men, and the splendid compositions of our poets. Suavity and sociability, art and science have so fully taken possession of your minds that no room remains for the eternal and holy Being that lies beyond the world. I know how well you have succeeded in making your earthly life so rich and varied, that you no longer stand in need of an eternity. Having made a universe for yourselves, you are above the need of thinking of the Universe that made you. You agreed, I know, that nothing new, nothing convincing can any more be said on this matter, which on every side by sages and seers, and I might add by scoffers and priests, has been abundantly discussed. To priests, least of all, you are inclined to listen. They have long been outcasts for you, and are declared unworthy of your trust, because they like best to lodge in the battered ruins of their sanctuary and cannot, even there, live without disfiguring and destroying it still more. All this I know, and yet, divinely swayed by an irresistible necessity within me, I feel compelled to speak, and cannot take back my invitation that you and none else should listen to me.[19]

Quo Vadis Schleiermacher?

For the purposes of writing this book, Schleiermacher invented a language that was so original that one struggles to think of a linguistic innovation of equal import, both prior to Schleiermacher and to this day. Every element of Schleiermacher's unique syntax is so designed that any number of different addressees with different perspectives can understand him both on the author's own terms, and within the particular context with which they associate him. Schleiermacher's words echo Paul's calling, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" (Gal 5:7) that was designed to be understood by the Jews of Asia Minor as a claim not that they are not in exile, but that they are running from the truth of the Gospel, while the *mitzvoth*-observing Christians hear it as a variant of *quo vadis domine*, a question addressed to a (a vision of) Jesus by Peter, and now asked of them: Why are you fleeing from the cross, when all that is asked of you is to agree to surrender yourselves to his compassion (containing echoes of Jesus' reply

[19] Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 2.

to Peter: "I am going to Rome to be crucified again"—*Eo Romam iterum crucifigi*)? (Acts of Peter, 35).

This apology of Schleiermacher's could have served his father, a former Calvinist priest in the Prussian army, as a sermon of reproof to his fellow members of the Moravian Herrnhut Church; by the same token, Moses Mendelssohn or Naftali Herz Weisel might have drafted it as an appeal to the Jewish communities under the rule of German Emperor Joseph II (1741-90).

However, his introduction could also have been received by the frequenters of the hermeneutic salons not as reproof, but rather as an incisive and clear statement of Schleiermacher's new area of interest. As an ally of the Berlin salon-goers, Schleiermacher was certainly authorized to present his everyday work and theological knowledge, not least because of the truth in his reproof: How did it happen that the most prominent topic in these gatherings—the question of the intellectual bridge between the members of the religions and different beliefs—became their essential blind spot and the blemish?

The multiplicity of intended meanings created by Schleiermacher seems to contradict the third man argument of Parmenides, according to which a thing cannot simultaneously be its absolute reverse. Schleiermacher inverts this critique by directing this very question to his friends to draw their attention to the problem that they created out of their insensibility. Do they actually gather in order to avoid discussing what it was that brought them together? Do they come together in order to separate, speak in order to silence, and appear in order to be subsumed by the crowd? These questions are a distillation of early Romantic hermeneutics, termed "impossible individuality" by Gerald N. Izenberg.[20] This is also one of his complaints against being forced into writing a book: You asked me to write in order to excuse yourselves from the discussion that you have been avoiding all along. How are you different from me, and where is your book? Schleiermacher formulates this charge in a manner that strikingly recalls Paul's *Epistle to the Galatians*:

> Might I ask one question? On every subject, however small and unimportant, you would be most willingly taught by those who have devoted to it their lives and their powers. In your desire for knowledge you do not avoid the cottages of the peasant or the workshop of the humble artisans. How then does it come about that, in matters of religion alone, you hold everything the more dubious when it comes from those who are experts, not only according to their own profession, but by recognition from the state, and from the people? I venture, though I run the risk, if you do not give me an attentive hearing, of being reckoned among the great crowd from which you admit so few exceptions.[21]

[20] Gerald N. Izenberg, *Impossible individuality [electronic resource]: Romanticism, Revolution, and the Origins of Modern Selfhood, 1787-1802* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).
[21] Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 21.

In order to understand that this is a subtle, idiosyncratic act, and not a cryptic speech or linguistic manipulation, the goal of which is to avoid explicit reference to a matter that may arouse the ire of men of religion or learning who take issue with Schleiermacher's views, we must revisit and clarify the nature of irony.

Irony is commonly understood as a figurative and rhetorical tactic that expresses something at the same time that the speaker intends its diametric opposite. And yet, it is a much more intricate concept. By way of introduction, let us recall that irony became the key element of early eighteenth-century German Romanticism with its central theoretical products, namely, hermeneutics and phenomenology. Three participants take part in the ironic act: the transmitter, the addressee and the audience. The addressee is also sometimes referred to as the "ironic receiver" or the "ironic victim." The message stated or relayed by the transmitter aims simultaneously at two addressees: the interlocutor, and witnesses to the conversation. The goal of the transmitter is to create two coinciding, contradictory interpretive and emotive responses in the two addressees: The interlocutor is meant to understand the ostensible, literal meaning of the message, and to ignore the often embarrassing error in his mistaken analysis of what is being said to him. The audience is the entity assumed by the transmitter to be capable of understanding the correct context in which the message is to be understood, to anticipate the misunderstanding of the interlocutor and precisely for this reason to rejoice at his downfall into the trap ostensibly set for him by the transmitter and his collaborators in the audience.

