

VAUVENARGUES' RHETORIC OF DISJUNCTION, OR THE
DISINTEGRATION OF UNDERSTANDING IN THE
INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The Eighteenth Century witnesses, according to Sartre, the declaration of independence of Literature which passes from the perpetuation of the status quo in the affirmation of the ideology of the ruling class, to the proclamation of its disengagement from all established norms. More than simply affirming its autonomous status Literature, in this period, in fact embodies a certain spirit of negativity, of gainsaying, as it identifies itself with the powers of contestation, powers which Sartre neatly encapsulates in the term *Esprit*: "... elle [la littérature] ne reflétera plus les lieux communs de la collectivité, elle s'identifie à l'Esprit, c'est-à-dire au pouvoir permanent de former et de critiquer des idées. [...] la littérature se confond avec la négativité, c'est-à-dire avec le doute, le refus, la critique, la contestation."¹ What we hope to demonstrate is the fact that the subversive undercurrent of literature as intimated by Sartre in his paradigm of negativity finds perhaps its most perfect illustration in Vauvenargues' *Introduction à la connaissance de l'esprit humain* which, far from offering the sanguine moral philosophy traditionally alluded to by Vauvenarguan criticism, proffers a form of literature undermined by an adversative *Esprit* subtending its being. By the same token, we hope that the latter will lead to a re-evaluation of the traditional opposition between Vauvenargues with his supposedly positive moral philosophy, and his more pessimistic predecessors of the *Grand Siècle*.

Traditionally, Vauvenargues' *oeuvre* has been taken to express the author's enthusiastic celebration of human nature, be it his admiration for man's aspiration toward virtue and glory, or his sympathetic understanding of man's fragility and imperfection; his indulgence towards man's foibles, or his compassion for human misery. As such, it is perceived as the converse of the austere philosophy of the moralists of the *Grand Siècle* such as Pascal, who depicts the misery of man tainted by sin, who can achieve salvation but through the proscription of what is natural, of what is human,² or La Rochefoucauld for whom the dictates of self-love are invariably incompatible with the demands of virtue. Refuting the negative portrait of man outlined by his predecessors, Vauvenargues proposes then, via his reconciliation with human nature, the rehabilitation of man fallen from grace: the human, for Vauvenargues, is not to be repressed, but affirmed rather in all its vitality. But what exactly, one must ask oneself, constitutes the human for the philosopher of the Enlightenment? If Vauvenargues reflects on man in his relationship to God, to his fellow-man in society, and above all to himself and his conscience, he also reflects on the nature of reflection and its relationship to the expression of the latter. In short, Vauvenargues seeks to investigate not only the human

spirit in its myriad manifestations, but also the agent by which he arrives at his understanding of the latter. It is thus that he seeks to circumscribe not only what man knows, but also the manner in which he arrives at this knowledge: "Il ne faut point juger des hommes par ce qu'ils ignorent, mais par ce qu'ils savent, et par *la manière dont ils le savent*" (222³; italics ours).

As such, there occurs what may be termed a displacement of transcendence: the teleological transcendence of Pascal has been replaced by an epistemological form of transcendence as the reflection of man unfolds in a phenomenological, and not a metaphysical, dimension. We would do well to remember, at this stage, that Vauvenargues' *Introduction à la connaissance de l'esprit humain*, published in February of 1746, appeared in the same year as Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, and that Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, first published in 1690, had been widely disseminated on the continent in the early part of the Eighteenth Century.⁴ It is precisely at this juncture where the *what* and the *how* of human understanding intersect that the sanguine portrait of the moral philosopher takes on a very different tonality: it is the darker side of this portrait occasioned by the aporias arising out of the self-reflexivity of Vauvenargues' reflection which will be the focus of our investigation into the circumscription *of* the human spirit *by* the human spirit. Or, to be more precise, the purpose of our investigation is to articulate the disarticulation of human understanding by the ironic fissures, those points of slippage occasioned by the incommensurability between the subject and the object of human understanding. In short, to articulate what we have termed Vauvenargues' rhetoric of disjunction: that moral philosophy should, by definition, revolve around the theory of human knowledge should indeed, as Henri Mydlarski rightly remarks, be taken as axiomatic.⁵

If we are to gain a proper perspective on Vauvenargues' *ars philosophandi*, we must attempt to elucidate from a diachronic perspective the human dimension accorded by the moral philosopher to understanding. It is thus that we begin our investigation with an overview of the epistemological revolution which occurred with the Enlightenment.⁶ For the moral philosophers of the *Grand Siècle*, there exists an essential disjunction between two basic types of knowledge, that is to say between scientific *praxis* and teleological *doxa*, the divine inspiration of the latter proving the ruination of the positivistic postulate. For the moral philosopher of the Enlightenment, however, the disjunction between these two orders of knowing is abolished when scientific enquiry is dispossessed of its supernatural etiology as it is reoriented in a theory of knowledge predicated upon the consubstantiality of man and his world. It is the human dynamics of the new epistemology which we shall see reflected in Vauvenargues' *oeuvre*: "Je regarde humainement les choses" (100). That the *Introduction à la connaissance de l'esprit humain* should be oriented towards the new epistemology would in fact find confirmation in the very

title of the work. It is by no means fortuitous that the title itself should propose not so much an introduction to the human spirit, but rather an introduction to the *understanding* of the human spirit, the latter turn of phrase connoting significantly both the object and the agent of understanding – all this being succinctly synthesized in the ambiguity of the *de*. The latter interpretation is further reinforced by the fact that the term *connaissance* itself connotes both the object and the agent of knowledge, or, as Furetière would have it, “toutes les choses qui ont passé par nostre esprit.”⁷ Moreover, the fact that the title should refer both to the object of human understanding as well as to the modality by which the latter is arrived at, would be confirmed by the usage of the term *introduction*, understood here in its etymological sense: what Vauvenargues is intimating thereby is a leading into the understanding *of* the human spirit *by* the human spirit. To the ambiguity of syntax, however, must be added the semantic ambiguity of the term *esprit*, which can be taken to refer both to the mind as well to the human spirit. Ambiguity, then, being of the essence in the title of Vauvenargues' work, the question which we must now ask ourselves is why this should be so. We hope to demonstrate that articulated in the dynamics of ambiguity insinuated in the title is Vauvenargues' invitation to comprehend his rhetoric of disjunction.

