

Karl Philipp Moritz's Andreas Hartknopf Novels and the Ethics of Allegory

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If Quintilian was right when he said that allegory "says one thing in words and another in meaning," then he was only wrong for not making the distinction between the activity of the author who writes allegory and the critic who reads allegorically.¹ From the standpoint of ethics, Quintilian's definition, which emphasizes allegory's distortion of reference, continues to burden the relationship between author and reader who eye each other with moral suspicion. When the author calls attention to his linguistic practice, the reader considers this an imposition and wonders what new deception lies in wait for him or her. In comparison, when the reader willfully misreads a text, the author believes his work is ruined and responds with a proscription of interpretation. The conflictual process of interpretation explains the curious history of allegory and, probably, the curious history of Moritz's neglected allegorical novels. Writing gave birth to censorship, and, in turn, censorship spawned allegory; modern censorship, though, began in the eighteenth century with the censorship of allegory.

Despite the fact that poets of every age since Augustine have found new uses for the ancient genre of allegory, the Enlightenment associated it with the decadence of the seventeenth-century Baroque and devalued it for its dependence on an artificial model of language.² Allegory's dual promise to name itself and its "other," that is, to establish an intimate connection between writing and reference and, at the same time, to incorporate the "other" of that which it signified, seemed both impossible to fulfill, not too mention, risky. Adhering to an Aristotelian poetics, neoclassical critics preferred to divide literature into lyric, epic, and dramatic genres. Although one can find evidence of allegorical tropes in each of these categories, this division cannot accommodate the full definition of allegory. Moritz's two allegorical novels, *Andreas Hartknopf: Eine Allegorie* (1785) and *Andreas Hartknopfs Predigerjahre* (1790), thus represent a departure from a dominant Enlightenment aesthetics that explicitly contests its ethics of reading.³

As a writer, professor, and editor of the first journal of clinical psychology in Germany, Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-1793) witnessed the emergence of a "public sphere" where the discussion of intellectual ideas could take place in a rational manner. It is my general thesis that Moritz offers us an alternative model of the public sphere in his work, because he raised the issue of rational discourse in the light of the pathologies of the human mind.

For Moritz, a new awareness of madness in human behavior found its objective correlative in the maddening increase of new technologies of communication and new modes of appropriation that threatened the autonomy of the public sphere.⁴ The return to allegory—the favored symbolic mode of the Baroque court poets—shows Moritz's recognition of the failure of conventional modes of expression. The thematic stability of allegory rather than its generic stability, its preoccupation with eternal themes, such as, love, marriage, and death, make allegory not only possible, but an historical necessity.⁵ More so than literary realism, the narrative frame of allegory provides an active response to the new ethical demands created by a public sphere in the eighteenth century, because it constructs its own "public sphere" of the imaginary. The allegorical text that brings with it a "public sphere" of the imaginary does not allow itself to become the refuge for the private interests of either author or reader. The key to understanding Moritz's allegory is not a secret password known only to the initiated.⁶ It simply provides a common—though unstable—ground that dictates where the negotiations between author and reader should take place.

As I will show, Moritz presents a unified narrative strategy in which the staging of the hero's death beyond the pages of the novel invites the reader's imaginative engagement with the text. The creation of an "alternate discourse" within a new kind of literary space enables the individual reader to view the community of the public sphere from the outside and to discover new means of individual expression. My notion that the *Hartknopf* novels create a "public sphere" of the imaginary results from the belief that Moritz's allegory is a direct criticism of eighteenth-century subjectivist discourse which led to Romanticism. In comparison, Moritz scholarship, which often compares Moritz to Rousseau and his conception of the self, straitjackets Moritz into a pre-Romantic tradition. Beginning with his interest in the science of the mind, Moritz does not invoke the concepts of fiction and reality as such but the conventions which form the basis of a contract between author and reader. The terms of this contract do not identify the allegory as discourse but as the performance of an interpretive process which has been interrupted.

