

BRAND'S HAIDE – ARNO SCHMIDT'S ROMANTIC REALISM

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ABSTRACT

Arno Schmidt's novel *Brand's Haide* (1951) demonstrates the impossibility of romantic love in the misery of the immediate post-war period in Germany. On the one hand Schmidt distorts Romantic motifs such as the moon, yet his largely autobiographical hero is engaged in research on the Romantic German writer Fouqué. By means of a complex network of references, Schmidt re-evaluates Romanticism in light of the experience of National Socialism and World War Two, as well as in light of the miserable living conditions of an expellee in the aftermath of these events. According to Schmidt, literature as a point of intersection between material reality and fantasy represents a crucial factor in the constitution of our world. With the background of the traumatic experience of National Socialism, Schmidt develops his own conception of a Romanticism interspersed with elements of Realism and Enlightenment – a Romanticism that he perceives as more realistic than Realism itself.

KEY WORDS: Arno Schmidt; Romanticism; Realism; German post-war literature.

INTRODUCTION

Arno Schmidt (1914-1979) was one of only a few authors of the immediate post-war period to transform the shock of the war-experience into a new literary prose form.¹ Even though there existed stylistic precursors such as Alfred Döblin or James Joyce, whom he read only later, his manner of writing was unique in early post-war Germany. It is commonly accepted that Schmidt's works from the 1950s were more closely or at least more obviously connected to the political issues and the everyday life of the fledgling Federal Republic of Germany than were his later works.² This article focuses on his early novel *Brand's Haide*, written in 1950, and published the following year. There is an abundance of excellent research on *Brand's Haide* that has deciphered many of its hidden allusions. For numerous references and background information this article owes much to the detailed commentary of Heinrich Schwier (2000), who extended earlier studies of Horst Thomé (1981), Peter Piontek (1983), Wolfgang Hink (1989), Michael Müller (1989), and Torsten Schmandt (1996). These authors pointed out various links to romantic texts. Thomé considered *Brand's Haide* to be the most developed example of the "Prinzip, die banale Alltagswelt

¹ This is claimed by Ralf Schnell in his literary history (1986: 90): "Vielleicht gelang es nur einem einzigen Erzähler der frühen Nachkriegszeit, den Schock des Kriegserlebnisses ästhetisch produktiv zu machen, mithin eine neue Form literarischer Wirklichkeitsverarbeitung zu begründen: Arno Schmidt". Hans-Georg Pott (1990: 217) calls Schmidt the only significant and radical innovator of German narrative prose in the second half of the twentieth century.

² Wolfgang Proß (1980: 124) presents Schmidt as developing from a political polemicist to a cultural pessimist detached from the world. This seems correct but somehow oversimplifying.

auf die Wiederholung literarischer oder mythischer Muster hin durchsichtig zu machen" (1981: 142). The philosophical implications of this principle, however, have not been fully drawn yet. Building on Thomas Körber's (1998) investigation into Schmidt's reception of Romanticism, this article examines Schmidt's conception of a Romanticism interspersed with elements of Realism and Enlightenment in *Brand's Haide*. It aims to demonstrate that the author's attitude towards German and indeed human society in general, his way of writing, and his stance in relation to Romanticism represent a particular reaction to the experience of National Socialism. In *Brand's Haide* Körber clearly sees at play the central role of the core Romantic motive that is the relation of reality and fantasy and Schmidt's pursuit of the question how Romanticism can still be received in the aftermath of World War II (127). By developing a form of writing that allows for a superimposition of Realism and Romanticism, Schmidt insists on the world-constitutive power of poetics. After analysing the realistic and the romantic elements in *Brand's Haide*, the article will define their specific relationship in Schmidt's poetics in the early fifties, demonstrating how his writing overcomes the opposition between reality and fantasy.

ANTI-ROMANTICISM?

Schmidt's first publication, *Leviathan* from 1949 (written in 1946), displays a tension between poetic idealism which becomes obvious in the value attached to literature, a belief in rationality as demonstrated in the scientific explanations about the state of the world, and social scepticism as a consequence of the barbarism of the Nazis. He explores the question of what remains of German culture and society after 1945 in more detail in three texts, published in the early 1950s, and in 1963 in the form of the trilogy *Nobodaddy's Kinder*.³ The first part, *Aus dem Leben eines Fauns*, describes how a man wants to escape the despised National Socialist society by retiring into a secret hut in the heathland. The second part, *Brand's Haide*, portrays the misery of the aftermath of World War Two, and will be dealt with in more detail below. The third, *Schwarze Spiegel*, situated in a futuristic 1960, describes the life of a lonesome survivor of the Third World War, which, as the work has it, takes place in 1955. The trilogy affirms that the martial logic continues, leading ultimately to complete destruction as the weapons of mass destruction are continually developed.

The second part, *Brand's Haide* (1951),⁴ takes place in 1946. It is considered by Jan Philipp Reemtsma (2006: 177) as one of the three pinnacles of Schmidt's work next to *Kaff* and *Abend mit Goldrand*. In spite of its complex intertextual construction, the plot is easily retold: a man, having been a prisoner of war of the British after losing his home and all his belongings in Silesia, is released and

³ This is obviously an allusion to William Blake's poem *To Nobodaddy*, to which also Joyce alludes in his *Ulysses*. See Meyer (1989).

⁴ In the following I quote the easily accessible Fischer edition.

moves to a small village in northern Germany where he lives next door to two women, Lore and Grete, who are refugees like him. A love affair with Lore develops but ends when she, wishing to flee post-war misery, leaves Germany to marry an elderly but rich man in South America. In three parts covering a few days each, we learn about his arrival on 21 March –the first day of spring, which represents a new beginning after hard times– about his living conditions, the refugees' life at the end of July, and about the last days before the departure of Lore at the end of October and beginning of November. There is a multitude of autobiographical elements in that the protagonist's and narrator's name is Schmidt, he has the same identity card number as the author and claims authorship to stories previously written by the real Arno Schmidt.