We begin our investigation into Vauvenargues' rhetoric of disjunction with *le paradoxe sur le philosophe*. Far from exemplifying those beacons of humanity whose reasoned understanding of man and society will contribute to the amelioration of the latter, the philosopher as portrayed by Vauvenargues is, on the contrary, the very embodiment of unreason and non-edification. If philosopher he be, and the title is one which Vauvenargues automatically refutes, if we are to believe his pronouncements on the subject in his correspondence with Mirabeau,⁸ it is on account of his sentiment (“Ce sont mes inclinations qui m'ont rendu *philosophe* ...,” 401) – sentiment which renders reason impotent: “Toutes nos démonstrations ne tendent qu'à nous faire connaître les choses avec la même évidence que nous les connaissons par sentiment. Connaître par sentiment est donc le plus haut degré de connaissance; il ne faut donc pas demander une raison de ce que nous connaissons par sentiment” (272). Paradoxically, it is “les passions [qui] ont appris aux hommes la raison” (201). And what of the goal of moral edification which ought rightly to be the aim and end of the philosopher? Again, contrary to normal expectation, the understanding of human nature by the moral philosopher does not, according to his own confession, contribute one iota to the edification of humanity:

Que n'a-t-on pas écrit contre l'orgueil des grands, contre la jalousie des petits, contre les vices de tous les hommes? Quelles peintures n'a-t-on pas faites du ridicule, de la vanité, de l'intempérance, de la fourberie, de l'inconséquence, etc.? Mais, qui s'est corrigé par ces images ou par ces préceptes? Quel homme a mieux jugé, ou mieux vécu, après tant d'instructions reçues? (269)

Indeed, the edification of mankind is but an illusion, the *métier* of philosopher but *vanitas vanitatis*: "... il n'est pas d'occupation si ingrate que celle d'instruire les hommes. [...] le plus médiocre et le plus borné des métiers est celui d'écrivain et de philosophe" (270). And, were this not sufficient in itself to indict the philosopher, the latter, not unlike Plato's pariah-poet, is taxed with untruth: the philosopher is what Vauvenargues terms "un personnage menteur" (341). If, then, Vauvenargues' portrait of the philosopher is grounded in unreason, non-edification and untruth, what, one may ask, is the intent of his reflections? Does such a damning portrait of the philosopher in fact not undermine the very credibility of his work? Does *le paradoxe sur le philosophe* not imply, in the final analysis, the self-contestation of all philosophy? We understand better, at this stage, why Vauvenargues, false modesty notwithstanding, should be wary of accepting the not so honorific title of philosopher, and why, ultimately, he should understand his natural philosophy to contain within itself the seeds of its own self-contestation ("... elle s'arme contre elle," 401). And, what is more, if his natural philosophy is grounded in sentiment, that is to say in his very being, it follows that philosophy should be coterminous with the philosopher. Indeed, Vauvenargues goes so far as to proclaim the identity of his being with philosophy ("la philosophie que je suis," *ibid.*). He is not a philosopher; he *is* philosophy, the fundamental correlation between philosopher and philosophy underscoring the epistemological grounding of his enquiry in its affirmation of the consubstantiality existing between the subject and the object of understanding.

Leaving aside for the moment the speculations of the moral philosopher, we turn now to the mediation of the latter in and through his *ars philosophandi* which finds its realization in the consubstantiality of subject and object, of mind and world. Let us state at the outset that to attempt the circumscription of an *ars philosophandi* which is by definition organic or, if you will, kinetic in structure, is to confess, *de facto*, one's inadequacy to the task at hand. The latter notwithstanding, it would appear that cognition, for Vauvenargues, is grounded in the intentional act whereby is realized the consubstantiality of mind and world: it is for this reason that Vauvenargues states: "C'est dans notre propre esprit et non dans les objets extérieurs, que nous percevons la plupart des choses" (308). Furthermore, cognition, as Vauvenargues explains elsewhere, is grounded not only in the consubstantiality of mind and world, but also in the differential rapport established in the apprehension of the object via the intentional act: "... il n'y a rien de grand parmi les hommes que par comparaison. Ainsi, lorsqu'on dit un grand arbre, cela ne veut pas dire autre chose si ce n'est qu'il est grand par rapport à d'autres arbres moins élevés, ou par rapport à nos yeux et à notre propre taille" (387–88; italics ours). The intentional act, then, establishes an interstitiality of two sorts: firstly, between mind and world, and secondly, between the objects in the world apprehended by the mind, the differential rapport subtending these

two orders being realized in and through the mediation of language: "Toute langue n'est que l'expression de ces *rappports*" (388; italics ours). The latter will, as we shall see, in fact prove crucial for Vauvenargues' hermeneutics, for the apprehension of the text is predicated upon the mediation by the reader of the aesthetic artefact which is the mediation of the thinking of the author mediated through language. But to continue with Vauvenargues' theory of knowledge: cognition, he maintains, is not based upon a simple correlation between mind and world; rather, it is grounded in the apprehension of what Vauvenargues terms *alliance*: "Le feu, l'air, l'esprit, la lumière, tout vit par l'action. De là la communication et l'alliance de tous les êtres" (207). The action mentioned here refers not only to the kinesis of an organismic cosmos but, by implication, to the kinesis of mental cognition; it is what Vauvenargues elsewhere terms, albeit in a somewhat different context, "l'art de combinaison" (81). However, the mind is more than a mere generator of *alliances* and *rapports*: the complexity of the mind, for Vauvenargues, is such that the intentional act is comprised of a dual and simultaneous postulation whereby the mind seeks both to synthesize as well as to situate by combination the object of intentionality:

... un esprit étendu diminue en apparence les objets, en les confondant dans un tout qui les réduit à leur juste étendue; mais il les aggrandit réellement, en développant leurs *rappports*, et en ne formant de tant de parties irrégulières qu'un seul et magnifique tableau. (373; italics ours)

