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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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SOME ASPECTS OF BALLADESQUE ART AND THEIR RELEVANCE
FOR THE NOVELS OF THEODOR FONTANE.

by

R.C. Leckey

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of German

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

September, 1976

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The undersigned recommend
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Abstract.

The "balladesqueness" of Fontane's novels, though generally acknowledged to exist, has never been the subject of sustained critical investigation. This work attempts to start on that task. As being one possible approach, the investigation was divided according to consistent themes, or elements of form or style. The novels were approached only after examination of the ballads. In ballads where Fontane had a known Anglo-Scots model, such techniques as repetition or "Sprunghaftigkeit" were shown to have influenced the German version. These influences were then traced to the novels. Then, early ballads of Fontane's own were investigated: it was suggested that their outstanding features were often latent in the traditional ballad. These, too, were traced to the novels. Finally, in his late ballads, tradition was seen as being overcome. Fontane's originality was apparent in features which, far from destroying the ballad, are at home in it - as they are in his novels.

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Zugemessne Rhythmen reizen freilich,
Das Talent erfreut sich wohl darin;
Doch wie schnelle widern sie abscheulich,
Hohle Masken ohne Blut und Sinn;
Selbst der Geist erscheint sich nicht erfreulich,
Wenn er nicht, auf neue Form bedacht,
Jener toten Form ein Ende macht.

Goethe: Nachbildung

I i

Introduction: The task

It is Thomas Mann who is responsible for - if not the first - at least the best-known and thus most pernicious example of what has prompted this study. In his essay entitled Der Alte Fontane, he makes the following confession:

Es ist etwas unbedingt Zauberhaftes um seinen Stil und namentlich um den seiner alten Tage, wie er uns in den Briefen der achtziger und neunziger Jahre wieder entgegentritt. Mir persönlich wenigstens sei das Bekenntnis erlaubt, dass kein Schriftsteller der Vergangenheit oder Gegenwart mir die Sympathie und Dankbarkeit, dies unmittelbare und instinktmässige Entzücken, diese unmittelbare Erheiterung, Erwärmung, Befriedigung erweckt, die ich bei jedem Vers, jeder Briefzeile, jedem Dialogfetzchen von ihm empfinde. Diese bei aller behaglichen Breite so leichte, so lichte Prosa hat mit ihrer heimlichen Neigung zum Balladesken, ihren zugleich mundgerechten und vermässigen Abbreviaturen etwas bequemes Gehobenes¹

Fontane would doubtless have been well pleased. The trouble is, though, that Thomas Mann is unconsciously following what has become over the years a sort of critical tradition in the field of Fontane studies, of occasionally dropping the word "balladesque" into discussions of his prose works; a provocative enough gesture, but one which is generally left more or less unexplained.² It is almost as if a critic, when looking for a new word to sum up a subtle or charming effect of Fontane's prose, occasionally remembered that he had written ballads, too, and threw in the word as if

1. Thomas Mann, Der alte Fontane, 1910 in: Adel des Geistes (Gesammelte Werke, Berlin: Aufbau, 1965, Bd. 10), pp. 487-8.

2. As it is here. "...zugleich mundgerechte und vermässige Abbreviaturen" is a good point, but scarcely accounts adequately for a consistent, ubiquitous and differentiated characteristic.

it were self-explanatory. This is being facetious, of course, but what is remarkable is the unity of opinion among Fontane commentators that his prose is, in some way or other, "balladesque". And yet equally remarkable is the frequency with which the word is mentioned, and then side-stepped, in other words, treated just as Peter Demetz does when commenting upon Unwiederbringlich: "Aber das Sprunghafte erweist sich, im Blick auf Christines Charakter, als durchaus sinnvoll; keine andere Technik vermöchte eine so scheue Sensibilität anzudeuten, nur das wiederkehrend Balladische kann die wortlosen Tiefen treffen."³ At least Demetz does us the courtesy - which others do not - of explaining which aspect of the multi-faceted catch-phrase "das Balladische" he is referring to, namely, here, "das Sprunghafte": as we shall see, a perfectly valid and very important aspect. However, why can "n u r das wiederkehrend Balladische ... die wortlosen Tiefen treffen"? Surely other writers would have found their ways of capturing "die wortlosen Tiefen". One feels that what Demetz is hinting at here (and what he really ought to have said) is that, given the particular case of a Fontane, on whom it is reasonable to assume that his ballad-writing had a profound and lasting influence, and given the specific purpose in hand ("eine so scheue Sensibilität"), the use of a balladesque technique might well have seemed particularly effective and

3. Peter Demetz, Formen des Realismus: Theodor Fontane, Kritische Untersuchungen (München: Hanser, 1964), p.174.

appropriate, and we may legitimately speak of such here. He should also have mentioned what "das Sprunghafte" meant to Fontane's ballads; how it is used here; and why it works... but then, perhaps he realised that that would mean writing a thesis on the subject. At any rate, if this is what he is saying, then he is marking out a large area of influence of the ballad form and possibly even of ballad thought and subject-matter, upon Fontane's novels. Now, he is either doing this unconsciously, or assuming that this influence is an age-old topos with which all his readers must be acquainted. The latter certainly should not be the case, since no-one has ever done anything to acquaint Fontane readers in any detail with this area of influence. And whether this or the former is the case, Demetz is indicating a large area which needs excavation and then abandoning his readers without a shovel. This work can be considered a spoon with which to start the job.

It should be stressed at this point that Demetz is only an example; many writers on Fontane, among them such major ones as Nürnberger, Reuter and Martini, could show similar passages; so, too, could writers of many articles and dissertations. One or two writers, however, have had a clear idea of the kind of work that needs to be done: Otto Brähm made an excellent start on "das Sprunghafte" in Unwiederbringlich⁴; had he continued, at book-length, to

4.. Otto Brähm, Kritische Schriften (Berlin: Fischer, 1915), pp.267-272.

give us the advantage of his personal knowledge of the author and critical insight into his works, the rest would have been silence. Ernst Kohler, in the most fascinating page-and-a-half of his fine work Die Balladendichtung im Berliner "Tunnel über der Spree",⁵ summarises some of the areas in need of examination and even postulates some of the likely results. Other works, notably Hans Rhy's Die Balladendichtung Theodor Fontanes (1914, rpt. Nendeln: Kraus, 1970) and Carl Wegmann's Theodor Fontane als Übersetzer englischer und schottischer Balladen (Münster: Westfälische Verlagsdruckerei, 1910) offer hints and suggestions of some insight, though no conclusions.

It is the critic's job to be analytical, and what is a failing for him can be called "enigmatic" and "evocative" in the author himself. And indeed, it is Fontane who leads the way in the provocatively nonchalant handling of the word "balladesque". Otto Brahm, who knew Fontane well, offers us the enticing quote, which refuses to be tracked down and must come from a private conversation: "Fontane hat von sich selber einmal gesagt: sein Talent sei ein balladeskes".⁶ This is not the only self-confession of his addiction: in 1882, discussing Ellernklipp, he writes: "...ich (...) kann (...) meiner Natur

5. Kohler, op. cit., (1940, rpt. Nendeln: Kraus, 1969), pp. 341-2

6. Brahm, p.267.

und Angewöhnung nach von der Ballade nicht los";⁷ and again:

"Dies balladeske Gefühl leitet mich bei allem, was ich
schreibe".⁸ Nor are ballad and prose mutually inimical and
exclusive areas of creation for him: this is stated specifically
in the "Literarische Selbstbiographie" of 1874, where he writes:
"Nach meiner Meinung fliessen sich z w e i Dinge besonders gut
hervorheben", one of which is : "die Übereinstimmung zwischen
meiner Prosa und meinen Versen, so dass letztere nur die
Arabesken zu jener sind. Beide dienen denselben Göttern".⁹ The
notion of the arabesque in novels seems, incidentally, to
have been a nineteenth century topos: Fontane may have been
using a standard word of critical vocabulary, or he may have
been making a reference to Friedrich Schlegel's interpretation
of the arabesque as a "Verweis auf das Unendliche",¹⁰ in which
case he would be assigning his verse a high status indeed;
higher than that usually accorded it by critics. At the least,
he is clearly suggesting that the one might illuminate the
other. The conviction that: "Beide dienen denselben Göttern"

7. "Ein Stück Autokritik", March 4, 1882, originally
published in "Die Gegenwart", Nr. 9. Quoted from Dichter über
ihre Dichtungen, Bd. 12: Theodor Fontane (München: Heimeran,
1973) II, p. 290.

8. *ibid.*, p. 290.

9. Sämtliche Werke (München: Nymphenburger, 1959 ff.) XV,
p. 440. Henceforth cited as: N.

10. Cf. Esther Hudgins, Nicht-Epische Strukturen des
romantischen Romans (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), pp. 128-9.

was a constant in his life: in one of the last years of it, 1895, he was planning a novel - never executed - to be called Die Likedeeler, which was to be: "eine Aussöhnung....zwischen meinem ältesten und romantischsten Balladenstil und meiner modernsten und realistischsten Romanschreiberei".¹¹ I believe we can take this implied compatibility, along with all his other pronouncements on "the balladesque", as confirmation from the mouth of the master himself that we are not engaged here on a wild goose chase.

It is implicit in what has been said above that the "method" of approaching the balladesque from the novels (backwards, as it were) seems clearly to be wrong. Two things need to be done: first, the ballads need to be examined with a view to determining what may legitimately be called "balladesque" about Fontane's ballads; and then, armed with the results of this thorough inquiry, one needs to approach the novels to see if, and where, and how the former impinge upon and materially contribute to the latter. This work started out with the grandiose design of accomplishing both, and is now content to make a start on the first.