The book manages to describe unsentimentally the hardships of life of many Germans in those years but simultaneously to make the reader laugh –a rare achievement at the time, as Reemtsma pointed out (2006: 149).⁵ Both women, Lore and Grete, fall in love with 'Schmidt', but he has eyes only for the tall, mocking, cheeky Lore. However, in spite of their love, the romantic love story cannot be lived out in such dire circumstances. The ending suggests that Schmidt and Grete will become a couple; he will settle for the practical and feasible solution since romantic love is impossible.

Such a reading based on the material events of the plot is supported, for example, by Schmidt's distortion of the Romantic motif of the moon. There are twenty-one occurrences of the moon in the short novel, most of them rather unflattering metaphors. The beginning of the book exemplifies this tendency: "21.3.1946: auf britischem Klopapier. / *Glasgelb* lag der gesprungene Mond" (7). The moon is shattered –there is no place for Romanticism anymore. To add to this disaster, the notes of the narrator, of which the later book consists, had to be written on British toilet paper provided during his time as a prisoner of war. This is already a telling image, not only of the material hardship of the time, but also of the circumstances for literature; contemporary German literature has no other way of existing except by being written on British toilet paper. That also drastically symbolises the hopelessness of changing the ways of the world through the arts. In this way the Romantic glorification of the arts is ridiculed. Later on we find the following description: "Eine Zeit lang lehnte das spitze hippokratische Gesicht des Mondes schräg da oben, in fleckigen leinenen Tüchern" (119). The moon is agonising; the emblem of Romanticism has become miserable and sick and is on the verge of dying. On page 145 it is called "Lügnermond" whereas on page 67 "ein Endchen Mond flackerte" in the dawn, whose pink colour is commented on: "Jetzt wurde es rosa: aber auch gleich so

⁵ Reemtsma (2006) also refers to the contrast of *Brand's Haide* with the famous book by Wolfgang Borchert, *Draußen vor der Tür*, to which Schmidt alludes at the beginning of the book, where the protagonist mentions that humans multiply like rabbits, whereas in Borchert they die like flies. Clausen (1992) analysed this contrast to other books on the homecoming soldier.

gemein rosa, wie in einem Mädchenpensionat um 1900; als sei nichts passiert; schamlos" (67). This explains why, after 1945, the Romantic idea of the moon cannot function anymore: after what has happened, it is brazen to dwell on such notions. As opposed to many of his contemporaries Schmidt seems to take sides with Theodor W. Adorno's infamous statement from 1949 about the barbarism of writing poetry after Auschwitz (Adorno 1977). After the "rupture in civilisation", as Dan Diner later called it (Diner 1988), nothing can be as it used to be: humankind has lost its innocence once and for all.

But does the novel really demonstrate the end of Romanticism in the misery of the immediate post-war period in Germany? Schmidt's confession of his "Selenomanie" (Schmidt, BA Essays und Aufsätze 2:30) refutes this; his love for the moon is expressed by infinite variations in its descriptions throughout his oeuvre⁶ and by the importance he attaches to having a view of the moon from his workplace (Schmidt, BA Essays und Aufsätze 2:30). Even the image of the broken moon goes back to Romanticism itself; Jean Paul uses it several times and Schwier suggests that Schmidt alludes to him (Schwier 2000: 16). In any case, his position vis-à-vis Romanticism is complex.

ROMANTICISM IN SCHMIDT'S WORKS

Schmidt was considered a realist in the 1950s; he was generally held to be pro-Enlightenment (Albrecht 1992). This has, however, proved to be more complex. Thomé labelled Schmidt as "Aufklärer ohne Aufklärung" (1981: 47-92) because he considered the wise men of Enlightenment ahistorically, in a "sozialgeschichtliche Enthistorisierung" (69), and saw himself to be one of them. Thomé still placed Schmidt on the side of Realism since in spite of the romantic focus on the poetic Schmidt's fundamental conception is the realistic perception of nature which the early Romanticism broke away from, which is why Thomé claims that Schmidt cannot fully relate to it (153). After the posthumous publication of his early works, *Juvenilia*, in 1988, there is no doubt that the young Arno Schmidt is an epigone of the Romantics. Körber provides a book-length study on Schmidt's "produktive Rezeption" of German Romanticism, which demonstrates that Schmidt's commitment to Realism and Enlightenment does not dismiss of Romanticism (107). Körber points out elements such as an opposition of reality and fantasy, an irruption of the fantastical into reality, an enchantment of the world, a dualism of reality and "Gedankenspiel", a synthesis of literature and science, and finally the idea that literature is nourished by literature so that there is always referentiality. He retraces the development of Schmidt's reception of Romanticism, summing it up as follows: a dominance of fantasy before 1945; fantastic realism with a fertile clash of realistic description and the fantastic in the fifties followed by a

⁶ Karl-Heinz Rofkar (1992) wrote an entire monograph, on the "Megametapher Mond" in Arno Schmidt's work, as he calls it in an addition to this work (1994: 20).

de-romanticisation and a dominance of realism after Schmidt's study of Freud and the development of his etym-theory; and finally, in the seventies, a return to fantasy (326).

The war experience –Arno Schmidt was a soldier for six years without having much involvement in direct battle– had undoubtedly a tremendous impact on his worldview. According to his wife Alice, it transformed him from a very sensitive person into the angry, radical man personified in his literary alter egos.⁷ He has 'Schmidt' of *Brand's Haide* describe his own literary style as "Früher süß, jetzt rabiat" (9), which is valid for the real Arno Schmidt as well. Lore asks the 'Schmidt' of the novel to write the story of their life in Brand's Haide, but hopes it will be a sweet, not a ruthless story (95). It turns out to be sweet and ruthless at the same time.

The post-war Schmidt clearly did not give up his fascination with Romanticism, which is evident in the novel on many levels. But in his post-war writings Schmidt turned to E.T.A. Hoffmann's fantastic realism where the fantastic is combined with realistic description; Schmidt's early works lacked this counterpart to the fantastic world. It is with this term that Körber describes Schmidt's position; fantastic realism is a poetic procedure which accepts the outer world and simultaneously allows the inner world and fantasy to emerge in the outer life. It is therefore a realism that incorporates the fantastic since fantasy is part of the perception of reality (1998: 118).