However, the mind, engrossed in the latter postulation, is ultimately overwhelmed by its own kinetic potential: "La vérité échappe au jugement, comme les faits échappent à la mémoire. Les diverses faces des choses s'emparent tour à tour d'un esprit vif, et lui font quitter et reprendre successivement les mêmes opinions" (212). Indeed, the mind is ultimately confounded by its own fermentation: "... les hommes ne sont guère capables de concevoir aucun sujet tout entier, et d'en voir les *divers rappports* et les *différentes faces*" (270; italics ours). Hence the fragmentation of knowledge, the limitation of human understanding and, ultimately, the vitiation of the kinesis of cognition: "... cette loi de la nature si féconde, nous trouvons que c'est un vice dans l'homme" (208): the capacity to integrate his kaleidoscopic perceptions is not given to man ("Il n'y a guère d'esprits qui soient capables d'embrasser à la fois toutes les faces de chaque sujet," 231). Clearly, when the mind overreaches itself ("L'esprit [...] embrasse plus qu'il ne peut lier," 177), when knowledge is unknowable, the very foundations of moral philosophy cannot but be vitiated. The latter notwithstanding, thinking (and not thought) is salvaged, ultimately, by the energy of its kinetic modality, by the ebullience of its effervescent sallies: "Le mot de saillie," Vauvenargues explains, "vient de sauter; avoir des saillies, c'est passer sans gradation d'une idée à une autre, qui peut s'y allier. C'est *saisir les rappports* des choses les plus

éloignées: ce qui demande sans doute de la vivacité et un esprit agile" (70; italics ours). La Bruyère⁹ claims that the man of letters is "trivial," in the etymological sense of the word, in as much as he symbolizes a crossroad: we would suggest, by the same token, that Vauvenargues' theory of cognition which postulates the disaggregation of thought into thinking as it radiates in all directions, is equally trivial. We would also maintain that Vauvenargues' theory of cognition in fact partakes thereby of the dynamics of the grotesque with its heteroclitic synthesis of manifest incongruities. But Vauvenargues' theory of cognition is also grotesque in another sense: just as the fantastic associations of the grotesque are, as Kayser¹⁰ explains, undermined by intimations of the sinister, of a world estranged, so too Vauvenargues' theory of cognition, whilst exulting in man's fantastic cognitive sallies, at the same time insinuates that cognition is the diabolical medium whereby man is estranged from truth.

If truth is unknowable on account of the kinesis of cognition, it is doubly so when the object of cognition is equally kinetic. And so it is that the kinetic, interstitial grounding of epistemology finds its sociological analogue in the *commerce* of mankind: just as cognition is grounded in the differential rapport between thought and the object of thinking, so too man as a gregarious animal must be understood in terms of his differential rapport, his *commerce* with mankind: "... ce n'est que dans un commerce libre et ingénu qu'on peut bien connaître les hommes, qu'on se tâte, qu'on se démêle et qu'on se mesure avec eux" (131). In other words, the understanding of man in society is grounded in the differential rapport between man as an individual, and his fellow-man. Moreover, just as thought is ultimately vitiated by its commerce with thinking, so too the *commerce* of mankind is undermined by its fraudulence, the apprehension of man's dissimilarity being realized in its dissimulation: "Le commerce du monde n'est fondé que sur la politesse et la flatterie; qui en ôtera ces choses, ruintera les principes de ce commerce" (258). And, what is more, the "fausseté réciproque" (*ibid.*) of mankind is redoubled when to the external differential rapport is added the internal differential rapport between man and the darker side of his being which he seeks to dissimulate: "Nous découvrons en nous-mêmes ce que les autres nous cachent, et nous reconnaissons dans les autres ce que nous nous cachons nous-mêmes" (193). In other words, man's being, predicated as it is upon a double interstitial rapport, upon a now triple vitiated *commerce*, can only be defined in terms of its ironic non-coincidence.

To speak of a differential rapport between man and mankind, between man and mask, is to imply that man is somehow endowed with an essence, an essence which is by definition susceptible, via human reason, to classification, to circumscription. Such an argument, however, is fallacious for the very fact that man exists in time as a kinetic entity participating in "le mouvement universel de la nature" (257) precludes, *ipso facto*, the apprehension of his essence. And, moreover, when the present moment

exists uroborically as an affirmation of its own self-negation ("... le présent nous échappe de lui-même et s'anéantit malgré nous," 256–57), man's being cannot but be incommensurate with his essence. And when to the kinesis of man's being is added the kinesis of thinking in its non-coincidence with thought, man's essence becomes doubly elusive: "Toutes nos pensées sont mortelles, nous ne les saurions retenir; et si notre âme n'était secourue par cette activité infatigable qui répare les écoulements perpétuels de notre esprit, nous ne durerions qu'un instant; telles sont les lois de notre être" (257). In other words, when to be must be defined in terms of being (understood here in the literal sense of the gerund, the verbal qualification of the noun implying the essential disaggregation of the latter), thought in terms of thinking, the very laws that define man's being, ironically defy the apprehension of his being. It is for this reason that the definition of man's essence can only be realized through the medium of paradox: just as the present moment comes into being projectively in a movement which at one and the same time affirms and denies its being ("Nous ne pouvons retenir le présent que par une action qui sort du présent," *ibid.*), so too the essence of man must be apprehended in terms of paradox as it affirms itself in its uroboric self-consumption. Hence Vauvenargues' definition of being in terms of a status quo which is paradoxically grounded in palingenesis:

... chaque action est un nouvel être qui commence, et qui n'était pas. Plus nous agissons, plus nous produisons, plus nous vivons, car *le sort des choses humaines est de ne pouvoir se maintenir que par une génération continue.* (334; italics ours)

The latter finds its logical analogue in the palingenetic paradox of thinking: "... mes pensées meurent, mais pour renaître" (312). Furthermore, to the paradox of the palingenetic status quo and the self-consumptive affirmation of thinking must be added the paradoxical stasis of imperfection: "O terre! [...] Te faut-il admirer dans ta constante et invariable imperfection?" (274): if imperfection, by definition, implies a movement towards perfection, it cannot therefore be invariable. The latter postulate of course has dire implications for Vauvenargues' philosophy, for enshrined therein is an implicit refutation thereof: if the goal of the moral philosopher is to enable man to eradicate imperfection through his striving for perfection, that goal self-destructs when Vauvenargues confesses the stasis of imperfection. Besides, even if perfection were attainable (and such cannot be the case when perfection too, by definition, is grounded in stasis), it remains, by Vauvenargues' own confession, frozen in incommunicability ("... la perfection est une, et incommunicable," 346), the latter but reinforcing the auto-refutation of the initial postulate concerning the paradox of static imperfection.