Irony, according to this understanding, occurs only when it perfectly fulfills a number of criteria:

1. A single message that has several converging meanings is simultaneously ascribed to mutually exclusive contexts.
2. A transmitter, an addressee, and at least one additional participant in the first stage who takes on a passive role are all required in order to carry out the ironic ritual.
3. The addressee is transformed from a potential to an actual victim in a three-stage act of initiation: (a) a response that suggests an initial mistaken understanding of the message; (b) a response that is common to the transmitter and the ridiculing audience; and (c) the addressee's return to his senses, after understanding the particular and different context that the transmitter intended for the message.

This formulation is well illustrated in the song, "Ironic," by the popular Canadian singer-songwriter Alanis Morissette:

> Mr. Play It Safe was afraid to fly
> He packed his suitcase and kissed his kids goodbye
> He waited his whole damn life to take that flight
> And as the plane crashed down he thought
> "Well isn't this nice. . . .
> And isn't it ironic . . . don't you think

Well life has a funny way of sneaking up on you
When you think everything's okay and everything's going right
And life has a funny way of helping you out when
You think everything's gone wrong and everything blows up
In your face

For Morissette, irony is a necessary disaster for the sake of restitution and change. Transmitter, addressee and audience are all likely to emerge somehow scathed. Who is the ironic victim of Morissette's message? I would like to suggest a number of candidates: (1) Mr. Caution, who chose to overcome his fears precisely on the day and on the flight that were, apparently, fated to serve as an additional justification for his irrational fears; (2) the audiences: that which crashed with him in the horrific accident, and that on whose lips a bitter and macabre smile of knowing broke out upon hearing the song; and (3) the children orphaned by the crash, sacrificed on the altar of irony.

What happens after the voices of laughter in the audience die down? After the victim recognizes his mistake, now exposed, he repents for it by accepting the transmitter's prank by bowing his head. Then it turns out that there is a follow-up continuation to the ironic ritual, since it is inconceivable that insult and laughter were its entire purpose—this recalls the expectation during a sacrificial rite that the act of killing will be rewarded with revelation, or at least an immediate fulfillment of urgent needs by the entity to whom the live sacrifice was offered. The ironic ritual during which a person is sacrificed arouses similar expectation as ritual sacrifice,[22] but ascertaining its nature requires inquiring as to the object of the participants' wishes in the ironic ritual. Equally important is the question of what would be considered an appropriate, worthy, or satisfactory response to the ironic act of sacrifice.

The entity for whom the ironic ritual is intended is none other than a human being. And the desired object is the activity of collective ironic discourse, which has three necessary and sufficient conditions: (1) it must be accessible to the understanding of all possible transmitters and receivers; (2) a particular and absolute total of contexts of interpretability, some of which are contradictory, must exist; and (3) synchrony: all possible understandings included in a particular ironic ritual, including the automotive and interpretive responses that it arouses, must occur simultaneously. Such a sacrificial discourse-offering fulfills all of the functions that Roman Jakobson attributed to language.[23]

A. *The referential (denotative) function*. The ironic ritual brings to the fore, in theory and in practice, all the various contexts that can be associated with a particular message.

B. *The emotive (expressive) function*. The multiplicity of various fields of discourse to which an ironic message can be linked is expressed in the range of various and sometimes contradictory responses of the various

[22] Dramatic presentations in ancient Greece were usually performed as part of pagan worship.
[23] Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics," *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960), 350-377.

participants in the ironic ritual (for purposes of our discussion, I refer to this combination of the emotive and the poetic as "*the epideictic function"*).

C. *The connotative function.* In the ironic ritual, in the final reckoning, all of the participants become transmitters. When one of the participants who functioned as an addressee until a certain moment takes on the role of transmitter, the rest of the participants become his addressees. Some of these addressees are potential, while others are actual.

D. *The phatic function.* The function where the message's conductivity among addressees is the most critical for completing the ironic ritual. This function serves a dual purpose: the suspension of reality (by the act of bracketing or *epoché* as Husserl structured it) and the creation of synchrony, or, as I will refer to it below, *homochrony* or *monochrony*, into which the subjects taking part in the ironic act will be given.

E. *The meta-linguistic function*. This is the preliminary catalyst and perhaps the primary reason for the ironic discourse itself. What appears originally as a literary ornament, a convenient, acceptable and tremendously powerful rhetorical instrument, turns out to be the supreme goal of all interpersonal discursive activity. This perspective is supported by the etymology of the word "irony," which combines two ancient Greek terms: "speech," and "masquerade," or "dissemblance." Not surprisingly, the etymology of this concept reveals an amalgamation of conflicting meanings imported from two categories of discursive fields. One contains the philological, sociological, theological, and the second, the theatrical, poetic and discursive.