Schmidt did not like the more theoretical early Romantics but refers rather to the late Romantics such as Tieck, Hoffmann, Brentano, and Fouqué (Körber 1998: 11-12). As I will demonstrate, however, Schmidt, unlike Hoffmann, never openly presents the fantastic, but avails of it in a more subtle and ambivalent manner.

One striking Romantic element is the importance of dreams, as demonstrated by Ernst-Dieter Steinwender, who claims that no modern German author has held dreams in such high esteem since the Romantics (1993: 20). In *Brand's Haide* 'Schmidt' relates six of his dreams, one over five pages. These play a significant role in putting the events into perspective, enriching them and commenting on them.⁸ The idea of the book originated in a dream itself, as Arno Schmidt notes (2003: 26). I will argue later on that for Schmidt, the dreams –albeit a romantic feature– are part of the accurate and therefore realistic description of human consciousness; the distinction between Romanticism and Realism thus becomes debatable.

⁷ Quoted by Körber (1998: 104). Körber concludes his study by stating that no other author of the post-war period has taken on Romantic literature to the same degree (1998: 328).

⁸ Ernst-Dieter Steinwender (1993: 24) affirms that the dreams in Schmidt's writing are often the reaction to the events of the day, they function like a condensation and structuration: "Schmidt benutzt an einigen Stellen Träume, die in der Art von dramatischen 'Integrationsszenen' den Sinn der Handlung konzentrieren und strukturieren".

Furthermore, there are many quotations taken from Romantic works and they fulfill a similar function as the dreams; that is, they constitute crucial elements of the story by adding layers of meaning to the events. The quotations are charged with subjective associations and memories; they are condensations of the subconscious and link the different text levels by their polyvalence (see Hink 1989 and Müller 1989).

First and foremost, there is the prominent role of the Romantic writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué. The importance of Fouqué for *Brand's Haide* is well established. Like Arno Schmidt, the 'Schmidt' of the novel writes a biography of Fouqué and provides several details that are later published also in the real biography (Schmidt 1958). Extensive quotations, up to seven pages long, from Fouqué's novels *Undine* and *Die wunderbaren Begebenheiten des Grafen Alethes von Lindenstein* are read out by 'Schmidt' to Lore and Grete.

In particular, the Undine theme is a strong leitmotif in *Brand's Haide*. Fouqué's Undine is a mermaid who falls in love with the knight Huldbrand, and the requited love of a human being bestows a soul upon her which the elemental fairies otherwise lack. She becomes the perfect wife, trying her best to keep her husband happy and to protect him from the scorn of her relatives, the fairies, who would punish him for not loving her sufficiently. But Huldbrand is confused by the tricks played by the fairies, namely by her uncle Kühleborn, who can take any shape he likes. Huldbrand gradually falls in love with their friend Berthalda, Undine's stepsister, and both treat Undine unfairly while she is trying to protect them from the wrath of the fairies. Finally Undine leaves and when Huldbrand and Berthalda marry, believing her to be dead, the mermaid Undine returns and kills Huldbrand with her kiss, saying "Ich habe ihn zu Tode geweint". Undine is the good, kind, gentle-hearted woman whereas Berthalda is unjust, arrogant and ungrateful. A similar triangular relationship exists in Fouqué's *Alethes* in which there are also a good and a bad stepsister and Alethes is caught in the middle, incapable of keeping them apart.

In *Brand's Haide* the protagonist 'Schmidt' initially considers Lore to be his Undine, which he explicitly states at several points. From the start he is besotted by her and rejoices when she sits down next to him to work as Undine does next to Huldbrand in Fouqué's story; he thinks: "wie Undine: neben mich!!" (32). Looking into her eyes, he also tells her that fairies are supposed to be recognisable by the light in their eyes (78). He expects her to be able to dissolve a coming storm (80), as Undine does in Fouqué's story.

However, Lore obviously cannot live up to his expectations. She loves to dance and enjoys the material aspects of life for which 'Schmidt' expresses nothing but contempt. He explains to her how much art touches him: it is not simply leisure time or relaxation for him:

ich bin da invertiert: für mich ist das Atemluft, das einzig Nötige, und alles Andere Klo und Notdurft. Als junger Mensch: 16 war ich, bin ich aus Euerm Verein ausgetreten. Was Euch langweilig ist: Schopenhauer, Wieland, das Campanerthal, Orpheus: ist mir

selbstverständliches Glück; was Euch rasend interessiert: Swing, Film, Hemingway, Politik: stinkt mich an (Schmidt 2004: 93).

Thus 'Schmidt' positions himself in the Romantic tradition of art as religion, or at least of the idea that art equals life. In spite of his love, 'Schmidt' includes Lore in the other camp. She does not have the qualities of Undine: her gentleness, her willingness to work, her caring character.

In spite of the narrator's behaviour, many allusions associate rather Grete with Undine (Hink 1989: 52). She is kind, which becomes obvious from the start when 'Schmidt' wants to borrow a broom for half an hour. Grete opens the door and is willing to help, but Lore refuses (12-13). Grete is sewing and knitting, which are the activities of Undine; she is referred to repeatedly as "good Grete"; she is the one eager to help Schmidt with his intellectual work. In the end she is the one Schmidt returns to. Learning about a cut in the water supply he fills the bath so that Grete can wash when she returns home – Undine's element of water is related to her. She needs water as a mermaid, and in taking care of her he has accepted finally that she is one. One could say that in *Brand's Haide* Fouqué's Romantic Undine story has a happy ending.

The initial confusion, however, is in line with Fouqué's story, where Huldrbrand is also mistaken in loving Berthalda instead of Undine. The last sentence of *Brand's Haide* refers to another comparable story: "Weine nicht, Liu!" (152). This is a quotation from Puccini's opera *Turandot* where Prince Calaf refuses the love of the good Liu because he is blinded by Turandot's beauty. When in *Brand's Haide* the radio plays the song of Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* – "Blende ihn mit Deinem Schein" – 'Schmidt' comments dryly: "Ist schon passiert!" (29), implying that the effect of Lore on him is in fact deceptive and this makes him blind to Grete's true values. So whereas in *Turandot* Calaf's "weine nicht" is a call to duty telling Liu that she must take care of his father when he abandons her for his passion for Turandot's beauty and the high ideal of love, in *Brand's Haide* it can be read as a real consolation, indicating that 'Schmidt' and Grete will stay together.