So far we have established the fact that, given the kinetic modality of thinking and being, man's essence cannot be articulated except in and through its paradoxical self-consumption. The question which we must

now ask ourselves is: how is this paradoxical self-consumption actually realized in Vauvenargues' *oeuvre*? The key to the understanding of the latter lies perhaps in the reciprocal ironic contestation established between the *Avertissement* to the *Réflexions et maximes* and the preface to the second edition of the *Introduction*, and the works they introduce. To begin with the contestation of the *Préface* or *Avertissement* by the work. In the *Réflexions et maximes*, Vauvenargues states the following: "Une préface est ordinairement un plaidoyer, où toute l'éloquence de l'auteur ne peut rendre sa cause meilleure, aussi inutile pour faire valoir un bon ouvrage, que pour en justifier un mauvais" (338). Does this paradoxical postulate proclaiming the incapacity of the preface to validate the work, not in fact imply the repudiation of the very notion of a preface? As Vauvenargues states elsewhere: "ce qui est bien pensé est bien pensé, et ce qui est bien écrit est bien écrit" (354): hence the definitive redundancy of all prefaces. By the same token, Vauvenargues' confession as to his indifference as to whether he be understood or no by his public ("Je m'entends, mais je ne me soucie guère qu'on m'entende," 307), would likewise constitute a tacit disavowal of any preface or *avertissement* which by definition seeks to explicate the work for the public so that the latter might better comprehend the intent of the author. Indeed, does Vauvenargues not state quite categorically, in his correspondence with Mirabeau, the futility of even attempting to communicate his ideas to the public: "... le public n'a point besoin de savoir ce que je pense, et [...] si je le disais, ce serait ou sans effet, ou sans aucun avantage" (407)?

The latter notwithstanding, Vauvenargues does nevertheless choose to preface his works, but with an ironic form of preface which, far from explicating the work it seeks to introduce, in fact proves the ruination of the latter. The preface to the *Introduction* opens on a curious note with its affirmation of the infirmity of man's understanding, his frustration, given the kinesis of cognition, at his failure to reconcile his disparate perceptions and, ultimately, his inability to eradicate error therefrom:

Ces maximes n'étant pas l'ouvrage d'un seul homme, mais d'une infinité d'hommes différents, qui envisageaient les choses par divers côtés, peu de gens ont l'esprit assez profond pour concilier tant de vérités et les dépouiller des erreurs dont elles sont mêlées. (59)

The dual postulation, predicated upon the infinite expansion ("[envisager] les choses par divers côtés") and synthetic limitation ("concilier tant de vérités") of the object of cognition, will not go unnoticed. Vauvenargues confesses, however, not only the impotence of man's understanding in general, but his own in particular, for if his maxims are, as he has stated earlier, the distillation of the kinetic cognition of a multiplicity of minds, his intellect is too feeble to synthesize the "triviality" of the latter into a reasoned system ("... nous [sommus] trop faibles pour rapprocher ces maximes éparées, et pour en former un système raisonnable"). And if such a confession as to his intellectual impotence were not

sufficient in itself, Vauvenargues then goes on to state the indifference of mankind *vis-à-vis* his intellectual inadequacies ("Il ne paraît pas même que personne s'inquiète beaucoup des lumières et des connaissances qui nous manquent"). False modesty aside, this is hardly the traditional perspective of the Enlightenment thinker. But, the contestation of cognition is carried to yet greater heights: the final nail in the coffin of cognition is struck by Vauvenargues' categorical refutation of the enunciation of all general principles: "... il n'y eut aucun principe sans contradiction." The syllogistic application of the latter notwithstanding, it would appear that the aforementioned principle not only gives the lie to the *raison d'être* of Vauvenargues' reflections as a whole, but, moreover, it specifically undermines his assertion, in the very same preface, as to his desire to extrapolate from the moral portrait of man certain basic principles ("... je me proposai de parcourir d'abord toutes les qualités de l'esprit, ensuite toutes les passions, et enfin toutes les vertus et tous les vices, qui n'étant que des qualités humaines, ne peuvent être connues que dans leur principe"). Understanding, it would seem, can only be realized in its paradoxical de-realization, much in the same way that, for man, the attaining of his goal can only be achieved in and through the affirmation of its self-negation ("Ainsi s'ils atteignent le but dans quelque art ou dans quelque science, on doit s'attendre qu'ils le passeront pour acquérir une nouvelle gloire," 213).

The *Avertissement* to the *Réflexions et maximes* displays techniques of ironic contestation not dissimilar to those we observed in the *Préface*. The work opens with what may be termed *le paradoxe sur le lecteur*, the reader seeking not instruction in the works he reads, but rather error ("... il y a des gens qui ne lisent que pour trouver des erreurs dans un écrivain," 175). The *Avertissement*, applying the aforementioned paradox, then continues with the defensive strategy of the author ironically condoning the possible critique of certain of his reflections should they be construed as impious; he thereby avows his piety in the disavowal of any interpretation to the contrary ("... j'avertis ceux qui liront ces réflexions que s'il y en a quelqu'une qui présente un sens peu favorable à la piété, l'auteur désavoue ce mauvais sens, et souscrit le premier à la critique qu'on en pourra faire"). In so doing, the aim of the author is to sensitize the reader to the "triviality" of hermeneutics. Furthermore, if Vauvenargues' scepticism in the area of hermeneutics underscores the illusion of understanding, the latter is further reinforced by the author's disclaimer as to the inherent possibility of enunciating general principles, which itself is enunciated litotically ("... il n'y a personne qui ne sache que toutes les propositions générales ont leurs exceptions"). It is certainly not without significance that the latter should be identical to the postulate of the *Préface*. Given the exact repetition of the self-same postulate concerning the fact that all general principles of necessity incorporate their own self-negation, it might be safe to conclude that Vauvenargues considers the latter as a

general principle – were it not for the fact that the very enunciation of such a principle carries with it the seeds of its own self-destruction. What then are we left with? A general principle which proves the self-negation of all general principles and hence the self-contestation of Vauvenargues' reflections. A fine preface indeed for a work seeking to circumscribe human understanding!