I have attempted to establish a body of factors which make Fontane's ballads what they are. Some are of general application to the ballad, some only to Fontane. While the list is, one hopes, reasonably full, it is by no means exhaustive; and the tentative beginnings of an application to

11. Letter to Hans Hertz, 16 March, 1895.

the novels which follow each section are to be considered above all as suggestions of where one might look in order to verify the relevance of the point just made; they are clearly not examinations with any degree of academic pretension.

The full examination of Fontane's novels for "balladesqueness" - when it comes - will have to be undertaken by someone combining an unusual knowledge of all sides of Fontane's poetic production, a rare perceptiveness, and heroic patience. All I aspire to have done here is to lay some groundwork for that extraordinary individual, and in the rôle of another "Landvermesser", to try to bring ordinary perceptions to bear on a mystery that has been allowed to establish and perpetuate itself.

I ii

Problems of the ballad

In 1914, Hans Rhyn expressed the following regrets:

"Noch fehlt uns eine Geschichte der deutschen Ballade,
und ob sie in absehbarer Zeit erscheinen wird, ist fraglich".¹

"Schlimmer als mit der Benennung steht es mit der
Begriffsbestimmung der Ballade. Es gibt keine allgemein
anerkannte Definition".²

Over sixty years later, and after the appearance of several histories of the German ballad, ranging from sketchy to massively documented, little has changed with regard to a definition. Our attitude to definitions, however, surely has. What was once seen as a lack and has since proved itself an impossibility, can be seen to-day as evidence of the peculiar strength of this most versatile of poetic forms. And in retrospect it is easy to understand how a form which encompasses the most ancient and spontaneous poetic expression of innumerable different races and peoples; seemed an equally fit and appropriate medium for the ideas of classicism and the emotions of Romanticism; and still, though at present, in literary view, a degenerate subspecies, retains an undeniable vigour and attracts the attentions of even the greatest living poets³, who invent ever new forms and functions for it - could defy definition.

1. Hans Rhyn, Die Balladendichtung Theodor Fontanes (1914; rpt. Nendeln: Kraus, 1970), p.7.

2. Rhyn, p.7.

3. C.f. Fritz Pratz, Moderne Balladen (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1967). Contributors include Grass, Brecht, etc.

The present writer does not propose to change the definitionless situation of the ballad; to attempt to design that particular better mousetrap in this forum is ludicrously beyond the requirements of the present study. However, the word ballad - Ballade - ballade - ballada - ballata, etc. varies in semantic content, often more than somewhat, not only from language to language, but from context to context: in literature, whether folk or otherwise; in music, whether classical or popular. It would therefore be good, before we start talking about it at length and more or less theoretically, to clarify our idea of the meaning of the word in a context both literary and German.

Those who have ventured to deal with the ballad in theoretical terms seem invariably to have chosen one of two paths: either they have avoided the problem by presupposing that everyone more or less understood what was meant by "ballad"; or they have wrestled with the herculean problem of inventing an all-encompassing definition. This latter was the course followed by W. Kayser, who, writing in 1936, came to the conclusion: "Die Ballade gestaltet als Gedicht eine Begegnung des Menschen mit dem Draussen in der Art, dass die Begegnung in sich sinnvoll und geschlossen ist, die aufeinanderprallenden Kräfte aber als dauernd gefühlt werden, so dass das Ganze die sinnbildliche Verdichtung menschlichen In-der-Welt-Seins ist".⁴

K. Nussbächer's comment upon this passage is appropriate:

4. Wolfgang Kayser, Geschichte der deutschen Ballade (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1936), p.297

"Das trifft zwar auf viele Balladen zu, jedoch weder auf die Bertolt Brechts noch auf die älteren Liedballaden des Wunderhorns, auch nicht auf Goethes König in Thule und Mörikes Schön-Rohtraut, um nur diese Beispiele zu nennen".⁵

To that, we would add two things: first, that Kayser's definition is unsatisfactory with regard to certain Fontane ballads, too (Herr von Ribbeck auf Ribbeck im Havelland is a prominent example); and secondly, that the terms used here have had of necessity to be kept so broad in their application that the sum total of content not only amounts to little that is precise or enlightening but could almost equally well apply to different un-balladesque forms - even lyrical, though notably dramatic. (If the "definition" were given to an unsuspecting group of people who were then asked to judge which literary form it was defining, it is a safe bet that a sizeable proportion would say: drama.)

More and more, one is forced to face the conclusion that the ballad cannot be tied down within fixed boundaries. And so the wheel has come full circle; for, after two centuries of the attentions of literary research and men of letters, all we can do is go back to Goethe's interpretation. This first appeared in print not very long after Herder's fine work as an intermediary in bringing the world of the old English and Scottish ballads before the German public, close upon which Hölty and Bürger (no polemics here about who was

5. Konrad Nussbächer, ed., Deutsche Balladen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1974), p.511.

first!) opened up the ballad field as an art form, to an eager literary world. Goethe's typically original perception lay in seeing the ballad as an organic growth in poetic form, capable, according to the varying needs of the moment, of borrowing, juxtaposing, or combining elements from the realm of the lyric, epic or dramatic:

(Die Ballade) bedient sich....aller drei Grundarten der Poesie, um zunächst auszudrücken, was die Einbildungskraft erregen, den Geist beschäftigen soll; er kann lyrisch, episch, dramatisch beginnen und, nach Belieben die Formen wechselnd, fortfahren, zum Ende hinein oder es weit hinausschieben. Der Refrain, das Wiederkehren ebendesselben Schlussklanges, gibt dieser Dichtart den entschiedenen lyrischen Charakter. Hat man sich mit ihr vollkommen befreundet, wie es bei uns Deutschen wohl der Fall ist, so sind die Balladen aller Völker verständlich, weil die Geister in gewissen Zeitaltern, entweder kontemporan oder sukzessiv, bei gleichem Geschäft immer gleichartig verfahren. Übrigens liesse sich an einer Auswahl solcher Gedichte die ganze Poetik gar wohl vortragen, weil hier die Elemente noch nicht getrennt, sondern wie in einem lebendigen Ur-Ei zusammen sind, das nur bebrütet werden darf, um als herrlichstes Phänomen auf Goldflügeln in die Lüfte zu steigen.⁶

Literary research, then, must resign itself to the fact that, in the case of the ballad, description must replace definition. Is one wrong in detecting in Nussbächer's final "definition" a healthy measure of irony? - "die Ballade ist ...ein in verschiedenen Variationen auftretender inhaltlich unbestimmter Typus".⁷ Only such a definition as this would have a chance of meeting with universal approval, yet it is, of course, so broad in its sweep that it in fact defines

6. Goethe, Nachtrag zu: Über Kunst und Alterthum, in: Werke (Weimar: Böhlau, 1887-1919), Abt. I, Bd. 41/1, pp. 223-224.

7. Nussbächer, p. 511.

nothing; it can best serve as a warning example that the path of generalisation is, from the start, doomed to be a wrong one.

We shall let this observation suffice as a point of departure, one from which the only possible path to follow is clearly marked out: we shall attempt to take the middle way between ignoring the problem and losing ourselves in abstractions, as we build up a "definition" through observation of actual practice.

Formally, all that ballads have in common is a tendency to strophic division; it is therefore more true of the ballad than of any other type of poetry (to avoid the word "form") that it is best to give an outline of it by starting with subject matter. Thus it is that lists of the different types of ballad can sound like suggested topics: "Heldenballade, lyrische Ballade, rührende Ballade, magische und naturmagische Ballade, Ideenballade, Legendenballade, Historische Ballade, Bänkelsängerballade"⁸; "lyrisch-volkstümliche B., rührende B., soziale B., magische B., Legendenb., Totenb., Geisterb., Schicksalsb., Hybrisb., Vergeltungsb."⁹ Two of the three last named, Schicksalsballade and Vergeltungsballade, are to loom disproportionately large for Fontane, and thus for us, as they will for anyone who concerns himself with the ballad of the 19th century. In general, however, it is Fontane's versatility

8. Nussbächer, p.510.

9. Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte, begründet von Paul Merker und Wolfgang Stämmeler (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1958-1965), p.903. Henceforth this work will be cited as: Merker-Stämmeler.

that should be mentioned here; for, within the compass of his considerable ballad output lie examples (perhaps not archetypal, but at any rate with a touch of the Fontaneesque) of ballads featuring the main elements of every one of the categories mentioned above. Leaving aside the most obvious categories, examples of which will spring to the mind of anyone moderately versed in Fontane's ballad work or readily identify themselves to the first-time reader, one might be justified in asking where a "Bänkelsängerballade" is to be traced to earth. To which one might reply that all the necessary elements - direct contemporary allusion to a current event; limited scope of application; extremely simple and unpretentious rhyme-scheme exploiting primitive repetitious rhythms; popularist, sensationalistic tone - are present in his Berliner Spottvers. And an "Ideenballade"? Well, though it may not be immediately obvious, it becomes clear from Fontane's own report of its genesis that this is what Archibald Douglas is. As Fontane relates in a letter of 16th July 1889 to Maximilian Runze, he was leafing through a volume of Walter Scott when the rhyme:

A king's face
Shall give grace

(his misquote for: A king's face / Should give grace) caught his eye; and it was out of this that the ballad grew, the thought taking the form of the king's revocation of Douglas' banishment and words of pardon, which take the epigrammatic form of another "idea", or moral of the poem:

Der ist in tiefster Seele treu
Wer die Heimat liebt wie du.

Indeed, the "idea" content is emphasised by Reuter in his (hefty) criticism of the ballad: what makes it, for him, untypical of Fontane - weak, affected, precious - is that, among other things, it represents a too consciously arranged demonstration of an idea, - criticism which it is hard to counter, in view of the fact that Fontane felt free to overturn the course of history for the sake of his conciliatory happy ending, thus handling his characters with a liberty more properly reserved for the mythical legend-heroes one would normally expect in a classical "Ideenballade".