What, then, is the main distinguishing characteristic between ordinary speech and dissemblance? In ordinary discourse, the transmitter's intention is to one, singular meaning that one understands as manifest and distinct, and that will be understood by the addressee in the original formula that the transmitter assigned it. In the act of dissemblance, the transmitter says one thing that serves in particular instances as a disguise or concealment for discursive contexts or for connotative meanings that the transmitter intended to transmit to the addressee from the outset. From all we have explained until now, it is understood that, paradoxically, only the manifest or declared act of dissemblance can enable a "correct" understanding of the message (one that is "faithful to the original") through association with "correct" discursive fields "through which the addressee can decode the dissemblance precisely as the transmitter intended it."[24] This understanding is brought into sharp focus by Schleiermacher's aphorisms (apparently written together with, or at least edited by Friedrich Schlegel) that appeared in *Athenäum*, a journal edited and published by the Schlegel brothers from 1798-1800, regarding dissemblance or pretending:

> A cynic should really have no possessions whatever: for a man's possessions, in a certain sense, actually possess him. The solution to this problem is to own possessions as if one didn't own them. But it's

[24] This is the condensed version of Diderot's logic in *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (Paris: Sautelet, 1830).

> even more artistic and cynical not to own possessions as if one owned.[25]

In another fragment regarding the concepts of "knowing" and "reconstitution" characteristic of his philosophy, Schleiermacher adds:

> Many people have spirit or feeling or imagination. But because singly these qualities can only manifest themselves as fleeting, airy shapes [temporary knowing], nature has taken care to bond them chemically to some common, earthly matter [an ironic description of the relationship between Schleiermacher, man of religion, and Schlegel, the hedonist playwright]. To discover this bond is the unremitting task of those who have the greatest capacity for sympathy, but it requires a great deal of practice in intellectual chemistry as well. The man who could discover an infallible reagent for every beautiful quality in human nature would reveal to us a new world. As in the vision of the prophet, the endless field of broken and dismembered humanity would suddenly spring into life.[26]

The act of dissemblance or impersonation is what underlies the Socratic *Elenchus*: feigned innocence that is an essential part of the ironic ritual of dissemblance, focusing the addressee on the "discoveries" of exact meaning, which Socrates attributes to the topic under discussion or to a particular concept. In a dissertation that he wrote on the concept of irony in Plato's writings, Kierkegaard, who died in 1834, and whose biography shares many similarities with that of Schleiermacher, writes about the critical role of irony and dialectics in Plato's writing:

> That irony and dialectic are the two great forces in Plato everyone will surely admit, but that there is a double kind of dialectic cannot be denied, either. There is an irony that is only a *stimulus* for thought, that quickens it when it becomes drowsy, disciplines when it becomes dissolute. There is an irony that is itself the activator and in turn is itself the terminus striven for. There is a dialectic that in perpetual movement continually sees to it that the question does not become entrapped in an incidental understanding [intuition or initial apprehension], that is never weary and is always prepared to set the issue afloat if it runs aground—in short, that always knows how to keep the issue in suspension and precisely therein and thereby wants to [and works to] resolve it. There is a dialectic that, proceeding from the most abstract ideas, wants to let these display themselves in more

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[25] Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 22-23, Fragment 35 (accessed from: http://www.scribd.com/doc/21598602/Friedrich-Schlegel-Philosophical-Fragments#page51). Regarding this excerpt, Firchow notes: "Only the first sentence is by Schlegel; the continuation is by Schleiermacher." This epigram of Schleiermacher's, like others, echoes *Galatians*, specifically: "But of these who seemed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me." Gal 2:6.

[26] Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, fragment 330, 99.

> concrete qualifications, a dialectic that wants to construct actuality with the idea. Finally, in Plato there is yet another element that is a necessary supplement to the deficiency in both the great forces. This is the mythical and the metaphorical. The first kind of dialectic corresponds to the first kind of irony, the second kind of dialectic to the second kind of irony; to the first two corresponds the mythical, to the last two the metaphorical—yet in such a way that the mythical is not indispensably related to either the first two or the last two but is more like an anticipation engendered by the one-sidedness of the first two or like a transitional element, a *confinium* [intervening border], that actually belongs neither to the one nor the other.[27]

The key difference between Schleiermacher's and Kierkegaard's view of irony is that for Schleiermacher, irony contains the dialectic, the mythical and the metaphoric that Kierkegaard does not include in the concept of irony, but to which he rather assigns a status of components that complement the ironic act. In *On Religion*, Schleiermacher exemplifies what one must do if he wishes his words to be understood as they are when he uttered them, or if he at least seeks to minimize their multiple meanings: He must make use of the ironic ritual for the sake of preserving the three discursive functions as Kierkegaard described. Or, in today's idiomatic linguistics, to uphold Jakobson's five discursive functions described above. Schleiermacher's concept of irony is similar to that of Kierkegaard in that both view it as a preservative device whose purpose is to make possible the valid reconstitution[28] of the original generative process even after time has elapsed and cultural horizons have changed. Schleiermacher's irony assimilates, in addition to Kierkegaard's dialectic, metaphoric and mythic, the necessity of suspending the element of time from certain discursive activities in which it has taken part.