There are plenty of such intertextual references, all about triangular love stories, as Piontek pointed out (9), for example Grillparzer's *Der arme Spielmann* and Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, the narrator even commenting that this is "eigentlich dasselbe Thema, wie?" (26). Arno Schmidt does not say explicitly which topic, and the ambivalent "wie?" at the end stresses this. The reader could thus simply read over these allusions, but the more one looks into it, the more one sees how none of the quotations are arbitrary, but in fact all are carefully constructed to support or enrich the story. They add layers of meaning, they comment on the plot, they offer interpretation and put the events into perspective. Piontek speaks in this context of an "unablässig aktiven Steuerung des Erzählverlaufs mittels literarischer Anspielungen" (10). Indeed, without them, the story would be historically interesting perhaps, but banal. It

is mostly through them that the story gains depth and offers food for thought. Here, in the early phase of his writing, however, Schmidt still helps the reader to see these connections, for instance by giving titles and author names and by marking quotations as such. In his later works there is no longer any such signalling, as Hink rightly remarks (1989: 195).

A similar constellation of characters exists in Fouqué's *Alethes*, which is referred to in *Brand's Haide* several times; Schmidt reads extracts from this novel to Lore and Grete and there are long quotations, particularly in the third part when Lore's departure to South America is in the offing. One quotation of almost seven pages describes the descent into hell of the beautiful Mathilde, who is abducted from the Christian knights and her father by the powers of the underworld. When the bishop wants to take her back by the power of faith and forces her to emerge again, she expresses her wish to stay in the underworld full of sensual pleasure. She justifies this decision with reference to the Christian ideal of beatification, which is too feeble a promise in return for the life of ascetic abstinence her father forced upon her: "Drum halt ichs mit der sichern Lust" (143).

Lore's departure to South America in spite of her declared love for Schmidt is clearly put in parallel to Mathilde's descent into hell. After the reading of this story Schmidt is alone in the night and cries out in desperation but says "kein Teufel kam und holte mich!" (137). A little later he reads the *Alethes* extract. Lore is taken by the devil (that is, the rich South American and material comfort) but 'Schmidt' stays behind, without material compensation for the loss of his love.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN LIFE AND LITERATURE

This juxtaposition of the events and literary quotation demonstrates a connection as well as a tension between life and literature. As a matter of fact, this constitutes another important strand of meaning of the book. I have already mentioned the ending, where 'Schmidt' connects Grete to water, the element of mermaids. But this motif of water is present from the beginning, and throughout the novel. When 'Schmidt' arrives in the hamlet, the first thing he sees is a man handling a water hose, which 'Schmidt' comments on by quoting the title of Lessing's famous treatise on aesthetics *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen von Malerei und Dichtkunst* (10), in which Lessing refers to the example of a famous statue of Laocoön and his two sons struggling with sea serpents sent to kill them (Lessing 1766). This refers to Huldbrand's struggle with Undine's element, water; but Laocoön, the priest of a temple of Poseidon, the water god, also promised chastity to the god and is punished for making love in the temple. This relates Laocoön's story to 'Schmidt's' struggle in the book, with 'Schmidt' thus equal to Laocoön, torn between his vow to literature, or to Poseidon in Laocoön's case, and erotic love.

So Lessing's title acquires another meaning: *The limits of painting and poetry* are at stake here; we can actually read the entire novel as the description of the conflict between life and literature, or, in other words, the conflict between sensual and spiritual life.

This can be seen at the beginning, when 'Schmidt', before arriving at the hamlet of Blakenhof –which is also referred to as a dwelling mound ("Warft"), normally a place surrounded by Undine's element, water, but here by the fairy forest Brand's Haide– meets "den Alten" who appears time and again in *Brand's Haide* and who from the start can be associated with Undine's Uncle Kühleborn when he qualifies himself as one of the "elementaschen", an enigmatic designation which contains the word "Elementaren", that is "Elementargeister".⁹

Asked by the old man about his profession, the narrator writes "entschloß mich: 'Schriftsteller', sagte ich" (8). The entire text, then, is a description of how 'Schmidt' struggles to realise this initial decision. Lore represents the sensual life that is a counterforce to a life dedicated to literature, and even though 'Schmidt' tries to convince her and himself that it is possible to combine the worldly and the spiritual, the conflict remains. When he talks about his dedication to the arts, he insists that he has feelings just like everybody else, including love. But she accuses him of lying, "entweder liebst du Wieland oder mich" (93). Even though he declares "to prove manually" that both can be combined, this does not really seem convincing. When she then asks him to write a story about their life together, he promises to do so (95).

The first thing 'Schmidt' does after Lore's departure is to go to a shop and ask for a pen: "ne spitze Schreibfeder" (151). Even though he is told that they do not have any in stock, this serves to show that –in spite of the material obstacles– he renounces the worldly life after the failure of his love for Lore and dedicates himself to literature. He then sees many slips of paper hanging on the community council noticeboard and reads them: "Viele weiße Zettel hingen beim Gemeindeamt, und ich las mir eins" (152). Arno Schmidt is famous for his slip boxes (*Zettelkästen*, see also the title of his *opus magnum*: *Zettels Traum*) and we can interpret this sentence as referring to all the events in the hamlet that he is going to note on his slips for the book, as well as quotations and references he uses for his literary productions. The slips are still white so this is the beginning of his life as a writer.