We do not propose to go at any length here into the question of which details distinguish the concepts "Ballade" and "Romanze" from one another; we shall simply record and accept the observation that they "begrifflich kaum¹⁰ auseinanderzuhalten sind", and also that, within the "Romanze": "der düsteren Grundtendenz der nördlichen Spielart die leichtere, hellere, oft pastorale und burleske¹¹ Grundstimmung der südlichen gegenübersteht". In Fontane,¹² in spite of his "eigenste südfranzösische Natur", we detect principally the "dark, northern" tendency; nor is it only in ballads directly treating old Norse material

10. Merker-Stammler, p.902.

11. ibid, p.902.

12. Letter to Hans Hertz, 15 April, 1891.

(such as Gorm Grymme, Olaf Kragebeen, Swend Gabelbart) that¹³ what Meier calls "die herbe Tragik der älteren Zeit" predominates. Rather, it is a basic determinant of mood and atmosphere in all his early ballads on historical or legendary themes; and even though, when he later begins to put more and more of his own personality into his ballads, his dark, Nordic side may be significantly tempered by humour and a positive belief in humanity, it is - just as significantly - never expunged; though he may lean towards optimism, Fontane is never quite light-hearted; his natural talent is for the "Ballade", not the "Romanze".

Certain more detailed characteristics of the above-mentioned "suggested topics" deserve mention as being "typically balladesque"; and most commentators are in agreement as to which these are: "Zum hauptsächlichen Balladentypus gehören weitere Merkmale: thematisch die Vorliebe für das Ungewöhnliche, Extreme und Schaurige...."¹⁴ observes Merker-Stammler. Richard Schaeffer expounds at greater length upon the extraordinary, the extreme, and the grisly: "....der Ballade (ist) eine ausgesprochene Vorliebe für menschliche Grenzsituationen eigen. Aus diesen Grenzsituationen schöpft sie ihre Kraft, sie bedeuten ihr geheimes Wesen. Liebe und Tod stehen an erster Stelle der Thematik, dann Furcht und Schrecken (Hebbels "Heideknabe"),

13. John Meier, Das deutsche Volkslied (1935; rpt. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 1, p.32.

14. Merker-Stammler, p.903.

unwissendes Bestehen tödlicher Gefahren (Schwab, "Der Reiter und der Bodensee"), Terror und auch Güte. Der Mensch begegnet den überindividuellen Mächten der Natur und denen der Gesellschaft - hier ereignen sich Bedrohung, Geschlagensein, Versagen, Bewährung, Schuld und Sühne."¹⁵

From the Tower-Brand of 1846, right up to Olaf Kragebeen of 1889, we are faced with such a preponderance of human borderline situations and clashes with extra-individual forces, both natural and social, and so many resultant high emotions, dangers and deaths that no-one is likely to argue if we draw the conclusion that, thematically, then, Fontane's ballads sacrifice nothing of the power or essence of the type.

However, the word "love" has slipped out, and it will not do to leave it at that. We should like to refer to John Meier's preface to his collection of folk-ballads by way of reminding ourselves of those varieties of love - few in number - which, basically, we are likely to encounter in both folk and literary ballad. In general, we are not dealing with idyllic-romantic love, but rather with secret, stolen love in which deceit plays an essential rôle, or, as often as not, with adultery; Meier quotes from Joh. Herold's

Christenlicher Ee Instruction (Strassburg, 1542): "Es ist bei etlichen völkern der sitten, das man jährlich neue liedlin machet, welche die töchtere auswendig lernen müssen, deren gemeiner inhalt ist, wie der man wom weibe betrogen oder wie

15. Richard Schaeffer, Deutsche Balladen (Berlin: Ullstein, 1966), p.13.

die tochter umsonst so wol von den eltern verhütet oder heimlich bei einem buler gelegen sei. Und dise ding werden dann also für wol getone sachen erzölet, und man lobt dann, das die bosheit so wol geraten ist".¹⁶ Meier also places, with undoubted accuracy, as early as in the thirteenth century "das Urbild des Liedes von der unerwarteten Heimkehr des Gatten".¹⁷ The prototypes of these mentioned varieties of love caught Fontane's imagination, too: he has reproduced the latter one most faithfully in his ballads Jung-Musgrave und Lady Barnard and Schön-Margret und Lord William, not to mention the numerous and varied appearances of other balladesque forms of love in his novels. However, even should balladesque love be so happy as to be reciprocally enjoyed without necessitating deceit, then something else - principally social prejudice - will stand in its way. Thus Meier mentions that "Liebe, die die Ungleichheit der Stände überspringt"¹⁸ also often forms the topic of the folk-ballad. Here one can think, to be sure, of Fontane's Rosamunde, but, surely, no less of the story of Lene and Botho in Irrungen Wirungen, which is so often reminiscent of a ballad - and not least, from this particular point of view.

At this point we should like to make good the omission of a very important aspect of the "thematic characteristics" of the ballad, which we began to discuss above. The ballad

16. Meier, I, p.23.

17. *ibid.*, p.16.

18. *ibid.*, p.33.

is, namely, often a representation of the point at which normally logical, three-dimensional man comes into contact with the realm of irrationality and becomes, perforce, illogical, irrational man. What shook the literary world of the 1770's was that the realm of the logically impossible was conjured up and made tangible in Lenore, Adelstan und Röschen, and Die Nonne. Merker-Stammler rightly stresses that these works represented, for that immediately post-enlightenment literary world, a genuinely new departure, "weil in ihnen ein neues Menschenbild seinen angemessenen Ausdruck erlangt: der¹⁹ irrationale Mensch". This folk-ballad element, then, is duly present in the literary ballad right from the start, and remains a permanent characteristic of the German ballad "mit ihrem oft geheimnisvollen, in irrationale Gründe lotenden²⁰ Geschehen". We need only think of Fontane's fascination with ghost-stories, which betrays itself in such works as Silvesternacht, Treu-Lischen, Wangelin oder Die Weisse Frau and many others; which, indeed, is still strongly present in Die Brück'am Tay, and to a great extent makes the transition to the novel with him; and it will be clear that Fontane had, by nature, a lively appreciation of this powerful and life-giving part of ballad art.

This is all the more true of the traditional stylistic means which are considered to be characteristic of the ballad:

19. Merker-Stammler, p.904.

20. Nussbächer, p.511.

no-one can have been as masterful as Fontane at drinking in the style required by a subject and reproducing it in refined, perfected literary form. In his ballads he is every bit as much a stylist as in his novels; the discussion as to whether this was always an advantage or could be a disadvantage is one we should prefer not to get into at this point: we shall touch upon it later. However that may be, it is beyond doubt that the Fontane ballad will invariably and artistically incorporate several of the essential elements of ballad poetics, as described by Schaeffer: "... die fast durchweg erreichte Straffung des Stoffes, das Streben nach Kulmination und Katharsis, andererseits die Eigenschaft der Ballade, ²¹ Gedankliches in Handlung umzusetzen". Nussbächer recognises similar factors as typifying balladesque style, speaking by way of contrast of: "der "epische Fluss", der sich wesensmässig von der knappen, meist auf eine erzählerische oder dramatische Pointe zielenden, oft andeutend aussparenden, hell-dunklen, Wesentlichen nur ahnen lassenden, dynamischen und fast atemlosen Vortragsart der typischen Ballade mit ihren "Sprüngen und Würfen" (Herder)... ²² unterscheidet." Pithier in its formulation, but essentially similar is the assessment offered by Merker-Stammler: "... die Neigung zu gedrängter, häufig sprunghafter Aussage mit oft unvermitteltem Einsatz und mitunter pointiertem

21. Schaeffer, p. 13.

22. Nussbächer, p. 511.

23

Abschluss"...

One further point concerning the ballad in general is worth bearing in mind during what is to follow. We have seen that the ballad is not an identifiable poetic form in the sense of the "Novelle"; and that it is not a genre in the sense of the "Dorfnovelle". Nor is it to be tied to the bounds of a time-span, even if one rules a line under the year 1770 and declares the folk-ballad dead; for the concept simply regenerates itself in the literary ballad, as witness the fact that some few "Kunstballaden" have - by dint of becoming public property to the point where their origins are obscured - achieved the status of "Volksballade" (one can readily think of popular poems by Goethe, Heine, Brentano and, not least, Fontane.) To attempt to sum up the ballad from a stylistic viewpoint in the word "volkstümlich" ("folkish"? "folk-song-like"?), broad though this is, would be too narrow; and we have already seen that it has a dizzying multiplicity of thematic possibilities at its disposal. Yet that the word means something definite even if indefinable is, surely, proved by the fact that we can identify "the balladesque" where we find it with some exactness, as well as by the fact that both critics and readers demonstrate an amazing degree of agreement upon what may or may not be labelled "a ballad". We believe, therefore, that there is some justification for considering the ballad

above all an "idea", of which we may not demand that it should succumb, ultimately, to the definition logic or the rule rationale - which is not to deny that we may attempt to identify it individually. This may explain how it can be that often only certain parts or elements in a work appear "balladesque". As early as Schiller, it was demonstrated that the ballad could tend towards philosophical poetry; with Heine, Brentano, Uhland, Lenau, Chamisso, it is frequently impossible to decide whether a poem is more accurately described as a ballad or a lyric work; and modern ballads have undertaken a general demolition of traditional rigid structure patterns (we can trace the beginnings of this movement in several Fontane ballads, most noticeably in Die Brück' am Tay) without our denying them the right to the name "ballad" or failing to perceive "balladesque effect" in them. On the other hand - applying the same logic - it is a perfectly legitimate viewpoint to admit the possibility of the existence of a ballad even if the work as a whole is not entitled to that description, and to accept as such what is felt to be "balladesque". Fontane himself would certainly not have opposed this suggestion.