Friedrich Schlegel shared Schleiermacher's understanding of the concept of irony, and this is what guided him in his use of irony as ritual when he wrote his licentious novel, *Lucinda* (1799), which was dedicated, according to all appearances, to a description of his pre-marital relationship with Dorothea Veit (Mendelssohn). The work's title, *Lucinda* (the illuminated, or she who is understood),[29] is almost synonymous with the ironic act as I have described it: the ultimately manifest, clear and light communication. *Lucinda* was not accepted by the conservative Berlin

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[27] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony: With Continual Reference to Socrates*, trans. and ed. Hong, H.V. and Hong, E.H. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 120, 125. Accessed from http://www.sorenkierkegaard.org/concept-of-irony.html.

[28] The concept of reconstitution does not correlate with Kierkegaard's thinking in his composition, "The Concept of Irony." Here I might add that the concept of repetition is very similar to the concept of incomprehensibility, or non-interpretability, as sketched out in Schleiermacher's concept of irony. On this matter see Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, trans. and ed. with introduction and notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[29] The source of the title, "Lucinda," is the name of the young woman, Saint Lucia (283-304), a Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and Orthodox saint, whose eyes were taken out when she refused to marry a pagan. Saint Lucia is considered the patron saint of the blind, and her feast day is December 13th, mistakenly thought to be longest night of the year.

aesthetic consensus, since all that the readership saw in it was an embarrassing documentation of an established, sinful relationship. The Schlegelian irony succeeded, and in so doing brought destruction upon itself: it was received in the same manner by all of its readers (with the exception of Schleiermacher, who praised it publicly), who were unable (or did not want) to see through the lucid text and beyond it to the solemn sights reflected in the cultural mirror that Schlegel was holding up to them. *Lucinda* blinded its readers, enabling Schlegel to prove—admittedly not in the manner he had planned—that ironic practice indeed perfectly preserves the original intention of the author.

Revelation—*hierophany*—like publishing a book or putting on a play, requires parentheses, a means or a ritual that has a dual role. The first relates to the subject's existence in the present reality, suspending reality and afterwards, returning the subject to it. The second role, touching on the horizon towards which the subject directs his consciousness, is to serve as a preventative hermeneutic measure for a hyper-interpretive situation that will lead to the attributing of infinite meanings to the act of revelation (divine or human) that are liable to be revealed through an exegetical-hermeneutic hypertrophy and can retroactively turn any text, work or revelation into irony, creating an *irony ipsum-factum*[30] that can block all avenues of access to valid reconstitution of one-time revelation, whether human or divine. Irony, the ironic ritual, as Schleiermacher understood it (and Schlegel, in my opinion, shared in this understanding), is one of the most sophisticated kinds of bracketing.

The ironic set-up simultaneously turns all of the participants—including the work itself (text, painting, play)—into active attendees on equal footing. The goal of the ironic ritual is to know; those who take part in it do not explain, understand or learn. They know—a knowing derived from experiencing and taking part, which is as temporary as any other knowing. The moment of knowing is also the moment when the closing parenthesis appears, after which its hermeneutic present reappears, with its dim horizon comprising all of the post-knowing interpretations—an infinite number. Susan Sontag's essay, "Against Interpretation," uniquely exposes the anxiety that the interpreter will return to being permanently given in the present. Sontag refers, in my view, to the fear of reaching the hermeneutic state I termed "irony *ipsum-factum*." This is also the motivation for the somewhat extreme assertion she chooses to open with: that the interpretive act, from the days of Plato to the present, is nothing but an ongoing act of deception.

This *trompe l'oeil*, as Sontag called it, is located in the field of two discursive functions, the equivalent of Jacobson's *referential* and *phatic*. In the discussion above, we linked the referential function with the metalinguistic, and the phatic function with the act of parenthetical giving. Sontag, contesting the authoritative manner in which the interpreter assumes his position—which actually constitutes an obstacle to the reader who seeks to give his own meaning to the work he has encountered—reveals one of her prejudices (implied later in the essay), namely that the hermeneutic act can be properly performed only from within the ritual of suspension.

[30] Borrowing from Giambattista Vico's (1668–1744) maxim—*verum ipsum factum*.

We learn from Sontag's manifesto against the interpretive act that the assumption of the authorized interpretive stance is based on a number of preliminary assumptions: (1) the interpreter knows what interpretation a given reader is likely to give to the work before the interpreter mediates it for him; (2) the interpreter knows that the interpretation of his fellow is erroneous, at least partially; (3) the interpreter is convinced that his interpretation is correct, and, at least, more valid than that of his fellow; and (4) the interpreter knows what led to his fellow's interpretive error, and therefore is also able to assess the damage that insistence upon it may inflict both on the work and on the person who has incorrectly interpreted it.