Moritz's direct experience with the growing public sphere derived from his involvement as editor of the *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde* (1783-1793). His first novel, *Anton Reiser*, published in four volumes from 1785 to 1790, is an outgrowth of this project, while the novel's subtitle, *Ein psychologischer Roman*, immediately challenges the notion of genre by suggesting a new one. Describing this novel as the "innere Geschichte" of its protagonist, *Anton Reiser* is testament to Moritz's optimistic belief that he could render certain aspects of the pathological mind transparent in an act of personal and public exposure. The *Hartknopf* novels were written at the same time as *Anton Reiser* but are more experimental both in their use of language and in the structure of their narrative frame, thus reflecting a different understanding of the relationship between public and private. The novels themselves rely on even more biographical material than does *Anton Reiser*. Nevertheless, the allegorical mode works directly against the writing of an autobiographical contract that would combine author, narrator, and protagonist under one signature.⁷

The first *Andreas Hartknopf* novel, subtitled *Eine Allegorie*, introduces the traveling preacher, Hartknopf, during his fortieth year. The second, more complex novel, entitled the *Predigerjahre*, describes Hartknopf's brief tenure as pastor, which he begins at the age of twenty, in the not-so-picturesque village of Ribbeckenau.⁸ Written when Moritz returned from Rome—after having spent two years there in the company of Goethe—the novel explains that Hartknopf's situation in Ribbeckenau acts as a prelude to the later years which are narrated in the first novel:

Ribbeckenau war die Mutterkirche, und Ribbeckenäuchen das Filial davon, wozu der Weg über ein Torfmoor führte. Hier war es, wo der Knäuel seines Lebens sich in labyrinthische Knoten verwickelte, die nur die Schärfe des Schwerts wieder lösen konnte. [...] Durch diese Klemme mußte Hartknopfs Leben selbst noch durchgehen, ehe es ungehemmt in seinem vollen Glanze leuchten, und wohlthätige Klarheit um sich her verbreiten konnte. (Moritz 1:473)

This novel ends with Hartknopf's departure from Ribbeckenau, having become meanwhile not only an object of ridicule and a cuckold, but also a martyr of sorts. After marrying the beautiful Sophie Erdmuth in a macabre ceremony presided over by the minister named Tanatos, he suffers a series of setbacks. First, Sophie betrays Hartknopf in her change of heart toward another figure in the novel named Kersting—an

event that uncannily repeated itself in Moritz's own life. Second, Hartknopf suffers the hatred of his parish following his forced resignation from office—an event for which Hartknopf's nemesis, the deacon Ehrenpreiss, takes full responsibility. With Hartknopf's eventual departure for the mystical East, Ehrenpreiss claims his victory over Hartknopf in a manner which returns us to the allegorical theme of the novels. The final commentary on Hartknopf's life, "den Hartknopf habe ich moralisch tot geschlagen!," reminds us that Hartknopf's expulsion from prosaic Ribbeckenau represents a spiritual death—or, rather, a murder of the soul. The theme of "soul murder" connects the *Hartknopf* novels to a tradition of texts and "pretexts" beginning with the New Testament.⁹ Moreover, "soul murder," significantly enough, is the central theme of Prudentius' fourth-century allegorical poem, the *Psychomachia*, believed to be the forerunner of modern allegory.¹⁰

Rarely read or studied today due to their opacity, Moritz's allegorical novels provided a re-definition of the novel genre in terms of allegory that proved immensely fruitful for a generation of Romantic writers, like Jean Paul, who came after him. For Jean Paul, allegory's dependence on a rhetorical or "baroque" model of language was never a limitation. As a text which reflects on its own meaning, it became a model of the human effort to deny the effects of pathology and to assert individual autonomy by means of a shared use of language. Thus, Moritz's decision to eliminate the narrator from the *Andreas Hartknopf* novels first pointed toward the possibility of a narrative structured solely by language. According to this model, interpretation of the text becomes the activity of an autonomous reader. Since antiquity, Quintilian's definition of allegory as "the saying of one thing and the meaning of another" (Institutio oratorio viii.6.44), has not only guided the production of allegory by taking the fundamental function of reference as its *material* base, it has also defined a particular method of literary exegesis, known as *allegoresis*. This definition of allegory as an act of reading also contributes to Moritz's own definition of allegory.¹¹ Instead of including a narrator who engages in a strategy of exposure, the overt opacity of the allegory is another appeal to the reader's imaginary engagement with the text. Moritz's elimination of a subjective narrative point-of-view thus opens the text up to a "public sphere" of the imaginary.