Cognition, as we noted earlier, is grounded in the consubstantiality of mind and world and, moreover, in the differential rapport established in the apprehension of the object via the intentional act. The latter theory finds its application in the transcendental apprehension of the aesthetic artefact realized in the act of reading. In other words, reading implies not only the consubstantiality of reader and text, but also the realization of the differential rapport existing between the two. Or, to be more precise, the act of reading implies the exponentiation of the initial differential rapport, for the apprehension of the text by the reader is predicated upon the mediation by the latter of the aesthetic artefact, which itself is the mediated product of the thinking of the author, which again is mediated through language. As Sartre remarks: "... il faut que le lecteur invente tout dans un perpétuel dépassement de la chose écrite."¹¹ If the quest for human understanding is, as we have seen, undermined by the author in the ironic prefaces to his works, the pursuit of human understanding is further frustrated by the vitiation of the rapport between author and reader in the transcendental apprehension of the aesthetic artefact. Firstly, it should be noted that the very existence of the implied reader reinforces the author's disavowal of the existence of universal truth, which falls prey to the cognitive apprehension of the individual in the hermeneutic act. And, what is more, the latter disclaimer is doubly confirmed by the author's disparagement of the reader's intellectual capacities: "Combien de gens connaissent tous les livres et tous les auteurs, sont instruits de toutes les opinions et de tous les systèmes, qui sont incapables de discerner le vrai du faux, et d'apprécier ce qu'ils lisent!" (263). Indeed, the hermeneutic act is doubly disclaimed: if the hermeneutic act which seeks to realize the reciprocity between author and reader is, to some extent, abrogated by what Vauvenargues terms "l'incapacité des lecteurs" (*ibid.*), it is also undermined by its own exponentiation as it falls prey to the *dédoublement* which the reader practises on the initial hermeneutic act:

Si quelqu'un trouve un livre obscur, l'auteur ne doit pas se défendre. Osez prouver qu'on a eu tort de ne pas vous entendre, osez justifier vos expressions, on attaquera votre sens: Oui, dira-t-on, je vous entends bien; mais je ne pouvais pas croire que ce fût là votre pensée. (304)

The reader, in fact, is so little prized by the author that the latter considers him as but his plaything, to be manipulated at will into thinking the thoughts the author intends him to think: "Il ne faut pas laisser prévoir à un lecteur ce qu'on veut lui dire, mais le lui faire penser, afin qu'il puisse

nous estimer d'avoir pensé comme lui, mais après lui" (336). It will not go unnoticed that the reader is manipulated to the extent that his very thought, by an ironic subterfuge on the part of the author, becomes the property of the latter at the moment of the reader's self-congratulatory apprehension thereof: just as general principles can only exist in their self-negation, so too the possession of the idea by the implied reader comes into being when he is paradoxically dispossessed thereof.

The latter finds its logical analogue in the manner in which the author is ironically dispossessed of his *oeuvre*: just as the reader is dispossessed of his thought, so too the author, in claiming that his work is predicated upon the distillation of the thinking of a multiplicity of authors ("Ces maximes [ne sont] pas l'ouvrage d'un seul homme, mais d'une infinité d'hommes différents," 59), experiences thereby a certain disfranchisement from his *oeuvre*. Author and reader, moreover, join forces in their mutual dispossession of the *oeuvre* through their cynicism, the latter contributing significantly to the confounding of the hermeneutic act: "Vous croyez que tout est problématique; vous ne voyez rien de certain, et vous n'estimez ni les arts, ni la probité, ni la gloire; vous croyez cependant devoir écrire, et vous pensez assez mal des hommes pour être persuadé qu'ils voudront lire des choses inutiles, que vous-même n'estimez point vraies" (319). However, the final blow to the hermeneutic act is struck when the transactional aesthetics is vitiated by the differential rapport existing between the author and mankind at large, which rapport is at one and the same time both affirmed and disaffirmed. In other words, the author supposes the reader to be his peer, for they both partake of the same humanity; hence the author's aspiration to contribute to the moral edification of man: "Si nous avons écrit quelque chose pour notre instruction, ou pour le soulagement de notre coeur, il y a grande apparence que nos réflexions seront encore utiles à beaucoup d'autres; car personne n'est seul dans son espèce ..." (370). On the other hand, the author considers himself to be superior to his reader and to mankind in general, by virtue of the fact that he must transcend humanity in order to comprehend it if he is to realize his goal of moral edification: "... nous aimons à contrôler la nature humaine, pour essayer de nous élever au-dessus de notre espèce, et pour nous enrichir de la considération dont nous tâchons de la dépouiller" (213). Ironically though, the author's disjunction from mankind, whilst being a necessary part of the edificatory process, carries with it an implicit refutation of Vauvenargues' claim to the latter, for he can only communicate with mankind if he is an integral part thereof. The self-negation of all general principles notwithstanding, we would venture to affirm that the paradoxical relationship of the author to mankind, that is to say his engagement in and simultaneous disengagement therefrom, must in fact be considered as a constant in Vauvenargues' *oeuvre*. It finds, perhaps, its most perfect realization in the self-deprecatory approbation of the author: "Si l'illustre auteur des Maximes eût été tel qu'il a tâché de

peindre tous les hommes, mériterait-il nos hommages, et le culte idolâtre de ses prosélytes?" (231). The author, moreover, is most definitely not oblivious to the irony of his interstitial predicament or the pitfalls of syllogistic enquiry: "Nous sommes si présomptueux que nous croyons pouvoir séparer notre intérêt personnel de celui de l'humanité, et médire du genre humain sans nous commettre" (213): the author's critique of humanity implying as it does the denunciation, by virtue of his engagement in humanity, of the person emitting that critique, but parallels the enunciation of the self-negation of all general principles. In the final analysis, however, the frustration of the hermeneutic act culminates in the peremptory rescinding of the bond between author and reader as the vitiated transaction between author and reader is supplanted by the self-communion of author and text: "Je m'entends; mais je ne me soucie guère qu'on m'entende" (307). And with the implosion of the hermeneutic paradox, the goal of moral edification inexorably explodes.

If the hermeneutic act as it revolves around reading and writing is, as we have seen, undermined by the vitiation of the traditional bond between author and reader, it is further invalidated by the ironic disjunction, the differential rapport, if you will, between thinking and saying. In other words, the ironic interstitiality we observed earlier on the epistemological and ontological planes finds its objective correlative in the ironic fissures subtending the hermeneutic act whereby is articulated the *commerce* of thinking as it hovers between mind and world, thought and language, both in the speech act and in its solidification in the form of the written artefact. The expression of thought, we remember, constitutes for Vauvenargues the outward manifestation of the human spirit: "On peut dire en général de l'expression qu'elle répond à la nature des idées, et par conséquent aux divers caractères de l'esprit" (73). The expression of thought, moreover, is realized in and through the word. *Logos*, then, may be considered as the abode of the human spirit: "L'esprit se peint dans la parole, qui est son image" (294). However thought, for Vauvenargues, is by no means commensurate with *logos*; on the contrary, the moral philosopher takes as axiomatic the essential disproportion between thought and its outward manifestation in the idea mediated through *logos*: "Il est rare peut-être de trouver une proportion exacte entre le don de penser et celui de s'exprimer: les termes n'ont pas une liaison nécessaire avec les idées" (73). And this disproportion applies equally to the spoken and the written word: "On parle et l'on écrit rarement comme l'on pense" (329). If, then, there exists a fundamental disjunction between thought and word, the question we must now ask ourselves is what exactly is the etiology of such a disjunction. Concerning the latter, Vauvenargues presents various hypotheses: on occasion, the incommensurability between thought and expression is imputed to the inadequacies of conceptualization: "Ces gens-là ont une teinture de toutes les sciences, et parlent quelquefois des arts plus spécieusement que les plus habiles artistes; ils sont