This final decision for literature is then linked to Grete/Undine since he learns from one of the slips that the water supply will be cut off. Grete to whom he returns and who is characterised as "plain Jane, also eigentlich häßlich" (12) does not really replace Lore. Indeed, when Lore suggests that Grete and 'Schmidt' move in together after her departure and form a couple, Grete says

⁹ Cf. Meyer (1989: 140) for a more detailed explanation of the identity of the old man, Gärtner Auen and Kühleborn.

herself: “‘Er würde ja doch nur an Dich denken, wenn er mich–’ und weinte doch schon vor dem erbärmlichen Glück; dann, gefaßt: ‘Er machts ja auch gar nich...’” (147). Being with Grete signifies the realisation of his decision to lead an intellectual life, not one of sexual love and worldly pleasures. So when ‘Schmidt’ comes back home, he picks up on the Laocoön-motif of the beginning: now it is he who handles a water-hose and fills buckets. Unlike Laocoön, he copes with these “snakes”; his death is only the death of his worldly love life. He does not commit the error of Laocoön; he will stay chaste and is therefore part of the spiritual side of life. This is demonstrated by the fact that he then steps out of the door and dries off in the wind. Lessing claimed that poetry, in contrast to the plastic arts, cannot represent bodies, “weil das Koexistierende des Körpers mit dem Konsekutiven der Rede dabei in Kollision kommt” (Lessing 1766: 107). The decision for literature equals a decision against the body, the sensual.

After this comes a colon and there follows the last line “*Also: Weine nicht, Liu!*”. This Puccini-quotation must thus be read as follows: ‘Schmidt’ is Calaf who lets Liu/Grete know that she need not cry since he will not desert her by dying for the fatal love of Turandot/Lore. He will go on living to dedicate his life to a higher goal; not to love, as Calaf does in Puccini, since passionate romantic love is not possible, but to literature. This decision finally saves Calaf and makes him triumph, and it is also ‘Schmidt’s’ opportunity to overcome his miserable living conditions by pushing aside his unfulfilled erotic desires and by finding gratification in the arts and in having a devoted woman at his side.

The relationship between ‘Schmidt’ and Grete, who has to support him –even though in the service of art and therefore in line with the Romantic ideal of art– quite obviously does not represent the ideal of Romantic love; it is depicted rather as a *Zweckgemeinschaft*. However, Grete shares ‘Schmidt’s’ ideals and, if we compare for instance Friedrich Schlegel’s love-ideal as represented in *Lucinde*, their union might not be entirely un-Romantic.

THE REALISTIC DEPICTION OF FANTASTIC ELEMENTS

Finally, we must consider the way in which the fantastic elements of *Brand’s Haide* are presented by the narrator to evaluate Schmidt’s position vis-à-vis the Romantic fairy-tale aspects. A great deal of information is given about the forest next to Blakenhof, Brand’s Haide. These elements are related to Fouqué on whom the narrator researches. According to Schmidt’s biography Fouqué had a formative experience at the age of eight when his family lost its way in a forest called “Brand’s Haide” (which is, in fact, not located where Schmidt situates it for the purpose of his story) and imagined that they would now have to build huts and lead the life of people gone astray. Brand’s Haide was considered a forest where outlaws live (Schmidt, Fouqué 1986ff.: 49).

The title of the book is likewise a good example of the polyvalence of Arno Schmidt's writing; in addition to the historic reference to Fouqué, underlined by the wrong apostrophe in the title which is a quotation of Fouqué (Schwier 2000: 13), at Cordingen (Lower Saxony), the place the real Schmidt was sent to as a refugee in 1946, there was also a farmer called Brand as well as a place called "Bruns Heide", which, in English pronunciation, gives the title.

Such parallels make Fouqué and Schmidt overlap somewhat, an overlap that indicates Schmidt's identification with the Romantic writer. This identification also becomes obvious when 'Schmidt' reads a Fouqué text but actually puts the tip of his pencil on the page while reading, so that reading and writing become one (121). *Brand* means fire and *Haide* (heathland) is almost barren land, so we have a metaphor for the ruin and rubble of post-war Germany, and for the refugees' need to rebuild an existence from scratch –as the child Fouqué believed to be obliged to do when lost in Brand's Haide. *Haide* could also be *Heide*, a heathen, someone who lost faith after the catastrophic experience of the war. If we take into consideration Huldbrand from Fouqué's novel, whose name refers to someone burning or burned with love or grace, we can interpret 'Schmidt' of *Brand's Haide* as the one for whom nothing remains after the burning of love and who no longer believes in the possibility of fulfilled love. This typical polyvalence also represents the possibility of having realistic and Romantic elements at the same time.

The real Schmidts lived near to Cordingen at the Mühlenhof in 1946, a location very similar to the Blakenhof of the novel: many events and persons of the time figure in the novel, and Cordingen is said to be just around the corner from the Blakenhof. From there comes Fouqué's tutor's (Hauslehrer) grandfather, the gardener Auen, who has some common features with the old man in the forest. 'Schmidt' finds out from the church register in Blakenhof that Auen's birth date is uncertain and links this to the tale of the princess Babiöle. Babiöle opened a nut from which sprang tiny craftsmen and gardeners who built a splendid palace with gardens for her in the blink of an eye (90-91). When the story affirms that the craftsmen built a city five times the size of Rome in three quarters of an hour, the narrator 'Schmidt' comments dryly in brackets that this is obviously exaggerated. In its disproportion this could simply be perceived as funny by the reader but it also allows for the reading that 'Schmidt' does not contest the story in its essence.

The gardener Auen has a telling name: it means "Flusswälder", wetlands, which connects him to the forest Brand's Haide and to Undine. He is supposed to be one of the gardeners of the nut and according to the register he came out of the forest Brand's Haide. This is presented as the missing link for 'Schmidt's' research on Fouqué: Fouqué's tutor's grandfather is in reality a fairy who escaped or was expelled from Brand's Haide. Fouqué is therefore connected to the counter-world of the fairies. Schmidt accepts this fantastic story:

Ein Ausgestoßener aus Brands-Haide also war der Auen gewesen, ein Pflanzegeist, ein Elfenkind: deshalb hatte er immer seinen Geburtstag geschickt verschwiegen! (Er stammte ja auch aus der Nuß: wie lange war er darinnen gewesen: wie kam er hinein?! – Denn daran zu zweifeln fiel mir ebenso wenig ein, als sei ich Don Sylvio!: Bitte: es war ja Alles urkundlich belegt: ich besaß selber 5 Dutzend unter Cellophan!) *Ein Elfenkind*: ach, wär ich doch eins, und nicht Rumpffsweg 27, II. geboren, von konkreten Eltern (heißt 'concrete' nicht Zement?) (Schmidt 2004: 91)