> The fact is, all Western consciousness of and reflection upon art have remained within the confines staked out by the Greek theory of art as mimesis or representation. It is through this theory that art as such—above and beyond given works of art—becomes problematic, in need of defense. And it is the defense of art which gives birth to the odd vision by which something we have learned to call "form" is separated off from something we have learned to call "content," and to the well-intentioned move which makes content essential and form accessory. Even in modern times, when most artists and critics have discarded the theory of art as representation of an outer reality in favor of the theory of art as subjective expression, the main feature of the mimetic theory persists. . . . Or, as it's usually put today, that a work of art by definition says something. ("What X is saying is . . . ," "What X is trying to say is . . . ," "What X said is . . ." etc., etc.). [31]

When Plato made a final separation between art as an act of imitation, mimesis, and reality, as expressions that are in effect temporary and flawed imitations of the world of ideas that is hidden from our sight, claims Sontag, he ingrained in us a kind of perpetual paranoia of the human processes of recognition and reflection that might be summed up in the simple assertion that one never sees things as they are, but in their mistaken and misleading ephemeral manifestation. In order to properly understand that which our eyes see, an act of translation is always necessary, whose central role is to remove the barrier separating the viewer from the experience. It is even worse in the case of art, since not only does it not remove the mask created by sensory errors, but even adds a level of obscuration, an additional mask or obstacle in the path of one who seeks to apprehend the idea, even for a moment. Art—painting, sculpture, or dramaturgy—inasmuch as it is an imitation of an imitation, seems to require a multi-staged translational operation: (a) translation between the mimicking artistic representation and what is termed the "reality of the senses;" and (b) translation of the "reality of the senses" to the unchanging ideal experience. Sontag's description is a terse, inadvertent paraphrase of Schleiermacher's initial intuition about extra-ecclesiastical hermeneutics as potentially leading to what I shall refer to as "irony *ipsum factum*." It differs only in that it does not explicitly refer to the ritual of suspending reality, and it lacks the stage of return, of closing the

[31] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1966), 4.

reality-suspending parentheses. The target of most of Sontag's grievance against the interpretive act is the fate of the interpreter once he reaches knowing.

> The earliest experience of art must have been that it was *incantatory, magical; art was an instrument of ritual* (see the paintings in the caves at Lascaux, Altamira, Niaux, La Pasiega, etc.). The earliest theory of art, that of the Greek philosophers, proposed that art was mimesis, imitation of reality. It is at this point that the peculiar question of the value of art arose. For the mimetic theory, by its very terms, challenges art to justify itself. . . .[32]
>
> *None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself*, when one did not ask of a work of art what it said because one knew (or thought one knew) what it did. *From now to the end of consciousness, we are stuck with the task of defending art*. We can only quarrel with one or another means of defense. Indeed, we have *an obligation to overthrow any means of defending and justifying art which becomes particularly obtuse or onerous or insensitive to contemporary needs and practice.*[33]

That which Sontag terms our "obligation to overthrow any means of defending and justifying art which becomes particularly obtuse or onerous or insensitive to contemporary needs and practice," might serve as an excellent definition of the term "irony *ipsum factum*" that I suggested above.

Sontag's claim might be summarized as follows: A person is not an interpretive being. A person is an experiencing entity, and therefore, interpretation will necessarily be damaging because it will place a barrier between it and the unmediated manner in which it experiences its reality. "Irony *ipsum factum*" is an interpretive situation where, for a single work, meaning is weighted entirely differently by each interpreter, given the lack of a means that limits the total valid interpretive possibilities. This situation, in Schleiermacher's view, is a practical necessity in extra-ecclesiastical hermeneutics. The fear of the extra-ecclesiastical interpreter's becoming trapped in the interpretive ritual, without any possibility of reaching his goal—understanding and, rarely, knowledge—is undone (if not done away with) by Schleiermacher through ironic brackets.

The project in which Schleiermacher and Schlegel were partners attempts to prevent an "interpretive act of deception" that might obtrude between the work and those watching it or reading it, as Sontag described. Through the ironic ritual, in which the text is presented within parentheses that are ironic from the very start, where the disguise is manifest and the dissemblance is acknowledged from the outset, obviating interpretation *ex post facto* that turns them into irony *ipsum factum*—through such a ritual, one can preserve the original textual context, or, at least, limit it to a finite range the variety of manners in which the original linguistic and cultural contexts of

[32] Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 1.
[33] Ibid., 4-5.

the work can be reconstituted, even after much time has passed. The first chapter in Schleiermacher's *On Religion*[34] acts as ironic parentheses aimed at preserving the almost dogmatic message of Schleiermacher's speech on the nature of the Christian religion, its development, and the brotherhood it heralds. This is a message whose audience and content are unmistakable: the hermeneutic circles of Jena, where brotherhood is lacking, and where people are not truly seeking knowledge, unable to understand or explain their experience since they spurn the one institution that might help them: the Christian religion. This is what Friedrich Schlegel attempts to convey to the readers of *Lucinda* (that there is no connection whatsoever between religious apologetics and religion): You fail to understand what you read in my book, or what you experience in your daily lives, since there is no brotherhood between you, and not a single individual in the German nation is truly drawn to knowledge; this is because intellectualism blinded you so you could no longer see the ephemeral, the individual genius that can no longer be preserved unless it is bracketed by irony—and even this irony you fail to see.[35] Friedrich Schlegel barely "spoke," since he was well aware that ordinary, conventional use of linguistic signifiers that were not decoded by the signified would miss the mark of everything we have discussed up until now. Therefore, in a manner recalling Schleiermacher's solution to the hermeneutic problem, he creates two types of discourse: the first, fragmentary, highly concentrated and sparing; and the second, a language of creating, which can be discerned by the signified by employing ironic ritual.