In his zeal to impress his new friend, Goethe, Moritz touted the qualities of his "other" novel in a letter dated June 7, 1788. Desiring him to read *Andreas Hartknopf: Eine Allegorie* once he had finished with *Anton Reiser*, he wrote—in words that were sure not to please Goethe—that the *Allegorie* is a "wild blasphemy against a monstrous

unrecognizable something or other": "Es ist eine wilde Blasphemie gegen ein unbekanntes großes Etwas" (qtd. in Eybisich 233). It is not known whether Goethe ever read the novel. Once Moritz secured a position as Professor of the Theory of Fine Arts at the Berlin Academy of Arts in 1789, with the aid of Goethe and Duke Karl August, correspondence between the two men ceased. Since then, Moritz scholarship has regarded Moritz's description of his own novel as pure nonsense. Instead of believing that this letter attempts to communicate something important to Goethe, it privileges the many other statements that Moritz made concerning allegory. Typically, these comments are taken out of context, for Moritz's critique of allegory is, without exception, a critique of Winckelmann's description of allegory's function in *painting*. Moritz's famous critiques of allegory are not made against allegory in *literature*.¹² Nevertheless, the scholarship continues to judge his return to allegory as an aberration, forcing Moritz to testify against himself. This letter, which is the only one remaining that refers to either of the two allegorical novels, is significant, because it makes an important distinction between a *metaphorical* use of language and a possible *allegorical* use that, once again, takes us back to Quintilian.

The relationship between metaphor and allegory should already be clear, for one of the most popular definitions of allegory is one taken from Cicero that says that allegory is a "continued metaphor." In antiquity, of course, the terms, metaphor and allegory, were often confused. Although one of the figures was given the name, "inversio," and the other, "translatio," both are symbolic modes that operate according to the same process, namely, "translation." Quintilian, who called metaphor "the most beautiful of tropes," because it "accomplish[es] the supremely difficult task of providing a name for everything," himself made a distinction between metaphor and allegory (viii.6.4-5).¹³ Using the metaphor of property, he offers metaphor as a model for self-contained language. According to him, the comparison of two terms, however dissimilar, enables the one to "dispossess" or "displace" the other (viii.6.18).¹⁴ Although metaphor does not have the same function as the proper name, the negation of the native difference between two terms enables the metaphor or "word" to name its referent. In comparison, allegory provides merely the semblance of reference. Since "meaning" (*sensus*) no longer inhabits (or is the property of) "words" (*verba*), the ostensible movement from the particular to the general is considered no more than a "sleight-of-hand" in which abstract concepts substitute for particular things. In a similar manner, then, Moritz's allegorical novels reflect a crisis in the "conventional" or "metaphorical" use of language, because they respond to a historical situation. The

"monstrous unrecognizable something or other" that confronts him in the late eighteenth century either does not yet have a name or has too many names. The endless substitution of words for things that characterizes allegory can only end when the key is found that will unlock its mystery. Until that moment, as Walter Benjamin has remarked, allegory is a text in which "any one, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (Benjamin 175). Therefore, Moritz's letter tells Goethe that he has just written a text which will allow neither translation, nor substitution to "name" the "other" of his text and uncover its "secret history" (Moritz 3:93). The reader of allegory is put in the same position as the reader of the *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*. He or she is a wanderer in a labyrinth who is abandoned to the hope that the "mild ray of truth" will one day descend and show the way out of this labyrinth (3:103). The light would come, Moritz writes in the preface to the *Magazin*, but we have to wait until after we are dead.¹⁵

The Moritz scholarship is not wrong to say that Moritz's description of his own text is nonsense, but it must define the rules for its practice of substitution. During the last twenty-five years, the Moritz scholarship has been directly responsible for the "Moritz renaissance" in Germany as well as his introduction to a North American audience. With the appearance of *Anton Reiser* in a fine English translation and the possibility of more translations following, we must reassess our interpretive strategies. For example, what do we gain when we say that Andreas Hartknopf's life repeats the life of Christ (which it does) or that it closely resembles Anton Reiser's "innere Geschichte" (which it does) or that it gives a Masonic critique of Enlightenment (which it also does)?¹⁶ Do any of these readings, which locate the many pretexts of this allegory, provide the key to the mystery of these texts? Clearly these pre-texts have a certain authority, but when are we to decide that the allegory has finished re-writing its pre-text and has begun to *write* and *name* something "new," namely, the "monstrous unrecognizable something or other"? Instead of focusing on the nominative function of language, we should begin to consider the performative function of language, since, after all, a "wild blasphemy," like an interpretation, must be enacted, acted out, performed.