Finally, both to demonstrate modern research's bewilderment in face of the ballad and to support our contention that the ballad is, at bottom, an "idea", we should like to quote Hans Fromm's summing-up in which he sees it as a metaphysical symbol expressing an unchanging attitude:

Seit Goethe hat die Ballade, so viele Unterarten sie auch aus sich entwickelt hat, ihre metaphysische Tendenz immer erneut durchgesetzt. Gründe dafür lassen sich vermuten. Vielleicht treibt im Zeitalter der grossen Apostasie den Dichter zur numinosen Ballade die Sehnsucht nach dem Kleistischen "Paradies", welches das scheidende Bewusstsein uns verriegelt hat. Vielleicht führt den Dichter zu unserer Dichtart ein tieferes Wissen, dass die Handlungen, in welchen der Mensch den überweltlichen Kräften begegnet, sinnvoll werden als repräsentierender Nach-Vollzug einer die Ordnung setzenden göttlichen Ur-Handlung. Der Hörer einer solchen Ballade erfährt, wie die Macht der Dichtung in der Macht ihrer aufschliessenden Symbole ruht, die ihn den Weg sinngebenden Sich-Erinnerns führen. Es liegt für uns die eigentümliche Anziehungskraft der Ballade wie des Märchens darin, dass im Sinnbild uns ersteht, was im Urbild uns entfiel. 24

This mosaic collection of impressions has, one hopes, served two purposes: first, to preface this study in lieu of a definition; and secondly, to begin to place Fontane in context by showing him as sharing in a tradition which he enthusiastically embraces and respects, even as he - as we shall see - puts it to work for his own purposes. We shall see how he enriched and changed it.

I iii

The position and significance of the ballad in Fontane's creative life

The time has come to speak of many things which one might not expect to belong in a discussion of ballads and novels, but which in this case most assuredly do. The time has come to add a modicum of revelant biography to our mixture of criticism and interpretation, in the hope that the former may help illuminate the latter. No poetic development, however purely aesthetic the reasons for which it is undertaken, is explicable entirely from the words the author permits to appear on the printed page; these need to be supplemented by utterances in letters to acquaintances, and information on events affecting the author's life. It is of particular necessity to fill in this background in trying to shed light on Fontane's relationship with the ballad; it should also open up a wider perspective on the threads of development we are about to trace.

The crucial question to which we must supply an answer is: why did Fontane choose the ballad as his early standard form of expression? The answer is not a simple one, but can be deduced, in eclectic fashion, by pulling together many different strands of influence that we know to have worked upon him. First, it is worth noting a difference of opinion which is typical of many learned differences of opinion over the relative sincerity of Fontane's political views and strength of his artistic ambitions. Ernst Kohler, in his book Die

Balladendichtung im Berliner Tunnel über der Spree¹, sees Fontane's turning towards the ballad as representing a re-discovery of a love for history which is noticeable in Fontane at a very early age. ("Als ich in meinem 10. Jahre gefragt wurde, was ich werden wollte, antwortete ich ganz stramm: Professor der Geschichte".)² And combined with this, Kohler notes a growing distaste for what Fontane called, in 1854, the "Schwindel" of the "Herwegh-Zeit".³ This latter stood for a politically engagé, liberal-republican and pro-worker style of poetry which at that time was just finishing a period of enormous popularity during which it had been a highly fashionable stance among artists and writers. So Kohler takes this explanation offered to us by Fontane himself at face-value, without questioning its genuineness. Helmuth Nürnberger, on the other hand, in his *rororo Bild-Monographie*, inclines towards the explanation of Fontane's adoption of the ballad form by "der natürliche Egoismus des Künstlers", the wish for "Dabeisein im Tunnel" and the wish to win its applause.⁴ The Berlin "literarischer Sonntagsverein", "Der Tunnel über der Spree" was, by its composition, and thereby also in its political and artistic nature, of a confirmed

1. Kohler, p. 156.

2. Letter to Th. Storm, 14 Feb., 1854.

3. *ibid.*

4. Helmuth Nürnberger, Theodor Fontane in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1968), p. 56.

conservative bent, and it must have been crystal-clear to Fontane, who regularly attended its meetings for over a year as a guest before becoming a full member, just what was likely to be approved of, and what would be looked down upon. This, then, does make it rather remarkable that Fontane should have desired so strongly to become a member of the "Tunnel" and then have striven for years with all his energies to become its leading light - "Ich wurde, auf zehn Jahre hin, ein eifriges Mitglied derselben" (Sonntags-Gesellschaft)⁵ - indeed, the model "Tunnelpoet", since he had previously been known as a liberal-republican-democrat (all of which, in the 1840's in Germany, meant much the same thing, since it was the leftward political leaning that mattered, and not the details of party ideology) and in general, as something of a revolutionary. And it is one of the vexed questions in Fontane research, why someone of such a known leftish political position should seek to curry the favour of a body one of whose members - Merckel - is suspected of being responsible for the notorious rhyme: "Gegen Demokraten/Helfen nur Soldaten". Nürnberger goes on to relate Fontane's renunciation of further political poetry to the same reasons, "Egoismus des Künstlers" and the desire for applause. To this, one can only say that while it is true that he did give up political poetry - at least in the form in which he had practised it hitherto - he certainly did not give up his political concerns, and they are most forcefully present

5. Literarische Selbstbiographie, 1874, N, XV, p. 437.

in his novels. He had simply had to acknowledge that politics and poetry served different gods, and, writing in 1874, clearly implies the realisation that a "Verschmelzung" of the two is impossible: "Es war die Herwegh-Zeit, und das Interesse für Politik und Poeterei, ganz besonders aber für die Verschmelzung beider, liess alle andern Studien in den Hintergrund treten".⁶ This realisation did not come without disappointment or bitterness: by his remark about the "Schwindel" of the Herwegh era, he clearly means that Herwegh and his imitators were cheating both themselves and their public. The nature and strength of Fontane's political sympathies is dramatically demonstrated by his prompt and passionate response to the revolution of 1848: he asks a friend to furnish him with a gun, he mans the barricades; he is prepared to shoot, to fight, and to die. Even Nürnberger confesses: "Mag er nun geschossen haben oder nicht: er stand am 18. März mit Überzeugung und Leidenschaft auf seiten des Volkes".⁷

Had he merely sought gratifying applause, he would scarcely have made his debut in the "Tunnel" as he did - with tendentious socialist poetry, in large measure translations from English worker-poets, which did not fail to produce the mocking criticism he could have expected. The truth, surely, lies somewhere between Kohler's "political disenchantment" and Nürnberger's "artistic ego"; I think we must explain his

6. Literarische Selbstbiographie, 1874, N, XV, p.437.

7. Nürnberger, Theodor Fontane in Selbstzeugnissen..., p.63.

setting his politics aside in another compartment by a perception that his artistic goals could be best furthered by an association with the "Tunnel", which he recognised - whatever else it may have been - for a receptive and sensitive forum in which he could develop artistically while continuing the search for his natural artistic self. It led him to the ballad.

In addition, we must consider another, more personal, less positive and, for Fontane himself, sadder reason for his turning towards the ballad in the first place. For approximately a decade he had been dabbling in pure lyricism in many different forms, and he had finally come to realise that he had produced not only nothing above third-rate stuff, but nothing really original in thought or tone, nothing that was truly Fontane. And so, in 1847, just three years after he had become a full member of the "Tunnel", we find him writing to his friend and publisher Wolfsohn: "Das Lyrische hab ich aufgegeben, ich möchte sagen, blutenden Herzens. Ich liebe eigentlich nichts so sehr und innig wie ein schönes Lied, und doch war mir gerade die Gabe für das Lied versagt. Mein Bestes, was ich bis jetzt geschrieben habe, sind Balladen und Charakterzeichnungen historischer Personen...." - and they were to remain so, at least in the field of verse. The sadness with which Fontane realised the necessity of renouncing what was his dearest wish is reflected in a character named Hansen-

8. Letter to Wilhelm Wolfsohn, 10 Nov., 1847.

Grell in his first great novel, Vor dem Sturm, who just happens to be a ballad-writer - and in other respects, too, bears many similarities to Fontane - who says at one point: "Unsere dichterische Produktion....entspricht unserer N a t u r, aber nicht notwendig unserem G e s c h m a c k" (N,I, p.433). But what was his weakness on the lyrical side was his greatest strength on the side of the ballad, the epic and the novel. Ernst Kohler defines "eine Eigentümlichkeit seiner dichterischen Schaffensweise" as follows: "Fontane bedürfte zur Gestaltung seines Erlebens eines ausser ihm liegenden, gegebenen oder erdichteten Stoffs, in dem sich sein persönliches Gefühl, seine seelische Situation, ein Element seiner Weltanschauung objektivieren konnte".⁹ And of course it is immediately obvious to us, with the advantage of hindsight, that this quality, which led Fontane to the ballad, is also, if not a prerequisite, at least a great gift for the writer of novels to possess. Kohler, surely, is absolutely right to see Fontane's settling on the ballad form as "erster¹⁰ Schritt auf dem Wege zum Eigenen, Besonderen". In his recognition of his limitations and making a strength out of them, we can talk of a victory of "Natur" over "Geschmack".

One important attraction of the ballad for Fontane cannot be ignored, and that is its interest in history, its adaptability to historical subjects, and the particular slant

9. Kohler, p. 159.

10. *ibid.*, p.159-160.

of its concern with history, by which one means non-academic and indeed, often, non-factual. Many of the characters in his early poems and attempts at drama are political examples from English history: the Stuart family fascinated him,¹¹ as did Cromwell.¹² So, from his earliest writings, even before his ballad period, history for him was material for poetry. But "history", for him, has both earlier beginnings and a much broader application than is allowed for in the usual interpretation of the word. Nürnberger has a theory about Fontane's earliest brushes with history:

Während der so aufnahmebereiten Swinemünder Jahre vollzieht sich die erste Begegnung des Knaben mit der Geschichte in den verschiedenen Stadien ihrer Verdinglichung: noch nicht geklärt in aktuellem Bericht und erinnernder Erzählung, abgesunken in Sage und legendär gewordener Überlieferung, als Prozess des Fortschritts dargestellt und zur Waffe geschmiedet von einer rationalistischen Wissenschaft, zur Poesie geworden im romantisierenden Bericht vom Selbstverständnis der Völker.¹³

Now, of course, this is true of many children, but we must allow that Fontane was especially receptive to it: "Als Dreizehnjähriger konnte er in Neuruppin Primaner fürs Examen einpauken....Es war nicht "blosser Zahlen- und Gedächtniskram".¹⁴ Then there was his father, who played a most important rôle as Fontane's "history teacher" in his childhood - by his vivid and lively manner of story-telling,

11. Nürnberger, Der Frühe Fontane (München: Hanser, 1971), p. 139ff.

12. *ibid.*, pp. 142-144.