Irony as a Ritual: Schleiermacher on the Relationship between Irony, *Epideixis*, and Forgiveness

The opening sentence of Sontag's essay, which we might re-title "On Artistic Creation: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers," is key to understanding the relationship between irony and ritual, and their relationship with the acts of learning and forgiveness, as Schleiermacher understood it: "The earliest experience of art must have been that it was *incantatory*, magical; *art was an instrument of ritual*." Learning-by-repetition in the framework of religious observance is the source of the rhetorical tool or one of the embellishments of the art of speechmaking known as *epideixis*. The meaning of the term *epideixis* is akin to a learning-by-repetition that refers to nothing located outside of it. The signifier is also the signified; the word, the tone, the syllable, and the statement indicate only themselves. The statement and its meaning are precisely the same: At the very same moment that the goal of uninterrupted repetition is achieved (i.e., connecting what is said with its indicated meaning), speech and speaker become one. The peak of the experience unifies speaker, message and meaning into a single entity.

What is the importance of the epideictic process, and why does it reappear precisely during a period when the bulk of intellectual effort in the West is focused on separating the subject from the world of meanings and

[34] To which we might add part of the end of the fifth chapter.

[35] On Schlegel's irony, see: Edgar Landgraf, "Comprehending Romantic Incomprehensibility: A Systems-Theoretical Perspective on Early German Romanticism," *Modern Language Notes* 121 (2006): 592-616.

judgments to which it had been bound, to its detriment, either by men of religion (up to the Enlightenment), and by philosophers and intellectuals (until the advent of Romanticism)? The significance is in the very attempt to try reconnecting logos with the subject and the experience in which he is located. This conglomeration is the basis of the Protestant attempt to reconstitute Jesus' crucifixion by revisiting it. The phenomenon is not uniquely Protestant; Augustine, Abelard and Rousseau made determined attempts in their confessions. Why is it necessary to connect or meld subject and logos? The question can be first approached by considering the religious, monotheistic discursive fields, starting with the difficult Theodosian question of forgiveness through penance. How does penance enable the sinner's repentance? What is the mechanism that enables an anachronistic rectification of a misdeed performed in the past? The retroactive annulment of an occurrence that led to a chain of events that ultimately drove the believer to realize that he must ask for forgiveness?

In fact, penance is an act that renders itself superfluous even before it is performed. And most commentators in the various religions will reply that, indeed, such a course of events necessarily requires the intervention of a transcendental, non-time-bound entity. This was not the view of the likes of Schleiermacher and Schlegel, who maintained that all that a person needs to carry out the act of forgiveness is to turn himself into logos, or text, since text can be edited, rewritten and corrected retroactively without any consideration for negligible problems such as time. However, the rhetorical maneuver that is today known as the *phatic*, i.e., *epideixis*, is not enough. Rather, we need a tool that is potent beyond measure: irony.

Irony is a hermeneutic-rhetorical tool that places any objective within reach. Irony, as understood by Schleiermacher, is an extra-ecclesiastical expression of the repetitive act of epideictic penance that brings about a metamorphosis of consciousness (as well as a sort of physical metamorphosis) in the subject performing the ironic act. In this sense, one can see in Schleiermacher's essay the beginnings of the phenomenology of revelation, which will later be recognized by leading theologians under different names: "hierophany" (Rudolph Otto) and "Gestalt of grace" (Paul Tillich). The common denominator shared by irony, the *epideixis* of penance and the subject, is the condition of extra-temporality or, in other words, the suspension of reality as a necessary condition for extra-temporal introspection, for apperception, which is in some aspects, as I will soon elaborate on, like revelation.

Schleiermacher, according to the above rendering, understood that the attempts of his peers from the Berlin literary salons to create an extra-ecclesiastical hermeneutics, in the last accounting, turned the main characteristic of hermeneutics—an interpretive discourse with a definitive horizon—into an apologetic and defensive discourse lacking any horizon (as Sontag's attack on interpretive pretension well demonstrates). Such a hermeneutics is a most precise illustration of what Gerald Izenberg termed the "impossible individuality" of Romanticism.[36]

[36] Izenberg, *Impossible Individuality*.