Each of Moritz's major texts begins with a "motto" or "emblem," that which in German is called a *Wahlspruch* and in French a *blazon*; in this respect, the first *Hartknopf* novel is no different. The "motto" serves two purposes: 1) it designates the genre of the text itself and 2) it demands that each interpretation responds to that which the designated genre calls for. Neither of Moritz's mottos is at all original, indi-

cating that, for Moritz, genre is less a matter of category than it is a means to establish a continuity with a specific tradition or "canon" of texts. For these novels, then, he chose the familiar Pauline *dictum*, "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" or, in German: "Der Buchstabe tötet, aber der Geist macht lebendig" (1:402).¹⁷ The problem of the letter and the spirit in the *Hartknopf* novels, is not, however, one of writing, or, of allegorical writing in particular, as is so often argued by Moritz scholars, it is, just as it is in Corinthians, one of interpretation. In Second Corinthians, for example, Paul explains the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and, in the process, he explains that one must read the Old Testament allegorically. The meaning of his *dictum* is that God gives His authority to read the letter spiritually, or to allegorize, if the literal level of the letter kills and the spirit gives life. Moritz's "motto" does the same. It puts out a call for interpretation and thus shifts (or displaces) the burden of responsibility from the author and his text to the reader and his or her own "reading." Thus, the novel's subtitle, "Eine Allegorie," as well as the "motto" that follows it are not intended simply to indicate "genre," but also to show that a definition of allegory as reading, that is, *allegoresis*, is an invitation to dialogue with the reader.

Yet, the invitation goes unanswered. Instead, Moritz scholarship practices a subtle censorship of these allegorical novels and avoids the responsibility of interpretation. Predominantly, it gives itself the metaphysical task of bringing to life the "dead letter" of allegory by means of a *re-presentation* of a text that defines itself by its *lack* of content: "It is a wild blasphemy against a monstrous unrecognizable something or other." In this manner, criticism defines its own responsibility to consist in the "vivifying actualization of a dead letter" (Weber 93). Following a traditional hermeneutics, the critics' restoration of a representational model of language privileges the status of the reader within a "private sphere" of the imaginary. This private sphere is "autonomous" in the *literal sense*. It is the property of one individual, namely the critic and his or her subjective opinion.

Karl Philipp Moritz's alternative model of the public sphere shatters this "prison of autarchic subjectivity," because it offers a model of negotiation between author and reader inspired by the emergence of the public sphere in Germany during his lifetime.¹⁸ His decision to write allegory involves a new notion of authority that reshapes the traditional relationship between author and reader by imposing a conflictual process of interpretation. Interpretation is henceforth a *psychomachia*. This struggle between author and reader fought out on the battlefield of the text ranges in intensity. One moment it achieves an intimate di-

ologue familiar to other Sentimental novels of the period. The next moment it reaches the vehemence of those polemical attacks which Moritz often encountered while working for the *Vossische Zeitung* or in the frequent debates among editors of the *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*. Finally, the disappearance of the author from the *Hartknopf* novels, reflected in the elimination of a centralized narrative point-of-view, performs a function similar to the "motto" or, even, the well-known invitation of the *Magazin*. Moritz's *Magazin*, it will be remembered, enjoined all, scholar and lay person, to contribute to the store of life-histories that have been published "before the eyes of the world" or to reflect openly on the lives of famous men—Rousseau, for example. While it is quite possible for an accomplished author to construct the "innere Geschichte" of a character within the frame of a "psychological novel," the publication of a "secret history"—or that which Moritz called a "geheime Geschichte"—is the task of allegory and requires an experimentation with different narrative strategies. The author's disappearance from the *scene* of the text, so to speak, is not an evasion. Rather, it is an assumption of the responsibility of his own discourse at the same time that it is an invitation to the reader to share in this responsibility. The censorship of allegory—in particular, Moritz's allegories—indicates just such an evasion of responsibility. The formulation of an ethics of allegory begins with a question that the author puts to the reader: "Why," he asks, "do you not take responsibility for your interpretation?" To which the reader responds, "Because I do not trust you." A differentiated criticism of Moritz's *Andreas Hartknopf* should try to understand how Moritz's allegory formulates a response to this crisis of conventionality—which might also be called a crisis of faith.

● NOTES

1. "allegoria [...] aliud sensus ostendit." See Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, viii.6.44. Since Quintilian, the traditional definition of allegory has made way for a specific kind of writing practice contributing to the production of allegories and a specific kind of reading practice known as *allegoresis*. My use of the word allegory is based on these two senses of allegory. However, I emphasize, as does Quintilian, the material basis of language as the material basis of reference. I take issue with the more "spiritual" reading practice which privileges meaning (context) over material (the word). *Allegoresis*, which, in some sense,

is what all literary critics do, especially Freudian literary critics, must be careful not to "kill" the letter, in order for the spirit to "live."

2. In the strange logic of the late eighteenth century, Rhetoric equals Artifice. It is possible—but I cannot prove this here—that the eighteenth century was completely unaware of Quintilian's definition of allegory.