13. *ibid.*, p. 57.

14. Nürnberger, Theodor Fontane in Selbstzeugnissen..., p.35.

peppered with anecdotes, and his phenomenal memory. Fontane himself writes unforgettably of these Socratic hours in "Meine Kinderjahre." (N, XIV, p. 138ff.) And we know that, throughout his life, he remained receptive to history in its popular and poetic forms, rejecting the academic, the dry and the documented. He was greatly attracted by the idea that popular songs, ballads, sagas, legends - in short, all forms of poetry that came from the people - could endow historical happenings with greater significance for the world at large than perhaps they had in the historian's scheme of things. In his essay on Walter Scott, he says: "Wegen Scott zählen die Schicksäle der Stuartprätendenten von 1715 und 1745 zu den bekanntesten und beliebtesten Kapiteln, die die Weltgeschichte aufzuweisen hat. Das liegt nicht in dem Gewicht der Dinge selbst, das liegt lediglich in der poetischen Bedeutung, die ihnen der nationale Dichter gab."¹⁵ Scott, by the way, by Fontane's definition, did qualify as a poet from the people, a "Volksdichter". Then, in another essay, this time on Die alten englischen und schottischen Balladen, in spite of great praise for comic, Romantic and love-ballads, Fontane finds the historical ballads the most beautiful: these are "mit den deutschen Liedern von 1813, ja mit allem, womit ein sangreiches Volk jemals einen wichtigen Abschnitt seiner Geschichte begleitet hat, vergleichbar."¹⁶ So we can identify

15. Walter Scott, NXXI/I, p. 419.

16. Fontane, Aufsätze zur Literatur (München: Nymphenburger, 1963) p. 378.

the idea that poetry transfigures and transcends history. We see this theory put into action in innumerable ballads on actual historical themes: Maria Stuart, Jane Grey, Schloss Eger, and in particular Der Tag von Hemmingstedt and the "Preussenlieder". In all of these, it should be underlined that he respects the historical facts.

Parallel to this, however, runs a belief that real history, as opposed to a chronicle of battles and treaties - what moved masses, what the ordinary man found earth-shattering - is found only in inventions of the popular mind - ballads, folk-songs, sagas, legends, fairy-tales. Nürnberger notes Fontane's natural propensity in this direction from a very early age: speaking of battles of which he would have heard reports, he says: "Der Knabe verfolgt alle Kämpfe mit Leidenschaft, aber er sucht das Bunte und Märchenhafte in ihnen", ¹⁷ and he goes on to give examples. Of course, this meant - and Fontane was aware that it meant - accepting embroidery upon plain reality: where reality is too banal, the "Volksmund" - like the artist - has the privilege of adding to it whatever elements it wishes in order to produce a good story. And so we find Fontane occasionally casting himself in the rôle of an artificial "Volksmund": he writes to his sister Elise to find out the reasons for the murder in 1806 of a Frenchman by the inhabitants of Dreetz in Grafschaft Ruppin:

Wahr braucht es ja nicht zu sein, der "Volksmund" hat das

17. Nürnberger, Der Frühe Fontane, p.66.

Vorrecht zu lügen, soviel er will, es heisst dann "Sage" und wird von den Gelehrten oder Käuzen meines Schlages mit höchstem Respekt behandelt. Trommle also in Dreetz noch ein paar Menschen zusammen: einen Schäferknecht, der sich absteigend entwickelt hat, eine "weise" Frau, einen wahrsagenden Imbécile, einer davon wird doch wohl zum Donnerwetter so viel Erfindungskraft haben, um rauszukriegen, warum dieser arme Franzose eigentlich totgeschlagen worden ist. Ich selbst kann und darf nichts erfinden, einmal weil es gegen das "historische Gewissen" ist, dann weil es in meinem Gemüte feststeht, dass der biedere Dreetzer von 1806 den Franzosen so totschrug, wie man einen Pfahl in die Erde schlägt, oder mit noch viel weniger Grund.¹⁸

So Fontane has very clear ideas about how he wants his version of history to look: another time, he gives his sister instructions, "historisch-romantisches Liederlichkeits-¹⁹ Material auszugraben". Fontane would probably have defended himself by saying that this was how history came down to most people, that inventions of the "Volksmund" - and for our purposes, ballads - were the history of the masses, and therefore contained at least as much truth as what actually happened. To put this another way, we can say that Fontane had much less respect for reality than he had for realism. He had a very personal interpretation of this word, one which we can only approximately paraphrase by an expression like "poetic realism", since its meaning for him was at once so much more and broader: a poetic transfiguration of reality achieved by using the distilled essence of reality in situations either real, or fictional but mirroring the real, and above all, the whole given shape by a personal and (not

18. Letter to his sister Elise, 12 Dec., 1873.

19. Letter to Elise, 29 Jan., 1873.

less importantly) coherent vision. He himself would often contrast his realism with the realism of the era, as represented by Zola, Dostoyevsky, Ibsen, among others, rather more journalistic and documentary in aspect, and, for all its virtues, at least by contrast with Fontane, more like mere detailed observation and note-taking.²⁰ Fontane uses "Realismus" as

almost a synonym for "Kunst", and at one point goes so far as to equate them: "Der Realismus in der Kunst ist so alt wie die Kunst selbst, ja noch mehr: er ist die Kunst".²¹

In a letter of 1885, he recognises as his only rule that: "An etwas bestimmt Gegebenes muss man doch immer anknüpfen".²²

But only "anknüpfen". And so there is, by implication, throughout Fontane's works, a kind of parallel established between the relationship of "Volksmund" to reality, and the relationship of the artist to reality, with the one sanctioning the other. Thus, it seems to us, he was suited by nature to become a balladier, which helps us to appreciate his immediate sensing of a kinship with the composers of the ballads in the Percy and Scott collections; and makes it a little clearer what he means when he says that his whole attitude towards reality and its literary transfiguration and restructuring is

20. Cf. his criticism of Richard Voss-Brigitta, NXXII/2, p. 638f.

21. Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848, NXXI/I, p. 9.

22. Letter to Paul Lindau, 15 Feb., 1885.

23
"balladesque".

Previously, in at least two ways - political and artistic - we saw that Fontane's adoption of the ballad was a compromise, and we know that he realised it was a compromise, too, in what it meant for the formal side of his work. He calls it, in 1847, "eine natürliche Übergangsstufe zum Epos und Drama".²⁴ Now, he never succeeded in the realm of drama, though he dabbled in it, but what is significant is that he realises, as he takes up the ballad, that it means his natural leanings are towards the direction of the epic.

The inner conflicts which led Fontane to attach himself to the ballad are not relieved the minute he begins to use his new tool. In this connection, it is interesting to take H.-H. Reuter, in his richly detailed two-volume work Fontane, as an example of the way in which Marxist terminology can give to the sharpest of perceptions a twist which, in spite of the theoretical claim to greater clarity and freedom of

23. e.g. Dies balladeske Gefühl leitet mich bei allem, was ich schreibe, und ich fühle deutlich, dass ich mich, trotz der Salto mortales, die diese Führung mit sich bringt, doch keiner anderen anvertrauen darf...Ich war, von meinem 16. Lebensjahre an, Balladenschreiber, habe mich später daraufhin einexerziert und kann deshalb, meiner Natur und meiner Angewöhnung nach, von der Ballade nicht los (Ein Stück Autokritik, 4th March 1882); or Otto Brahm's unannotated comment:

Fontane hat von sich selber einmal gesagt, sein Talent sei ein balladeskes (Theodor Fontanes balladeskes Talent und "Unwiederbringlich" in: Otto Brahm, Kritische Schriften, II, p. 267).

24. Letter to Wilhelm Wolfsohn, 10 Nov., 1847.

vision,²⁵ makes literary criticism almost a caricature of what it should be.²⁶ Reuter actually has a very clear idea of what Fontane is doing in his early ballads, but we have to read through the vocabulary he uses in order to get at it. He speaks of the "Aristokratisierung und Entaktualisierung der Ballade"²⁷ and about a "Festlegung auf Stoffe der Vergangenheit", all of which he manages to make sound very negative; the implicit political stance he then makes explicit, when he accuses Fontane of executing "eine...ideologisch begründete Verschiebung."²⁸ Whether the author himself was conscious or unconscious of this ideological basis is not made clear; however, what we have to imagine is Fontane making a decided move to the right; in terms of historical necessity, a backward step; and in dialectic terms, a betrayal. Reuter goes on to castigate Fontane for this, and then allows that Fontane's late

25. Vgl. Georg Lukacs, Erhard John as quoted in Von der Tendenz zur sozialistischen Parteilichkeit, Jens Stüben: Parteilichkeit (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974), pp. 43-45.

26. Erscheint das wertende Urteil jedoch in der Form der beschreibenden Aussage, so wird eine subjektiv erfahrene und intersubjektiv nachvollziehbare Empfindung zu einer dem Erkenntnisgegenstand anhaftenden Eigenschaft hypostasiert: Ein solcher Satz nähert sich der Ideologie (Stüben, p. 19-20).