The Romantic individual seeks to assimilate the entire experience surrounding him into his innards, and at the same time to be assimilated into it. He seeks to contain it in its entirety and to be contained by it as an individual. Schleiermacher speaks to this matter in his first speech to his enlightened friends:

> The human soul, as is shown both by its passing actions and its inward characteristics, has its existence chiefly in two opposing impulses. Following the one impulse, it strives to establish itself as an individual. . . . The other impulse . . . is the dread fear to stand alone over against the Whole, the longing to surrender oneself and be absorbed in a greater . . . At the extremes, one impulse may preponderate almost to the exclusion of the other, but the perfection of the living world consists in this, that between these opposite ends all combinations are actually present in humanity.[37]

Schleiermacher suggests not a process of involving God in his process of understanding the text, but rather a manipulation in which the interpreter infiltrates the text and together with it enters the experience in a manner that leads to auto-transcendence of the interpreter, and, in turn, of the interpreted text as well. This description of Schleiermacher's *hermeneutica sacra* is contrary to the contemporary understanding of the "leap of faith," as an almost preposterous hermeneutic maneuver and one that even the critics of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics had a hard time attributing to a man of such erudition.

In order to explain how Schleiermacher thought to overcome the obstacle posed by the "historically-affected consciousness" (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*)—as Gadamer described it—in extra-ecclesiastical hermeneutics, we might borrow a concept from the field of biology. Heterochrony, a term coined by Ernest Haeckel (1834-1919) in 1875, relates to evolutionary processes in which the rate of development of a generation of offspring is measured by comparing it to the ontogeny of the parental generation, based on whether the rate of development of the offspring begins earlier and is faster than in the previous generation (*peramorphosis*, or *progenesis*), or whether the reverse is so (*pedomorphosis*, or *neoteny*).

The ontogenic criterion, or, as we shall call it, the heterochronous predicate, recalls time-suspension in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. This is more readily understood through the example of grafting fruit trees. The scion (the branch being grafted onto a target tree) must be taken from a particular branch of a ripe, fruit-bearing tree whose necessary qualities are early blooming and favorable quantity of fruit generated by this branch and desirable size. The orchard operator attempts to transfer these characteristics by grafting it onto a particular stock. The expectation is that the sapling will produce a fruit superior in quantity, size, quality and ripening time. The orchard master's goal of bringing about a heterochrony in the stock is revealed only when the broken branch begins to recover and even bud, when

[37] Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 4.

the fruit ripens in keeping with characteristics similar to those of the tree from which the scion was taken, and even begins to surpass it in quality. If, over time, it turns out that none of the stock's developmental traits was modified, or if there was deceleration in any of the qualities, the process is considered to have failed.

This can be likened to hermeneutics—in order to enable a valid interpretive process, as Schleiermacher understood it, the interpreter must concede his *ontochrony* by disconnecting the objective of his interpretation from the diachronic continuum in which he is positioned, i.e., to suspend the predicate of time of both the interpreter and the object of his interpretation. The encounter between the sum total of interpretive contexts that the interpreter brings with him and the sum total of cultural possibilities embodied in the text thus leads to a third product, namely, the valid interpretation. But herein lies the problem: In attempting to render a valid interpretation, the interpreter disconnects himself from the diachronic continuum in order to reach a state that we will call "homochronic." The interpreter is thus left without tools or criteria through which he can measure the validity of his interpretation, just as the scion cannot measure whether the new branch to which it has been joined will develop more quickly than that from which it was taken. This can be assessed only by the orchard operator.

This might explain why the "Church of Hermeneutics" met in the salons of women of Jewish origin who had no social status. Each discursive activity between two individuals requires a prior activity of suspension or the removal of two interlocutors from the continuum of their daily acts. The first condition for holding a dialogue or conversation is the temporary suspension of reality. This suspension is one of the cornerstones of every religious ritual, as well as its objective. Convening a community of people to carry out a particular series of acts, such as making a sacrifice or prayer, becomes possible only after each one has cut himself off from his private diachrony, or "heterochrony," as we have been referring to it. Relinquishing heterochrony for the sake of a collective act is a type of crisis, which precedes all worship (and every magical or transgressive act); therefore, even the return to the heterochronic state always involves a crisis, as can be understood from Sontag's article.

The time that passes between the disengagement and the subject's return to heterochrony is not diachronous time but rather a period best described by *kairos* (the "fullness of time"). The shared assumption on the part of all participants in the *conditioning ritual* is that the most critical component in the collective relinquishing of individual identities and existences, although they anticipate the crisis that will attend when they attempt to return to their suspended self-heterochrony, is that the god or other transcendental entity will necessarily respond to them. Such gatherings habitually end in failure, but also with a hope for future success.

Irony is the only act not in the religious category that is capable, in a similar manner, of suspending reality and leading participants to willingly relinquish—for a specific and defined period—their heterochronous being. The ironic act is a *ritual of conditioning* that is fundamentally an act of self-sacrifice in which participants are exposed to all possible meanings that can be attributed to a particular discursive activity. We have already stated that

ironic discourse is the only activity that has a finite sum of meanings, in contrast to any other imaginable discursive activity. The ironic ritual prepares those who take part in it to disconnect from their heterochrony and enables them to examine a particular object together. This is the function that was fulfilled by the Jewish women of the salons, the isolation behind the walls of the salons and the acts of acceptance or, alternately, rejection of friends into and from these gatherings. So it is with any religious institution, certainly of the monotheistic type, whose job is to help its newcomers let go of their heterochronous selfhood based on the assumptions that they derive from polytheistic rituals and that the repetitive act of conditioning in relinquishing or even sacrifice of autochrony will necessarily bring about a response from God; it is also based on the ability of participants in the ritual to identify it as such and to understand its significance.