Arno Schmidt was really born at this address. "Don Sylvio" is a reference to a work by Wieland, whose eponymous protagonist believes so much in fantasy that he confuses it with the real world. 'Schmidt', as well as Arno Schmidt, wants to be, like Fouqué, part of the fairy world. The 'Schmidt' of the novel wants an Undine, a fairy, as opposed to Huldbrand in Fouqué's story who cannot handle her not being human. This also becomes obvious in 'Schmidt's' refusal to accept that Lore is divorced; he wants to continue to call her *Fräulein* (33). This is not only because he wants to be the first man in her life but because Undine is a virgin and her love so deep that it must be unique. After having asked him to write a book on them, Lore realises that the idealised Lore in 'Schmidt's' book is the toughest rival she could have (95). 'Schmidt' prefers his fantasy world to reality.

The fairies' presence is attested in the old events recorded in the register but, as the priest affirms, the people still believe in them: they do not dare enter Brand's Haide, and just recently ghostly events were reported. The priest dismisses them as superstition, of course. 'Schmidt' simply says that he would like to see such things. His reaction does not give him away. It is easily possible to read the entire novel on the realistic level. This is the crucial point of Schmidt's dealings with Romanticism: he develops a literary form which allows Romanticism and Realism to coexist.

However, quite a number of details present things in a different light –the apparent Realism is undermined. 'Schmidt's' first encounter with the old man in Brand's Haide, at the beginning, indicates that the old man really is a fairy. First of all, he reacts to 'Schmidt's' ideas even though these are not uttered but only thought, which implies that he can read 'Schmidt's' mind. Moreover he pushes a wheelbarrow with beautiful autumn leaves even though it is the beginning of spring. Furthermore the man agrees with 'Schmidt's' ideas on birth control, saying: "Es hat viel zu viel auf der Welt: Menschen" (7). Referring to "humans" after the colon in this way suggests that he himself is not one of them. When 'Schmidt' tells him that he is working on a biography of Fouqué, the old man does not refer to Fouqué as a writer but as a personal acquaintance saying that he is a pious man and a baron. When 'Schmidt' is astonished that he is familiar with Fouqué, the old man answers: "Die Undine kennt Jeder von uns erementaschen hier" (9). Again, Undine is not referred to as a book title but as a person, without inverted commas or italics, and the penultimate word, which the narrator claims not to have understood correctly, is a mixture of hermits,

hermitage, and elemental fairies (Eremiten, Eremitage and Elementaren). At the end of their conversation he simply disappears and it is remarkable how this is rendered: “Er strich sich mit der Hand übers Gesicht und war weg (verschwinden kann heutzutage Jedermann; ich hab mal Einen gesehen, neben dem ne achtundzwanziger einschlug!)“ (9). The magical disappearance of the old man is compared to a historical war experience so that myth and history are on the same level and the reader can continue to read the novel as a realistic description, or alternatively interpret the formulation as pointing to the absurdity of historic reality thus showing that real life and the fantastic have merged.

When ‘Schmidt’ borrows a broom from the old man, the latter points out that ‘Schmidt’ is certainly not a local. The narrator comments that the old man should know that already and that he must refer to something else with this remark, but brushes it off: “Quien sabe; ich nicht”. The Spanish for “who knows?” cross-refers again to *Don Sylvio* and his belief in the fantastical. The old man, supposedly a plant fairy, approves of ‘Schmidt’s’ refusal to break off little branches out of respect for nature. Later on the story is told of a man who mockingly gave his hand to a tree, was grabbed by the branches and could save himself only by cutting off his hand and fleeing from the forest (85). In the fairy forest everything is alive and at one point the text suggests that the old man is a bush himself: he lends a broom to ‘Schmidt’ and asks him to leave it afterwards at a certain bush; when ‘Schmidt’ returns the broom to the designated bush nobody is to be seen but when he turns his head the broom has disappeared: it must have been taken by the bush.

There are many instances in which events are described in such a way that it is up to the reader to take it as fantasy or as reality. The forest is said to change its paths constantly – ‘Schmidt’ decides to take measurements as a geometer to check that but then the wind knocks against the window “in protest” and ‘Schmidt’ gives in and takes back his decision (89). Again the reader can take this as a witty remark but it could also manifest a belief in the fairy world. Additionally it is mentioned several times that the forest and the paths do indeed change as common superstition has it. As Hink mentions, all the fantastic events of the novel can be read as personal eccentricity, coincidence, or subjective perception. Fantasy and reality remain separated for the reader, not so for the narrator (Hink 1989: 60-61).

ROMANTICISM AS A MORE REAL REALISM

The literary and mystical worlds are combined with the real world in Brand's Haide; this forest is a place where life and literature meet. Consequently Lore's and ‘Schmidt’s’ first sexual encounter takes place in the forest. This location underlines ‘Schmidt’s’ effort to harmonise literature and sensual love. Brand's Haide is not only a place in opposition to Blakenhof, as Müller establishes

(Müller 1989: 47), it is a world in-between, a passageway –just as literature is a liminal place between the outer and the inner world, as demonstrated by the reading sessions in *Brand's Haide*. As such a combination of the reality of everyday-life and the extraordinary Brand's Haide intensifies life: "blaken" is a weak flickering light whereas "Brand" is a real fire. Such a gate or door into a greater reality, also associated with literature, is explicitly mentioned when 'Schmidt' passes from the outer world to his literary work. The idea is triggered by a cat flap: "eine Tür, eine Tür; wer doch eine Tür hätte; und das Bild und das Wort kamen mit mir ums Haus [...] und wieder eine 'Tür'; ich ging in meine Tür" (135). Such formulations become significant when the reader is aware of the book being about oscillating between worlds. At the very end, 'Schmidt' steps out of the "door", too, and dries in the wind (152). He leaves his realm of literature or of the fairy-world (wetness, Undine's element water) and is back in common "reality" and with Grete; therefore the last words: "Weine nicht, Liu!".