physiciens, ils sont géomètres; ils savent du moins répéter des opinions sur tous les sujets; et il ne leur manque que de concevoir eux-mêmes ce qu'ils disent" (268). But more than simply illustrating the defectiveness of the intellect, the latter example underscores, more importantly, man's *faux semblant*, that is to say the essential disjunction between man and mask. It is to man's insincerity, then, that the essential disjunction between saying, writing and thinking must be attributed: "... presque tous les hommes passent leur vie à dire et à écrire ce qu'ils ne pensent point" (231). The context of the latter quotation is highly significant: referring as it does to what Vauvenargues terms the insincerity of the writers of moral philosophy, the latter statement carries with it an implicit indictment of the author of such a pronouncement, hence invalidating the critique enunciated therein. In short, the argument self-destructs, and as such offers a perfect illustration of Vauvenargues' rhetoric of disjunction.

But to continue with our enquiry into the etiology of the disjunction between thought and word: so far, we have established that the latter is predicated not only upon man's defective intellect, but also upon man's disjunctive entity, suspended as he is between *être* and *paraître*. The latter explication, however, points to a disorder of a greater magnitude, for the disjunction between thinking and saying finds its corollary in the disproportion between *savoir* and what passes for knowledge: "Les gens du monde ont une espèce d'érudition; c'est-à-dire qu'ils savent assez de toutes choses pour en parler de travers" (339). *Scientia* can but be an illusion when *savoir* and *être* are founded on the same disjunctive premise; and so it is that man exults in his own imposture as he values not knowledge but its *faux semblant*: "Les hommes se piquent de mépriser la science, et se laissent toujours imposer par ses apparences" (*ibid.*). In short, knowing is not commensurate with knowledge, just as thinking is not commensurate with thought. Furthermore, the etiology of the disjunction between thought and word may be traced not only to the inadequacies inherent in the expression of thought and knowledge, but imputed to the imperfection of language, for is not language itself predicated upon the cratylistic disjunction between *verba* and *res*. Indeed, the imperfection of language is only surpassed by the imperfection of thought: "Nos idées sont plus imparfaites que la langue" (363). It is on account of this double disjunction that Vauvenargues' ideas are not articulated so much in terms of thoughts: rather, the latter are mediated by the presence of the subject in order to express the thinking of thought. Hence the frequency of expressions such as *je pense, je dis, je suppose, je crois*, or the self-reflexive *je dis en moi-même*, which are more than simply stylistic devices: they are indicative of a rhetoric of disjunction predicated upon the aporias of thinking and knowing. In short, they are the outward manifestations of the disarticulation of thought by thinking. In the final analysis, however, the impossibility of understanding thinking's saying, to paraphrase Heidegger,¹² but proves the logical analogue of the mysterious rapport between

man and things: "... elles [les impressions] sont l'effet du rapport qui est entre les choses et nous, mais ce rapport secret ne nous est pas connu" (83). If, then, there exists an insuperable gulf between man and things, an essential disjunction between thinking and thought, knowing and knowledge, does the latter not imply a tacit disavowal of Vauvenargues' attempt to circumscribe human understanding? But Vauvenargues' *oeuvre* is also ironic in another sense: if the disjunction between thought and expression must be apprehended as the *sine qua non* of man's disjunctive being, Vauvenargues, despite himself, cannot escape the logistics thereof – logistics which ultimately imply the disavowal of his own *oeuvre* which, by definition, cannot offer the objective correlative of his thinking. Well before Sartre, Vauvenargues had intuited the intrinsic irony at the core of the aesthetic artefact, for the latter can only be realized in and through its derealization, its ironic self-contestation: "... l'objet littéraire, quoiqu'il se réalise à travers le langage, n'est jamais donné dans le langage; il est, au contraire, par nature, silence et contestation de la parole."¹³

Vauvenargues then goes on to question the relationship of thinking to what is true,¹⁴ for thinking finds its *raison d'être* in truth: "... on ne sait guère penser, si l'on n'a des principes fixes et puisés dans la vérité" (353). And, what is more, the attainment of truth constitutes, for man, the realisation of the highest good: "... la vérité est le plus grand bien de la vie" (321). But if the medium through which truth finds expression, that is to say thinking, is, as we have demonstrated, inherently flawed, then the goal of achieving truth self-destructs upon its impact with thought: when the kinetic flow of thought cannot be stilled, for man cannot "fixer sa pensée fugitive" (68), the very foundation of truth is undermined by the medium through which it finds its being. It is for this reason that truth cannot exist as an absolute entity, but manifests itself rather as the intentional object of the thinking subject: "Une vérité s'offre à moi" (108). Hence its relativity: "Il n'y peut-être point de vérité qui ne soit à quelque esprit faux matière d'erreur" (181). But if, on the one hand, truth, by virtue of the fact that it is predicated upon the hermeneutic act, is limitless, inexhaustible ("La langue et l'esprit ont leurs bornes; la vérité est inépuisable," 363), it must nevertheless bow to the constraints imposed upon it by language and thought. Indeed, just as language is undermined by its petrification into cliché, so too truth is worn out by fossilized thought. But truth, according to Vauvenargues, is less susceptible to erosion than is language: "La vérité n'est pas si usée que le langage, parce qu'il appartient à moins de gens de la manier" (322). Thus, given the relativity and the imperfection of truth, it follows that the latter can but be apprehended in and through its *fuyance*: "Lorsque nous croyons tenir la vérité par un endroit, elle nous échappe par mille autres" (63). The latter confession, however, does not detract from the moral philosopher's fundamental belief in the permanence of truth: "Rien ne dure que la vérité" (322).