In his book on religion, Schleiermacher forced his friends to join him in a collective ritual of conditioning whose outcome was the reverse of what they expected: He organized his own surprise party for his friends from the Romantic salon. Through the ironic prologue, he expropriated from them the heterochrony that they so hallowed, in a manner that obviated any opposition. This is the great power of irony: by the time the spectator audience that is mocking or laughing returns to its senses, it has already discovered that it is too late; while the audience was laughing, it was taken unawares, and the great victim was not the initial prey but rather the audience captured by its gaze during the course of the ironic ritual.

Schleiermacher was a victim of the ironic act of coercion and he took advantage of his victim's "right" to have his hand at rendering those who demanded that he publish into the victims of this selfsame book he hoped never to write. The members of the salon run by Henrietta Herz and her sister, Dorothea Veit, did not understand that Schleiermacher never had plans to turn his back on the Moravian Church, and that the only reason that he was present at these salon meetings was his attempt to view from up close what he had intuitively felt years earlier – that no interpretation is possible without God's presence. To paraphrase Saint Cyprian's well- known saying: *extra ecclesiam nulla hermeneutica.* For this reason, Schleiermacher was so adamantly opposed to the suggestion (attributed to David Friedländer [1750-1834] but actually originating with Moses Mendelssohn) that the Jews would agree to convert to Christianity if the ceremony were a secular, civil procedure. Schleiermacher understood that in theory, not only would the Jews be achieving emancipation for themselves, but, in effect, they would be annulling Protestant heterochrony and leaving intact—if not imposing—Jewish time, not only in its diachronical sense but especially in its "fullness," in the sense of *kairos*—on the community they wished to join. Therefore, among the different possible addressees of the book's epilogue are Moses Mendelssohn and his daughters, the Schlegel brothers, and, in particular, Friederich (in response to his *Fragments* and his play, "Lucinda"), David Friedländer, and Kierkegaard, who shortly after the book's publication wrote, as mentioned, his doctorate on Aristotelian irony.

The hermeneutical problem was at that time the subject of the worst struggle in the history of the interpretive paradox. Schleiermacher's essay demonstrates that the paradox of the interpretive circle is only a derivative of

the heterochronous problem in the interpretive act. How can a subject, a heterochronous entity of a particular kind, encounter and even properly understand what was uttered by another heterochronous entity? More difficult is the question of how a single heterochronous entity can reconstitute the meanings of the works that, on completion, were expropriated from its private diachrony. And by what processes do I expropriate myself from my other diachrony, encounter a work that itself is a heterochronous entity, and even become capable of understanding it?

These questions are parallel to the issue of penance. How does the transgressor expropriate himself from the heterochrony according to which he and the sinful act are identical, and what enables him to re-encounter the sinful act in a manner that will entitle him to change it so that even after the heterochrony returns, the sinful act will remain something that is no longer attributable to him? The answer is the epideictic act of repetition. Repeating a sentence such as "Mother Mary pray for me" dozens of times is what dissociates one from his private heterochrony and enables him to adapt the homochrony of a community of believers in a shared state of anticipating revelation.

Schleiermacher anticipated Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* and his *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy* in understanding that the central issue in the interpretive act and its validity is the homochronous encounter that the interpreter seeks to bring about. This is also perhaps the reason that Dilthey never succeeded in completing Schleiermacher's biography; in so doing, he deflected the focus of hermeneutic attention to the question of historical consciousness which—to no great surprise—he constructed according to the same evolutionary model that we presented above, terming it *Erlebnis*.

The paradox of early Romantic thought, termed by many, including Izenberg, "the impossible individuality," resembles Schleiermacher's understanding of the paradox of revelation: Once it occurs, it annihilates its witnesses, and this is one of the salient characteristics of successful irony.

By way of conclusion, I present the following summary of the principles of Schleiermacher's irony:

1. All texts are likely to be ironic, *ipsum factum*, with the exception of those that are formulated as such from the outset.
2. Irony, in Schleiermacher's rendering, shares a common denominator with the *modus operandi* of religion: the act of conditioning.
3. Irony, like a religious ritual, includes a sacrifice, the person performing the sacrifice, fuel (the audience and its initial, mocking response), and a transcendental horizon to which he is aiming (which is what connects it with epideixis and the matter of penance), and, ultimately, a devouring fire.
4. Irony as revelation begins as a disconnect from the continuum of being and time; it proceeds with the removal of any limitation or prohibition imposed on said ritual, vision and creational act (incomprehensibility = not bowing to limitations and dictates); it further continues with an epiphany or a one-time, rapid-fire apotheosis; and it ends in cataclysm.

5. Irony is like a true prophesy or like a false prophesy that comes to pass. A false prophet is to a true prophet as a daily discursive activity is to ironic discourse: The words of the false prophet are likely to be fulfilled, and are likely not to occur. The words of the true prophet and the ironic discourse are unequivocal, and are validated not by their realization, but at the moment of utterance; truth and irony—you know them when you see them.
6. Irony is unequivocal, clear and patently distinct.