27. Hans-Heinrich Reuter, Fontane (München: Nymphenburger, 1968), I, p. 194.

28. Reuter, I, p. 194.

ballads, which are contemporary in theme and represent a quite new departure in tone and construction, are a great improvement, and demonstrate "seine Fähigkeit zur ...Selbstzurücknahme und Selbstkorrektur" in that they represent - by way of contrast - to his early ballads - "die Säkularisierung und Demokratisierung eines Gedichttyps",²⁹ which, of course, he finds laudable. And so, despite having got all his facts right, Reuter has us believing in an ideological double-somersault in Fontane's life.³⁰ This is not necessary. As Walter Müller-Seidel points out, Fontane's early ballads can be understood only against the background of the circle that he was stepping into, and whose leading light - and greatest influence on Fontane - had been for some years Moritz Graf Strachwitz, whom one could do no better, if one had to sum him up in a few words, than describe³¹ as Müller-Seidel does: "er liebte die Vergangenheit über alles". It is also in reference to Strachwitz that Müller-Seidel poses the question: "kann man in der Geschichte einer literarischen Gattung schon die blossen Rückgriffe als eine wirkliche Erneuerung ansehen?"³² Now, he also means Fontane to be not entirely innocent of these "Rückgriffe", and it would be surprising if he were, coming as he was into a group the purity

29. Reuter, I, p. 195.

30. Walter Müller-Seidel, "Die deutsche Ballade. Umriss ihrer Geschichte", in Wege zum Gedicht, II: Wege zur Ballade, eds. Rupert Hirschenauer and Albrecht Weber (München, Schnell und Steiner, 1968), p. 67.

31. Müller-Seidel, p. 65.

32. *ibid.*, p. 65.

of whose artistic ideals he greatly respected, and which included besides Strachwitz the court poet Chr. Fr. Scherenberg, and Emanuel Geibel, the beloved of the bourgeoisie. It is our contention that we do not need to read an ideological shift to the right into Fontane's association with the "Tunnel", but that it is perfectly explicable by pure artistic motives: he had realised what he was not cut out for, was beginning to discover what he might be suited to, and here, offering itself to him, was a school in which to practise and to learn and to perfect himself; a school which, if not perfect, was certainly not without its merits either. If we accept this, and at the same time allow that he retained unchanged, but parallel to his artistic goals, his liberal politics, then we do not have to explain away some stubborn anomalies, such as, for example, that he proved he was capable of writing highly charged political poetry embodying his own convictions, in a guise which pleased the "Tunnel". Ein Ball in Paris is highly political, was a great success in the "Tunnel", and yet was written in 1850, the same year as Fontane's most saccharine, most excessively romantic "Romanze", Von der schönen Rosamunde, which the "Tunnel" acclaimed with absolutely incomprehensible passion. And the next year we find him having success with Der Tag von Hemmingstedt, a ballad written in support of the little man, in the form of the peasants of Dithmarsch, who not only defended their land against overwhelming odds in the form of an attack by the King of Denmark, but even dealt their aggressors

a crushing defeat. In the same year, 1851, he also calls his Der alte Fritz "durchaus ein politisches Gedicht".³³ If Fontane was capable of such production, but chose not to practise it, then this is surely a certain sign that he perceived other goals for his art than the political. This view also means that we do not have to explain away the fact that, even in his old age, Fontane thought with respect, admiration, and gratitude of Strachwitz.

Fontane was dealing, in his early ballads, with topics and ideas, with a whole world, that he loved; and he makes no secret of the fact that he was particularly concerned, in his "Tunneljahre", with learning virtuosity of technique: "die Mache".³⁴ (Though not, let it be underlined, to the exclusion of depth.) And it is significant that, when he reaches the pinnacle of perfection from the point of view of "Mache" - namely, in Archibald Douglas - he almost immediately drops the ballad entirely, perhaps realising that beyond perfection lay the danger of inferior repetition, even sterility. And so, he struck out for new shores, whether new themes or new forms.

33. Letter to Friedrich Witte, 17 Aug., 1851.

34. Sie meinen, es sei kein eigentliches Kunstwerk, sondern nur die meisterhafte Behandlung eines Stücks alter Chronik. - Ich bin darüber sehr ruhig. Paul Heyse nämlich m.u.s.s. tadeln, und wenn er nichts andres finden kann, so heisst das Ganze eine "alte Chronik". Selbst wenn er recht hätte, läge meinem Ermessen nach kein Tadel drin. Es fragt sich immer, wie die Chronik war, und wie die Bearbeitung ist. (Letter to Fr. Witte, 19 Mar. 1851).
Schlicht und wahr sei der Stoff und dann - "die gute M a c h e"; so glückt es. (Letter to B.v. Lepel, 3 Apr. 1851.).

He was not to find them for at least twenty years. If his "Lehrjahre" were over, his "Wanderjahre" were about to begin: we can call them this not only because the fifties and sixties encompass his years in London, but also - and not least - because it is during this period that he wrote his Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg. And it is in the seventies that we can firmly place the start of his "Meisterjahre", at the end of which, looking back on his life, he was himself to establish a parallel between the discovery of the ballad in the forties and of the novel in the seventies, when he wrote in a letter: "In poetischen Dingen hab ich die Erkenntnis 35 30 Jahre früher gehabt als wie in der Prosa", which I take to mean that it was not until the seventies that he found the form of prose that best suited his artistry. It might also be taken to suggest how useful he found the wealth of experience he brought with him from his ballad years to his novel years. So, to make our peace with Reuter, we would agree with him in seeing Fontane's "Tunneljahre" as representing the acquisition of "Virtuosität", and his late life only as representing 36 "Meisterschaft".

In 1855 Fontane made his last appearance in the "Tunnel" before his longer stay in England, and when he returned, the relationship was never again to be the same: he slowly let the "Tunnel" drop out of his life, along with the ballad. But we

35. Letter to his wife, 17 Aug. 1882.

36. Reuter, I, p. 186

know that, at least two years before his leave-taking from the club, he was worried about the way relations with both "Tunnel" and ballad were heading. In a letter to Theodor Storm, full of interesting insights, written on 19th March, 1853, we learn that the danger of sterile repetition was constantly in his mind: "Dass Ihnen die altenglische Ballade so gefallen hat, freut mich sehr. Ich bin nämlich immer in Sorge, dass ich mich zuletzt (wie das fast immer geschieht) in diese Antiquitäten verlieben und das freie Urteil über dieselben verlieren könnte. Mir schweben grauenhafte Beispiele vor". And then he goes on to explain why he has grown slightly tired of the "Tunnel", which had by now the habit of acclaiming anything he cared to produce: "Im Tunnel hab ich allerdings eine Art Regulator zur Seite, doch bin ich zu sehr ein Kind des Tunnels, als dass des Vaters Lob, unter dessen Maximen ich grossgezogen wurde, mir von besonderem Gewicht erscheinen könnte".

Well, these immediate personal reasons for Fontane's turn away from the ballad should be kept in mind; but we should place this turning-point, too, in a wider context. Many commentators upon the history of the German ballad distinguish, about the middle of the nineteenth century, what they call a crisis in the ballad.³⁷ It had run the course of its rather paradoxical double life as one of the favoured vehicles of classicism and Romanticism, and after more than half a century of seeming to offer almost infinite possibilities as a newly-

37. Cf. Müller-Seidel, p. 63.

discovered, if not new, and exciting means of expression, was in need of a contemporary rôle. And it was at this point that people began to perceive its limitations. Fontane, of course, did not have this historical perspective at the time, but he did know, by the mid-fifties, that the ballad for him, too, had dried up.³⁸ It is only in later years that we find him in a position to analyse what he must only have felt at the time. And it is, interestingly enough, in the year 1878, the year of publication of his first great novel, Vor dem Sturm, and just before he started writing ballads again - but quite different ones - that we find perhaps his best analysis of his reasons for abandoning his early ballads. It is quite possibly his best analysis not least because it is typical of the later Fontane in its humour which gently disparages its subject while at the same time letting patent affection for it shine through. These lines, which he sent to Klaus Groth,³⁹ certainly do not amount to a total disavowal of his early ballads:

N, XX, p. 637 So güng dat männig, männig Joahr,
Awers as ick so rummer un fortig woahr,

38. Cf. for example: Vertraulich liess mir Bong, der Herausgeber, aber doch sagen: "ja, das sei alles ganz gut, - a b e r B a l l a d e n g i n g e n n i c h t m e h r." Ich, damals noch im ganzen Stolz albionhafter Balladengrösse, schlug eine krampfhaftige Lache auf, aber schon nach 3 Tagen hatte ich mich beruhigt und sagte mir: "ja, dieser Esel hat Recht; es i s t s o, Balladen gehen nicht mehr." (Letter to E. Schmidt, 23 Nov. 1896).

39. The "plattdeutsch"-dialect poet.

Doa seggt' ick mi: Fründ, si mi nich böös,
 Awers all dat Tüg is to spektakulös,
 Wat süll all de Lärm? Woto? Up min Seel,
 Dat allens bumst un klappert to veel;
 Ick bin mehr för allens, wat lütt un still,
 En beten Beschriewung, en beten Idyll,
 Wat läuschig is, dat wihr so min' Oart,
 Dat Best bliewt doch Ummer dat Menschenhart".