The question we must now ask ourselves is why truth, for Vauve-

nargues, should be at one and the same time inaccessible and enduring. A tentative answer to the latter may be found in his prefaces. In both the preface to the *Introduction à la connaissance de l'esprit humain* and the *Avertissement* to his *Réflexions et maximes*, Vauvenargues warns us against the pitfalls of absolutism: general principles, as we noted earlier, cannot be erected into universal truths, for all general propositions incorporate their inherent self-negation. And truth is no exception. It is thus that truth is ironically predicated upon error: "... toute erreur [suppose] une vérité" (119). Indeed, error is an integral part of human reflection (thinking being the medium by which truth is realized), and it increases by a ratio directly proportional to the density of reflection: "Lorsque les réflexions se multiplient, les erreurs et les connaissances augmentent dans la même proportion" (370). In other words, understanding is realized in and through its derealization, for to the extent that man realizes understanding, he realizes, by the same token, error. If error, then, is ingrained in human reflection, and if all general principles by definition incorporate their self-negation, it follows that truth should be apprehended in terms of ironic chiaroscuro:

N'est-ce pas l'évidence de la vérité qui nous fait discerner le faux, comme le jour marque les ombres? Et qu'est-ce en un mot que la connaissance d'une erreur, sinon la découverte d'une vérité. [...] la certitude est démontrée par le doute, la science par l'ignorance, et la vérité par l'erreur. (122)

And how could it be otherwise when human nature, according to Vauvenargues, is grounded in oxymoron: "Les extrémités se rencontrent et se réunissent en nous" (146)? That falsehood, then, should be an integral part of truth illustrates not only the paradoxical nature of truth¹⁵ but, more importantly, the fact that truth, like man existing in time as an always future hollowness, is mobile, kinetic. Indeed truth, for Vauvenargues, cannot but be kinetic when it is irrevocably predicated upon the hermeneutic act: "La vérité échappe au jugement, comme les faits échappent à la mémoire. Les *diverses faces des choses* s'emparent tour à tour d'un esprit vif, et lui font quitter et reprendre successivement les mêmes opinions" (212; italics ours). Truth, then, being born of the union of mind and world or, as Vauvenargues would have it, the perpetual confrontation of the "esprit vif" with the surrounding world ("les diverses faces des choses"), is inherently multifaceted or, as La Bruyère would say, "trivial." In the final analysis, the kinetic multidimensionality of truth cannot but elude circumscription: as such it forms the logical analogue of the kinesis of cognition. And with the latter confession, the goal of moral edification founders under the weight of its own self-contestation.

How, one wonders, can truth be salvaged in a work which purports to have the latter as its *terminus ad quem*? The answer to this question lies perhaps in one of Vauvenargues' posthumous works. The anecdote recounted in no. 659 of his *Réflexions et maximes* suggests that truth implies

the non-duping of oneself. Extrapolating from the latter, we would maintain that Vauvenargues' confession as to the illusion of truth on account of its inherent kinesis contains, by the same token, a refusal on the part of the moral philosopher to be duped by the absolutism of truth. As such, his confession as to the impossibility of truth constitutes, ironically, what is true, truth being revealed thereby in and through its paradoxical self-negation. In other words, truth comes into being in and through the paradoxical affirmation of its self-contestation, much in the same way that the present exists as an affirmation of its ironic self-negation. As such, Vauvenargues' ironic situating of the essence of truth in its non-being affords us the perfect illustration of his basic premise according to which all general principles must incorporate their self-negation.

If truth, then, can but exist oxymoronically, kinetically, as an illusion, if thinking cannot be congealed in thought, if knowing can in no way be commensurate with knowledge, in short if being (understood as a gerund) cannot be correlative with being (understood as a present participle), the only vehicle for the expression of the ironic nature of truth as it is revealed through thinking will be a tenuous, destabilized form of literature grounded in discontinuity and incompleteness. Hence Vauvenargues' predilection for the fragment and the maxim with their open invitation to interstitial thinking, their constant affirmation of the refusal of closure. It is not without reason, therefore, that Vauvenargues should perceive the maxim in terms of its inherent "triviality": "Les bonnes maximes sont sujettes à devenir triviales" (318). Nor is it fortuitous that the moral philosopher should understand the triviality of the maxim to precipitate the discomfiture of truth (understood here in its absolute sense): "Peu de maximes sont vraies à tous égards" (193). It is thus that the maxim, or fragment, provides the most perfect objective correlative for Vauvenargues' understanding of an organismic cosmos which, whilst celebrating the vitality of a universe permanently open to flux and mutability, cannot elude the aporias resulting therefrom.¹⁶

If, as we believe, Vauvenargues' rhetoric of disjunction, predicated as it is upon the ironic disarticulation of meaning, requires that we recognize the philosopher of the Enlightenment to be anything but a philosopher of enlightenment, it likewise encourages us to re-evaluate the traditional opposition between the so-called sanguine philosopher and the more austere moral philosophers of the *Grand Siècle*: with his negative epistemology grounded in paradox, irony and aporia, Vauvenargues is perhaps not so distant from his pessimistic predecessors. Also, were Vauvenargues' textual self-reflexivity to be compared with the scriptural specularity evidenced in La Bruyère's *oeuvre*,¹⁷ the dissimilarity between Vauvenargues and the moralist of the *Grand Siècle* could not be affirmed. By the same token, it is important to situate Vauvenargues' *oeuvre* diachronically with respect to the theories of Romantic Irony,¹⁸ for if Vauvenargues' *oeuvre* undertakes to present the point at which thought

encounters an aporia engendered by a rhetoric which insinuates the mechanics of its realization into the meanings it seeks to posit, the moral philosopher is not alone in presenting a problematic form of literature which, via its disaggregation, not only re-enacts the processes by which it generates its own meaning, but questions ultimately, the possibility of meaning itself. Such, indeed, is the ironic postulate of the romantic aesthetic artefact which is likewise predicated upon a paradoxical state of permanent suspension as it mirrors what Friedrich Schlegel terms the eternal agility¹⁹ of an organismic cosmos. But Romantic Irony is first and foremost a double speculum: the latter is grounded essentially in permanent parabasis,²⁰ that is to say in self-reflexivity, or, to be more precise, in the "beautiful self-mirroring"²¹ of a text which posits itself simultaneously as mimetic reflection and textual reflexion, and in so doing spells out its own self-cancellation, its *Selbstvernichtung*.²² If, then, such is the paradoxical status of the self-consumptive romantic aesthetic artefact, the question which one must of necessity ask oneself is to what extent Vauvenargues' *oeuvre*, with its ironic self-reflexivity, in fact anticipates the theories of Romantic Irony. But matters are perhaps not quite so simple for, as Terence Cave²³ has so amply illustrated, the problematics of textual self-consciousness must be considered as epitomizing the literature of the renaissance period, whether in the texts of the humanist latin theorists or the French vernacular writers. If such then is the case, Vauvenargues' contribution to the thematics of textual self-reflexivity must be viewed diachronically not only with respect to Romantic Irony, but also with respect to his renaissance predecessors. Perhaps it is only fitting that we should conclude our exploration of the problematics of an ironic text which comes into being in the interstitial spaces which disarticulate its very being, by situating the latter in those diachronic interstices which suspend Vauvenargues' *oeuvre* between the cornucopian text²⁴ of the Renaissance and the self-consumptive aesthetic artefact of the romantic period, thereby making of it a double speculum.