3. Christoph Brecht's article, "Die Macht der Worte" (1990), is the lengthiest article written to date which handles the *Hartknopf* novels exclusively. The following list comprises the five or six articles and book chapters which have been written about the *Andreas Hartknopf* novels: Minder 219-246; Langen 166-218; Boulby 227-242; Schrimpf, "Nachwort"; Schrimpf, *Moritz*, 56-65; Saine, *Theodizee*, 91-123; and Kestenholz 131-151. A full-length study has yet to appear. Moreover, no critic has yet made a convincing argument regarding the centrality of the *Hartknopf* novels to Moritz's *oeuvre*. As a result, Moritz is highly regarded for the critique of imagination in *Anton Reiser* rather than for the transcendental imagination of the allegories.

4. Since the publication of Immanuel Kant's article "What is Enlightenment?" in 1784, the notion of the "public sphere" constitutes one of the categories central to our understanding of the modern period. As founding editor of the *Magazin*, Moritz participated in the historical "transformation" of the public sphere and gave intellectuals their first glimpse into the psychopathology of everyday life. Uniting creative writers, legal experts, and medical doctors in the common pursuit of "truth for its own sake," he hoped to uncover the "diseases of the soul." As a result of cultural debates in Berlin and literary debates in Weimar, Moritz rejected the "public" role of critical philosophy advocated by Mendelssohn and Kant. With the pamphlet, *Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen*, he and Goethe introduced a new notion of literature safeguarding the author's political and intellectual autonomy. In my dissertation, "The Works of Karl Philipp Moritz As Alternate Discourse of the Public Sphere (UCLA, 1997)," I substantiate Moritz's unique reading of this emerging concept by means of historical evidence.

5. In the literature concerned with allegory, there exists a debate whether allegory is a genre. Certainly, everyone can name a number of explicit allegories which would make a genre study possible. According to Quintilian, it is a trope, and I treat it as such. However, there is a tradition of allegory which cannot be denied. I am attempting to treat it as a structuring principle or narrative frame which has several purposes. One of them is to respond and to provide a response to ethical demands of an age. For an impressive discussion of genre and, in particular, allegory as a genre, see Fowler, *Kinds*, 191-95.

6. There are two traditions of allegory. One consists of a *secret* language written to be understood by a few. The allegory of Freemasonry is one example. The other insists that allegories form a universal language that can be under-

stood by as many people as possible. The *Andreas Hartknopf* novels belong in this tradition, with the *Inferno* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

7. For the notion of the autobiographical contract, see Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*.

8. In other words, the first novel narrates events which take place in Gellenhausen when Hartknopf is forty years old. The second novel is devoted to a twenty-year-old Hartknopf, pastor of Ribbeckenau.

9. On the notion of the *pretext*, see, especially, the chapter "The Pretext" in Quilligan, *Language*, 97-156.

10. On the importance of the *Psychomachia* for the history of allegory, see Van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth*.

11. My emphasis on allegory as an act of reading dissociates Moritz's notion of allegory from irony. Whereas in allegory, the word refers to something "other," in irony, it refers to its "opposite." There is, therefore, an enormous difference between allegory and irony.

12. Critics believe they have found evidence for how Moritz thought about allegory, because he wrote two articles which critique the whole notion of allegory. The first piece of evidence is the aesthetic treatise, *Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen* (1788). Because this treatise argues for the "autonomy" of art, it is argued (wrongly) that allegory cannot be "autonomous." The second piece of evidence is Moritz's article, "Über die Allegorie." However, the first sentence of this article explicitly refers to Winckelmann's defense of allegory and not to any literary examples of allegory. Cf. Sorensen, Chapter 6, "Die Autonomie des Symbols: Karl Philipp Moritz."

13. Personally, I make a distinction between allegory and metaphor, in order to avoid the overdetermined distinction between allegory and symbol. Benjamin and de Man have their own reasons for beginning their discussions of allegory with this distinction. But we need to ask ourselves if this distinction, which has since fallen into a binary opposition, is helpful anymore.

14. Quintilian writes, "Metaphora enim aut vacantem occupare locum debet aut, si in alienum venit, plus valere eo quod expellet."

15. See Moritz's preface to the *Magazin*.

16. This is a summary of the readings provided by Schrimpf; Boulby, *Moritz*; Minder; and Kestenholz. Brecht argues that the theme of these novels is the protagonist's struggle to define his identity by means of the language available to him. Brecht, however, recapitulates the "aesthetic ideology" of Moritz's age. He makes Hartknopf's struggle into a decision between *symbolic* language and *allegorical* language.

17. See *II Corinthians* 3:6.

18. See Adorno's essay on Franz Kafka in *Prisms*.

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