And twenty years after this, we find him saying and doing very much the same thing again: in 1898, the last year of his life, he has a laugh at his own past, tempered, as always, by his ever-present humour, which he was never afraid of turning on himself as much as on others. The poem is called Im Grünen:

"Während um mich die Lerche schmettert,
 Hab' ich in meinen Gedichten geblättert,
 Hab' ich Lieder, Sprüche, Balladen
 Ergebenst "zur Kritik" geladen.
 Liess sie sektionsweise zu fünfen und vieren
 Und klingend Spiel vorbeidefilieren,
 Und fand da halb freudig, halb mit Beschämen:
 Alle bewegen sich in Extremen.
 Übers Feld gespenstische Rosse keuchen,
 Dazwischen der Kirchturm von Werneuchen,
 Paladine von Karls des Grossen Tafel,
 Dazwischen Brandenburg an der Havel,
 In Schottland 'ne Anleih', mal in Wedding ein Pump,
 Mal Douglas und mal Nante Strump". 40

As we mentioned, it is only in retrospect that this can be seen to be part of a larger crisis in the ballad; at the time it amounted to a recognition of the limits of the ballad, and the need for rejuvenation within it. A letter of 1851 shows us more than clearly that Fontane did realise, even at that time, that the form was in need of "salvation", as he calls it, in a long letter to his close friend Friedrich Witte,

40. Fontane, Dichter über ihre Dichtungen Bd.12, I, p. 191.

who had written to him suggesting that the "salvation" of the ballad might be found in the "Nibelungen verse". Fontane, with admirable moderation, calls this comment "schwach", and goes on: "Jedem Zeitalter gehört eine bestimmte Form an, für das unsere ist diese Form noch zu finden, sie wird sich finden mit dem Gedicht selbst. Bis dahin wird in Hexametern, Alexandrinern, Trochäen und Nibelungenstrophen viel Schönes, aber nicht das Schönste, nicht das Wahre - a u f d a s w i r w a r t e n - geschrieben werden. Von der Nibelungenstrophe erwarte ich das Heil keineswegs...."⁴¹

So, with this sort of thought milling around in his mind, Fontane takes himself off to the - for a German writer - wilderness of London, and the - for a creative writer - wilderness of daily news reporting, a high proportion of it as a war correspondent. It is not surprising, really, that his ballad problems and anxieties should work themselves out in a work which, although not finished and published until 1878, was begun as early as January, 1862; a work which, although formally in the garb of his newly-discovered medium, the novel, is an unusual enough example of that medium to be considered a half-way house, a truly hermaphroditic ballad-novel. I refer to his first, and one of his best novels, Vor dem Sturm. Fontane himself has attested that he planned it originally as a "Nouvelle", but that it "just grew". This is why it is such a central work for the history of his development: he packed

41. Letter to Friedrich Witte, 3 Feb., 1851.

into it all the themes that were concerning him during those twenty years between one turning-point and the next. And one of the themes he has packed into Vor dem Sturm is that of the relative merits of ballad and prose. He does this by means of introducing a literary club, the "Kastalia", in Berlin, which bears many similarities to the "Tunnel über der Spree". The reader witnesses an evening⁴² at which poems and prose pieces are read out and discussed in very much the way they were in the "Tunnel". And we find the young hero, Lewin, being much more moved by a piece of prose than by a ballad, whereby the suggestion is left with us that, although the fine artistry, "die Mache", of the ballad is much to be admired, the ballad is less accessible and less relevant than the prose, which speaks for itself and makes its mark upon all present without any need for discussion. If one draws the further implication, it is that, while it would be nice to be able to discuss the construction and artistry of ballads, in reality, prose is the clearly superior and only appropriate medium in which to meet the reality of modern life on its own terms and re-shape it in terms of the Fontaneesque vision of realism. What it was about this vision that lent itself to balladesque expression, though still there, no longer seemed best expressed in the form of a ballad; because the form was that of the historical and the Romantic, it would remain, however noble, somehow remote and esoteric; however, the same vision could emerge, not emasculated, but rejuvenated, strong (and all the more so for

being subtle) in a new kind of prose. The balladesque currents beneath the surface of a prosaic society were not to be conveyed in a ballad, but in a balladesque prose.

Incidentally, it is interesting that the balladier-figure in Vor dem Sturm, Hansen-Grell by name, who bears many similarities to a younger Fontane, is killed off in a battle.

Accordingly, the ballad which is presented that evening at the "Kastalia" club is a picture of a Prussian cavalry general of the Seven Years' War (set well in the past, then) in the "Preussenlied" style of a Fontane twenty-five years younger; while the prose just happens to be a piece of war correspondence, albeit a highly unusual one. It is by no means bereft of balladesque elements; in fact, the story revolves around a visit in the dead of night to the funeral bier of a dead brother in a lonely church - a situation crammed with Bürgeresque potential. In fact, it passes off without incident. So, while one could not claim that the two sides, ballad and prose, complement one another, nor can one speak of a violent or total rejection of the ballad. The lessons, especially in artistry and treatment of theme, learned in the ballad school have much to contribute to narrative prose; "the two serve the same gods". One is reminded of Fontane's observation on "die Übereinstimmung zwischen meiner Prosa und meinen Versen, so dass letztere nur die Arabesken zu jener sind. Beide dienen denselben Göttern." (N, XV, p.440). Prose, then, is not perceived as being, in essence, inimical to balladesque

techniques and balladesque effects; this is demonstrated throughout the novel Vor dem Sturm, and the novels in general, and is pointedly exemplified in the piece of war reporting read out at the "Kastalia".

The balladesque and the Fontaneesque

II i

Three Questions

Fontane's ballads have been arranged in groups by several different people in several different ways: these groupings generally depend upon the nature and purpose of the investigation in hand. However, it is not open to argument that the ballads fall into two main groups without any coercion whatever. These are namely the ballads of the early period (approximately identical with the "Tunnel" period), and those produced by that new blossoming of Fontane's ballad powers comparatively late in his life (what he calls his "Nachzügler".) We may allow the first period to begin in 1844 with Tower-Brand and come to a close, soon after reaching its climax with Archibald Douglas (1854), in 1855; and the second to begin in 1879 with "Die Brück' am Tay and end with Herr von Ribbeck auf Ribbeck im Havelland in 1889. Little of note in the way of ballads was produced outside these dates; though, to be sure, certain works from the intermediate years deserve mention, and not only because they serve to remind us that, in face of the general marked decline in ballad production, something at the back of Fontane's mind kept the form alive for him. It must have been a period of deep thought and silent experimentation. Here, one might point to Das Trauerspiel von Afghanistan (1859), Gorm Grymme (1864) and Der 6. November 1632 (1866), all of which are among the best-known of Fontane's ballads. The first mentioned of these, interestingly enough, with its contemporary political topic, represents an attempt to use the ballad for

what is for Fontane a quite new purpose; but several decades were to pass before one could speak of a true and sustained new beginning.

1

Two of the three most important and detailed works yet published dealing with Fontane's ballads have been much concerned with bringing orderly divisions and subdivisions to this considerable and varied body of works. Hans Rhyn's book, published in 1914, Die Balladendichtung Th. Fontanes perceives - not entirely without justification - three main groups of "Balladen im engeren Sinn", which he manages to distinguish in spite of the lack of a definition. To his first group belong the early ballads, which Fontane composed before 1848, that is, before his important "Percy and Scott experience"²; the second and largest group is formed by those ballads which were written during the "Tunnel" years but after undergoing and in large measure under the immediate impression made by this enormous influence; and the third group is composed of the ballads of the late period. On top of this, Rhyn deals with two further

1. The third, Carl Wegmann's Theodor Fontane als Übersetzer englischer und schottischer Balladen, is concerned with Fontane's ability as a translator, and thus with only one segment of his ballad output.

2. It was in 1848 that Fontane first came across, and immediately fell under the spell of the important ballad collections of Bishop Thomas Percy, Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) and of Walter Scott, Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1803). Cf. Von Zwanzig bis Dreissig, N, XV, p. 163: "..., zwei Bücher, die auf Jahre hin meine Richtung und meinen Geschmack bestimmten".

species of the Fontane ballad: "Der Lyrik näher liegende Arten der Ballade" with five sub-classes; and "Der Epik näher liegende Arten der Ballade" with two sub-classes.

Ernst Kohler (in Die Balladendichtung im Berliner Tunnel über der Spree) proceeds rather differently. In general he would agree with Rhyn's three main groups, but for different reasons. In the "frühe Balladen und Versuche", (1844-48) he distinguishes between four groups according to theme: "Naturballaden"; "soziale Balladen"; "Preussenlieder"; and "englische Balladen". In the second "Tunnel" period (1848-55) "(kann) von Gruppen....nicht mehr die Rede sein. Jede einzelne Dichtung hat ihre scharf ausgeprägte Eigenart, ihr besonderes Gewicht und ihre Notwendigkeit." In spite of this, he feels he can tentatively propose "lockere Zweiergruppen....bei den ersten sechs Stücken". These he then calls: "Deutsche Historien"; "historische Schicksalsballaden"; and "psychologische Problemballaden". Finally, with the late ballads, it serves no purpose to attempt even the loosest of groupings.

Neither one of these viewpoints is of much avail for our purposes; for although both have their advantages as well as disadvantages, the very act of pigeon-holing is an impediment to the global view. Our task is twofold: first, to place Fontane's ballads beside tradition or known models, in order that both the borrowed and the specifically Fontaneesque may be revealed; and secondly to determine the existence and course of a process of development. The first has been attempted by

Rhyn and Kohler here and there, but at best sketchily; and above all, they failed to form their observations into any systematic general view. And as far as the second is concerned, it would hardly be satisfactory to declare a "process of development" the mere fact that Fontane's ballads can be divided into, say, early attempts, then ballads with a large measure of English-Scots influence, and then independent latecomers; or on the other hand the mere fact that gradually, over the course of a lifetime, they become increasingly difficult to divide into neat thematic groups at all. An artist's development, surely, can never be happily represented in this way. We shall be interested, rather, in what happens inside the essential structure of the ballad itself, and thus shall divide our work no longer by entire ballads, but according to significant elements of style or other characteristics which are either present throughout, from the earliest to the latest ballads, or crop up at significant times or under significant circumstances. To work backwards from the results for a moment, it may be permitted to mention at this point that two very different methods of composition are to be kept strictly separate in our minds: we must distinguish between ballads composed in close relationship to an existing one which served as a basic model (i.e. from Percy or Scott); and ballads which are entirely of Fontane's invention (whereby it must be remembered that these can, and often do, deal with English or Scottish material.) In this way we hope to approach some idea

of the essence of Fontane's work in the area of the ballad.