In a broader context Arno Schmidt defends the conviction that everything ever written, as well as every writer, is still present and part of our reality. It is his belief that we construct our own reality and that what we have read is part of our universe. Hink states that since the Undine-fantasy affects 'Schmidt's' perception, the elementaries are no fantasy anymore but real in this subjective way (Hink 1989: 61). Schmidt is not concerned with how the world is but with how it is perceived. Thomé (1981: 147) mentioned this already even though his choice of words –"sein" versus "erscheinen"– evokes a difference that Schmidt does not intend. Schmidt points to the fact that our world is a world perceived and built in our minds (*Geisteswelt*): for him it really *is* what we make of it. Schmidt states very clearly that the difference between the subjective and the real world is an "error": "Für jeden gibt es nur eine Welt, die, welche er eben sieht und diese allein ist für ihn wirklich" (*Dichtergespräche im Elysium*, 85, quoted by Hink 1989: 62). Literature is an important factor in this process. Yet even for those who do not read, the principle remains the same. The text refers to many people whose world is constructed on the basis of popular culture, particularly song, which 'Schmidt' severely dismisses as trivial.

Such a conception about the role of the arts and the constitution of our world is clearly a Romantic idea. It is, oddly enough, also in line with modern quantum physics, although this is rarely taken into account. Schmidt claimed that the era of physics had just begun (Schmidt, *Berechnungen* 1, 1986: 167). With this claim he maybe referred to the discovery that at the basis of everything, there is nothing material but rather something immaterial, like an idea. Contemporary physics has indeed come close to Romantic poetic ideas. Our contemporary world is based on this quantum physics, which contradicts the material basis of the world. Given this state of affairs in the so-called hard sciences we can indeed put in question the notion of reality as it is used in opposition to romantic fantasy. Schmidt was a passionate mathematician, claiming both literature and mathematics to be the most precious goods of

humankind (Schmidt, *Der Dichter und die Mathematik*, 1986 ff: 356-359). He insisted, especially in the fifties, on the scientific base of his writing, proposing in pseudo-scientific style his prose theory called "Berechnungen".

This procedure can also be placed in the Romantic tradition of Novalis' and Schlegel's *progressive Universalpoesie*, which combines poetry and science. Schmidt demands that any description of the world must keep up with the technical-political development and sees his style as a new prose form that presents the world in the same way in which we memorise our life, that is, jumping from one event to another. Our life has a "poröse Struktur", he claims: our memory is not continuous but consists of separated images that are complemented by small fragments in the process of remembrance. The English word "to re-member" indeed describes this process. According to Schmidt, the consistent description of life that Realism aims at, is therefore far from being realistic. We have only our "beschädigtes Lebensmosaik" (Schmidt, *Berechnungen*, 1986 ff: 103) –Schmidt also calls it the "Musivische Dasein" (Schmidt, *Berechnungen II*, 1986 ff: 275). Even though it is debatable whether his "calculations" are really scientific, with this new form, which he terms "dehydration" (*Berechnungen*, 1986 ff: 103), that is, his form of condensation, Arno Schmidt has indeed not only found a literary expression of psychology after Freud, he has also found an adequate literary expression of the rubble of his time as the idea of a whole is lost (see Martynkewicz 1992: 42). Post-1945 disillusionment with the social power of culture and the failure of humanism in a country in which it had been so advanced, along with the destruction of German culture, gave rise to the sense of a false reality that had to be countered by the world of the mind, which constitutes a more viable ground for the existence of an acceptable life. Our access to the world is necessarily subjective and porous but that is all we have. Consequently it is up to us to construct our world. Our world is not given but is constituted in a common process involving objective historical circumstances and our subjectivity.

Seen from this perspective, reality and fantasy are no longer in opposition. Therefore Schmidt claims that a page of a book should have two columns, one for objective reality and one for subjective reality (Schmidt, *Berechnungen II*, 1986 ff: 281). In this way literature would correspond to our "Bewußtseinstatsachen", that is, the two levels of our mind, objective and subjective reality –he calls the subjective part "längeres Gedankenspiel" (Schmidt, *Berechnungen II*, 1986 ff: 276). Schmidt melds literature and realistic thinking, fantasy and reality. He wants to find an accurate description of human consciousness; since the human mind functions to a large extent with fantasy, reality needs "Romanticism" to be real– then it is more real than "Realism". Schmidt's insistence on realism in literature necessitates Romantic procedures.

I contest therefore Körber's "Hauptthese", that is the notion that in Schmidt's work Romanticism incarnates "den Gegensatz von Realität und

Phantasie, von Wirklichkeit und Gedankenspiel, den Einbruch des Wunderbaren in die Alltagsrealität, die Verzauberung der Welt – Komplexe, die für Schmidts eigenes Werk von zentraler Bedeutung sind” (Körber 1998: 27). Even though Schmidt works with these oppositions, he believed, at least in the fifties, just as some Romantics did to a certain degree before him, that reality is constituted to a considerable extent by fantasy, or, to use Schmidt’s own words: “Die ‘Wirkliche Welt’?: ist, in Wahrheit, nur die Karikatur unsrer Großn Romane!” (Schmidt, *Die Schule der Atheisten*, 1986 ff: 181). Instead of an opposition between reality and fantasy, he sees them as necessarily complementary. The Romantics for him had a more global approach to humans’ access to reality and thus widened the concept of rationality of the Enlightenment. For Schmidt, fantasy is a part of the human ratio.

In some texts, Schmidt gives an explicit account of the Romantics that counters the popular notion of Romantics being unworldly fairy-tale dreamers. Schmidt argues, mainly in a radio lecture from 1959 on Tieck (Schmidt 1988), his favourite Romantic writer, that the Romantics are revolutionaries and highly political in their satirical social criticism. He points out how the Romantics (he puts the term in brackets to demonstrate the erroneous ideas about this concept) have all experienced the French Revolution and 26 years of war. For the first time in history, according to Schmidt, the population that suffered most due to such events was able to express itself appropriately. This is indeed an important point, since it demonstrates how the educational reforms of the Enlightenment led to new forms and new concerns in the arts. The Romantics realised, Schmidt claims, that life is chaotic and tried to depict this instability of the world. He therefore considers Romanticism the “Ausdruck des *verwegensten Realismus* in Lebensführung und Kunst” (155). It is evident that Schmidt and his contemporaries also underwent this experience of a radically unstable, chaotic world. Schmidt wants to face this reality of his time by developing a form for this conception of Romanticism.