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Notes

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 148–50.
2. For a detailed analysis of Vauvenargues' understanding of Pascal, cf. Henri Mydlarski, "Vauvenargues, lecteur de Pascal," *Revue des sciences humaines* (avril-juin, 1972), pp. 209–22.
3. All references to the *Introduction à la connaissance de l'esprit humain* are taken from the Garnier-Flammarion edition of 1981 (ed. J. Dagen) and will appear in the body of the text.
4. Émile Bréhier (*The Eighteenth Century*, trans. W. Baskin [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967], p. 8) explains that the *Essay* was known in its French abridgment published by Leclerc (1698), as well as in numerous editions of Coste's translation (1700), and in the French translation of Wynne's English abridgment.

5. Henri Mydlarski, "Les Fondements du savoir dans la pensée moraliste des Lumières," in *Man and Nature*, ed. M.-L. Girou-Swidorski and J. Hare, VII (Edmonton: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1988), p. 141: "Il n'est guère d'écriture moraliste, de quelque période que ce soit, qui ne réfléchisse, au moins en filigrane, une théorie de la connaissance."

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 141–48.

7. Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, 1690.

8. Letter to Mirabeau of 1 March 1739: "... c'est un nom que je n'ai pas pris; on me l'a jeté à la tête, je ne le mérite point; je l'ai reçu, sans en prendre les charges; le poids en est trop fort pour moi."

9. *La Bruyère*, ed. R. Pignarre (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965), p. 172: "L'homme de lettres est trivial comme une borne au coin des places."

10. Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. U. Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963).

11. J.-P. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

12. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 11: "Thinking's saying would be stilled in / its being only by becoming unable / to say that which must remain / unspoken."

13. J.-P. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

14. Yves Lainey (*Les Valeurs morales dans les écrits de Vauvenargues* [Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1975], p. 77) finds evidence of Vauvenargues' fundamental preoccupation with truth in the fact that the word truth is used by the moral philosopher on no less than 300 occasions, appearing on average every two pages.

15. For a detailed study of the theme of paradox in Vauvenargues' *oeuvre*, cf. Jules Barni, *Les Moralistes français au dix-huitième siècle* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1970), pp. 1–70. It is thus that the paradox of truth (which incidentally Barni does not mention) must find its place alongside the paradox of *volonté* and *vertu*, both being grounded in sentiment, and not reason.

16. Émile Bréhier (*op. cit.*, pp. 114–15) suggests that Vauvenargues was a systematic thinker who was forced by circumstances to leave his exposition in the form of disconnected thoughts. Roger Mercier (*La Réhabilitation de la nature humaine, 1700–1750* [Villemomble, 1960], p. 419), Prévost-Paradol (*Études sur les moralistes français* [Paris: Hachette, 1895], p. 232) and Gustave Lanson (*Histoire de la littérature française* [Paris: Hachette, 1894], p. 730), all espouse the same point of view. Whilst we cannot agree with the latter on account of the fact that they do not take into consideration Vauvenargues' ontological and epistemological theories, we would be in agreement with Georges Poulet (*The Interior Distance*, trans. E. Coleman [Ann Arbor Paperbacks: The University of Michigan Press, 1964], p. 38) for whom Vauvenargues' choice of the maxim symbolizes his detachment from the carcass of his dead thoughts. Jack Undank ("Vauvenargues and the Whole Truth," *PMLA*, 85, No. 5 [October 1970], 1112) is likewise cognizant of the fact that the neo-positivist interpretation does not allow for what he terms aesthetic considerations or, to be more precise, for the fact that Vauvenargues was "searching for an expression adequate to a not entirely conscious and evolving view of things."

17. Cf. Judith Spencer, "Voyage en Cratylie: de la spécularisation scripturale chez La Bruyère," *Revue romane*, 26, No. 1 (1991), 108–21.

18. Cf. (i) Lucien Dällenbach, *Le Récit spéculaire: essai sur la mise en abyme* (Paris: Seuil, 1977). (ii) Lilian Furst, *Fictions of Romantic Irony in European Narrative, 1760–1850* (London: MacMillan, 1984). (iii) Morton Gurewitch, *European Romantic Irony*, Diss., Columbia University, 1957. (iv) Gary Handwerk, *Irony and Ethics in Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). (v) Ann Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). (vi) David Simpson, *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* (London: MacMillan, 1979). (vii) Leonard Wessell, *Karl Marx, Romantic Irony and the Proletariat: The Mythopoetic Origins of Marxism* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

19. Friedrich Schlegel, *Ideen*, 69, *Kritische Ausgabe*, II, ed. H. Eichner (Munich-Vienna-Paderborn: Schöninghs, 1967), p. 263: "Ironie ist klares Bewusstsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlichen vollen Chaos."

20. F. Schlegel, *Lyceum Fragment*, 42, *Kritische Ausgabe*, *op. cit.*, II, 152.

21. F. Schlegel, *Athenäum Fragment*, 238, *Kritische Ausgabe*, *op. cit.*, II, 204.

22. F. Schlegel, *Athenäum Fragment*, 51, *Kritische Ausgabe*, *op. cit.*, II, 172.

23. Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

24. *Ibid.*, p. 11: "... the perpetual deferment of sense encourages -- even constitutes -- *copia*, defined as the ability of language to generate detours and deflections. Textual abundance (the extension of the surface) opens up in its turn an infinite plurality of possible senses. The intention (will, *sententia*) which was supposed to inform the origin of the text and to guarantee the ultimate resolution of its *sensus* remains forever suspended, or submerged, in the flow of words."