The Romantic approach to reality is more realistic, one could formulate, since it does not remain on the surface of the phenomena but penetrates the depths of the superficial constructions of coherence. And this focus on depths –it is no accident that Novalis was a mining engineer– unsettles the authorities and calls into question conventions and the given order. Schmidt rejects the cliché of the Romantics being irrelevant fairy-tale dreamers, “Denn in Wirklichkeit waren die Romantiker <gefährlichste Leute> – vom Gestapo=Standpunkt aus: ausdauernd=labil; peinlich wohlversehen mit der Gabe, den Widersinn von Regierungsmaßnahmen mit dem Widersinn der Kunst zu kontern” (156). In this quotation Schmidt makes an explicit connection between his conception of Romanticism and his NS-experience: Romanticism cracks open totalitarian systems and counters the administered world.

When Schmidt compares Romanticism with Expressionism, characterised by the same experience of a shaken world and, consequently, the same

confusion and overstrain of language (157), he positions himself clearly in the tradition of both of them, adding to Romanticism the rupture and violence of Expressionism. Schmidt's *habitus* cannot be the same as during the historical period of Romanticism. He integrates the miserable reality of post-war Germany into Fouqué's fantasy, which excluded this reality. But, as Thomé affirmed (1981: 148), this is not done to demonstrate disillusionment with the "poetic" parts but to understand them to a fuller degree. Schmidt does not rhapsodize about the world; he is even cynical about it, not believing anymore in the possibility of social progress. Art cannot lead to a better order in the world for Schmidt; it works merely on the individual level – Schmidt adopts an openly elitist attitude.

He continues by giving examples of Tieck showing the absurd cruelty of the world and particularly of the authorities, and calls this the "längst fällige Anpassung der Poesie an das Leben" (159). For him Tieck was a Realist and the term Romanticism needs to be corrected (165) since Romanticism was tough and realistic enough to face the contingency of the chaotic world without distorting it to produce a "geheimen Sinn".¹⁰ Even if it is true that Schmidt does not stick to a clear definition of Romanticism, as Körber claims (Körber 1998: 15), nor is his use of the term Realism necessarily attached to the historical period or genre (Minden 1982: 3), Schmidt is often very much aware of the historical circumstances and conditions of these movements.

Romanticism is consequently a bolder form of Realism, as it dares to face the underlying insecurity of existence, an insecurity that is more profound and more basic than one merely caused by a deficient social order which could be changed. The Romantics knew that the insecurity cannot be overcome since it is a result not only of outer conditions, but also an integral part of the human condition.

CONCLUSION

This article argues that Arno Schmidt's work must be considered in the light of his particular conception of Romanticism. It is clear that Schmidt wants to instruct his contemporaries with his writings in the early 1950s, albeit by shocking and insulting them. As he writes programmatically in *Aus dem Leben eines Fauns*: "Das ist ja schon ein Sanskritsprüchlein, daß die meisten Menschen nur noch Funken geben, wenn man sie mit der Faust ins Auge schlägt!: also male Maler, schreibe Dichter, mit der Faust! (Denn sie müssen ja irgendwie aufgeweckt werden)" (Schmidt, BA I,1, 1986 ff: 355). But for him this Enlightenment spirit is actually the spirit of Romanticism and in his books it is

¹⁰ If Schmidt really was a "verschämter Romantiker", as Schmidt-specialist Jörg Drews said (1979), that might be valid for *Leviathan* –in the fifties he then became a more and more overt one.

made clear that the so-called Realists are blind to the political realities whereas the literary *alter ego* protagonists see them much more clearly.

The complex intertextual layering of *Brand's Haide* and the close connection to Romanticism has been only briefly investigated in this article; there are many more elements that could be added. It is possible to read the novel as a realistic account of the German post-war situation for the many refugees. However, the immense complexity of the construction, with its different layers and its porous structure, presents a more realistic description of the world than the one offered by conventional realistic literary procedures with their efforts to depict a linear and complete series of events.

So is Schmidt a Romantic Realist or a Realist Romantic? One could adopt both perspectives, he is Realist in his desire to attain the most realistic form for the description of human consciousness with his writing, but he is convinced that the Romantic ideas are actually more in tune with this reality. So both Realist Romantic and Romantic Realist are redundant expressions from Schmidt's point of view.

I have shown that Schmidt understands his brand of Romanticism as a possibility of countering totalitarianism and what Horkheimer and Adorno called "die verwaltete Welt" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1991). His experience of National Socialism and a totalitarian system that did not allow for any deviation convinced him of the necessity of cultivating the free work and the associations of the subjective mind. He was part of German post-war non-conformism. This dissociation from society can gain some almost reactionary aspects and could be associated with a belated "inner emigration", especially in the following phases of his work where his alter egos withdraw even more into a reclusive world of specific erudition. But given Schmidt's contemporary society and the lack of understanding he faced, this is understandable –the potential for cultural criticism, social and anthropological reflection, and for an understanding of the functioning of literature remains.

We might take this form of writing as a representation of life: on the first, superficial level we deal with material reality but beyond that there is so much more –an immense multitude of layers of significations which makes life what it is; that is, more complex than any attempt to reduce it to one coherent meaning. Literature can make us aware of this.

Finally, writing literature with so many different layers and possible readings proves Lessing's thesis in *Laocoön* wrong: Arno Schmidt manages to write literature that is capable (just as the plastic arts are, according to Lessing) of representing co-existing things –it is not limited to consecutive representation. Language does more than what the Enlightenment of Lessing reserved for it. Literature is not simply a linear description of a coherent truth; it is an account of the complexity of life and even the creation of its richness. Thus, even if Schmidt was less optimistic about the possibility of a society where art and life merge, he nonetheless shared the Romantic conviction that

life would be nothing without the spiritual life cultivated in language; he believed in poetic thinking.

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