It proved to be most profitable to ask the following three questions: 1. What might Fontane have learned from old ballad tradition, and in particular from English-Scottish tradition as represented in Percy and Scott? (and incidentally: to what extent does he make use of what he learned in this school later - and then again much later?) 2. What elements can we already distinguish as Fontane's own even in his adaptations of English and Scottish models? (and connected with this: to what extent do these elements assert themselves in his further work?) 3. Are there elements which are to be met with only in ballads of his own invention, that is to say, where no material, or treatment, or style was prescribed by an earlier writer to whose seniority he might have felt obliged to show deference - in short, where nothing of the kind might have influenced him?

II 11 Repetition

We shall turn first to what ancient ballad tradition - by which one means, in Fontane's case, principally the English-Scottish tradition - might have had to teach an eager young Fontane in the forties and fifties.

In John Meier's (still extremely useful) collection of German "Volkslieder" (originally published in 1935) we find, in the section on "Stilform des Volksliedes", mention of the following as being one of the most significant elements: "In der Reimdichtung zeigt sich der mündliche Stil in einem

starken Vorwiegen des Formelhaften in Sätzen und Beiwörtern, in der Wiederholung des gleichen Ausdrucks bei gleichen Situationen und in der wörtlichen Wiederaufnahme von Worten und Sätzen im Dialog. Alles das diene einerseits dazu, dem Sänger das Improvisieren zu erleichtern, und andererseits, dem Hörer leitmotivartig Früheres wieder in Erinnerung zu rufen³. And later he expounds further on the reasons for repetition in fixed verses: "Es begegnen im Volkslied feste Strophen, die bei ähnlichen Situationen in gleicher Art eintreten, sei es, dass es äussere Vorkommnisse zu schildern, sei es, dass es mehr stimmungsmässig zu malen gilt:

Hi sprac tot sinen Knapen: 'Nu sadelt mi mijn Paert:
Tot Lutsenborch wil ic rijden, het is mi wel rijdens waert'.
Hi sprac toijnen Knapen: 'Nu sadelt mi mijn Paert,
Ten dale waerts wil ic rijden, het is mi wel rijdens waert'." ⁴

The value of repetition as not only a "folkish sounding" but highly effective element of style does not seem to have dawned upon Fontane at once. Chevy-Chase oder die Jagd im Chevy-Forst (N, XX, p.306) for example, was Fontane's first adaptation after a pattern of Percy's and was presented in the "Tunnel über der Spree" on 3rd December, 1848. In the course of his investigation of this ballad, Rhyn⁵ quite rightly notes that Fontane fails to reproduce the following unusually

3. John Meier, Das deutsche Volkslied (1935; rpt. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), I, p.27.

4. Meier, I, p.28.

5. Rhyn, p.31.

moving and effective piece of repetition:

- 1.101 "Ile doe the best that doe I may,
While I have power to stand:
While I have pow'r to weeld my sword,
Ile fight with heart and hand".6

A few years later, Fontane would not have missed such a passage; in his Percy und die Nortons (N,XX,p.317), an 1851 product, repetition is taken up everywhere the original (Percy,I,p.217) hints at it, e.g:

- 1.13 "Now nay, now nay, my ladye gay."
1.21 "Now nay, now nay, thou lady faire."
1.29 "Now nay, now nay, my lady deare."

1.9 "Zu spät, zu spät, liebe Lady mein"
1.17 "Zu spät, zu spät, liebe Lady mein"
1.25 "Halt ein, halt ein, liebe Lady mein".

His version, "frei nach dem Englischen", even exceeds the requirements of a straight translation, and often invents passages with repetition where there are none corresponding in the original; yet his use of the technique is never flawed by inappropriateness or flatness; for example, the newly-created internal rhyme: (1.13) "Und doch, und doch - sonst reut es dich noch!"

The second half of his Aufstand in Northumberland, which likely came into being in conjunction with or immediately following Percy und die Nortons, namely the ballad Percys Tod, receives similar treatment. If anything, however, the technique of repetition is used slightly more sparingly, while

6. Thomas Percy, Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (London: Cassell, 1794) I, p.208. Henceforth cited as: Percy.

at the same time with finer judgement. The shift, for example, from adjective to verb combines economy of expression with a slowing of rhythm and hence a heavier weight of expressiveness - at a most fitting point in the story:

Percy I, p.226, 1.29 When he had in Lough-leven been
Many a month and many a day....
N, XX, p.322, 1.17 Es geht der Tag, die Mönche gehn.....

Taking up a hint contained in the English work, he exploits the same technique in Percy's rather pathetic but moving complaint against the harshness of his fate:

Percy 1.86 "When I thinke on my own countrie,
When I thinke on the heavy happe...."
Fontane 1.61 "Ich hab' gedacht: es sei vorbei,
Und hab' gedacht: das Mass sei voll;"
1.68 "Es ist zuviel, es ist zuviel."
1.69 "Und sprichst du auch: Hab acht, hab acht!
Ich sprech' doch nur: Halt ein, halt ein!"

Thus, even when he diverges from exact or close translation, he knows enough to capture and imitate the spirit and the effect. This poem also, like the previous one, shows instances of repetition deriving from the German poet alone:

1.15 "Er denkt an Weib und denkt an Kind".
1.29 "Das macht, er hat verkauft die Treu".
Verkauft um englisch Sündengold".

These two poems show evidence of a fascination with this technique which leads the reader to suspect that Fontane had just recently "discovered" it and was at this point (Nov.-Dec. 1851) in the process of coming to terms with it. True, his new "finds" are without exception entirely to be approved of, but a simple count of number and frequency will reveal how precipitously they border on the excessive. We may, then,

assume, from the time-period and the manner in which he adopted it, that this technique was transmitted to him as a direct influence from the old-English ballad; if at first he grabbed at it with immodest enthusiasm, he was subsequently to handle it with greater respect and increasing sensitivity.

Later on, when Fontane adds a new "repetition" to an original, this often happens for a purpose which is typical of the developing Fontane style - not merely to be repetitive, but to build up the evocation of a character or atmosphere in a disarmingly simple, additive fashion. One example must stand for the many one could cite:

N,XX,p.283,1.9 Ihr Auge fiel auf Musgrave,
Ihr Auge wie Sonnenschein."

A comparison of the opening verse of the beautiful Barbara Allen will quickly demonstrate Fontane's ability to use this technique of repetitiveness plus additive description in such a way as to achieve his purpose while enhancing and improving upon the original:

Percy III,p.107, 1.1 It was in and about the Martinmas time,
When the greene leaves wer a fallan;
That Sir John Grehme o' the west countrye,
Fell in luvè wi' Barbara Allan

N,XX,p.296, 1.1 Es war im Herbst, im bunten Herbst,
Wenn die rotgelben Blätter fallen,
Da wurde John Graham vor Liebe krank,
Vor Liebe zu Barbara Allen.

Yet in doing this, it must be stressed, Fontane is not only ~~not~~ betraying the spirit of the poem as it stands in Percy, but quite probably taking his cue from it, as many constructions found there remind us, eg:

1.33 "O mither, mither, mak my bed,
O mak it saft and narrow."

Finally, the fact is worth mentioning that Fontane is often clearly conscious of the advantages of the device of repetition as used in the original, as for example when his adaptation offers a new version in different terms, but at the same point. Thus we can see that he would read with an ear open to the effect of this device and a view to imitation wherever possible and desirable:

"I charge ye all, ye mariners,
When ye sail ower the faem,
Let neither my father nor mother get wit....."

"I charge ye all, ye mariners,
That sail upon the sea,
Let neither my father nor mother get wit....." ⁷

(The Queen's Marie)

N,XX,p.139. l. 97 "Ihr Schiffer und ihr Matrosen,
Wenn ihr zu Schiffe geht,
Erzählt kein Wort in Frankreich
Von allem, was ihr nun seht.

Erzählt nicht meiner Mutter
Von dem Brett, auf dem ich stand,
Und nichts von meinem Tode
Und nichts von meiner Schand!"

(Marie Duchatel)

Fontane carries this stylistic device over into his own entirely original ballads: as early as Maria und Bothwell (1851) we can trace this particular influence of the old English ballad; we have the simple repetition of entire sentences with only names changed (parallelism of situation):

7. Walter Scott, Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (London: Longman, 1806), III, p.93, l.89ff. Henceforth cited as: Scott.

1. N,XX,p.135, 1.57 Maria hat es gesprochen,
 Graf Bothwell hört es kaum,
 Seine Schläfe pulsen und pochen,
 Er denkt an den eigenen Traum.

1.65 Graf Bothwell hat es gesprochen,
 Maria hört ihn kaum,
 Ihre Schläfe pulsen und pochen,
 Sie denkt an den eigenen Traum.

We also have repetition involving grammatical parallelism:

1.13 Dem Lande kleidet die Trauer,
 Der Königin kleidet die Lust.

Grammatical parallelism, that folkish sub-species, is often to be found in the ancient ballad in place of pure repetition; Fontane faithfully does justice to it, often using it to supplement direct repetition. Thus we find in Johanna Gray,

(N,XX,P.126) both: 1.61 Sie neigt sich vor dem Volke....
 Sie neigt sich zum Gebete....
 Sie neiget sich zum dritten....

and: 1.32 Sie rief: "Mein ist der Schlüssel! Sie dachte:
 "Mein ist der Kranz!"

And in Wangeline von Burgsdorf oder Die weisse Frau (N,XX,p.202) we find the following stanza:

1.23 "Und ob ihr bräuche das Herz in der Brust,
 Je blässer die Tote, je röter die Lust,
 Feigherzig Gewissen, fahr hin, fahr hin,
 Es brennt mein Blut, und es schwindelt mein Sinn".

Here, line two contains both grammatical parallelism and the typical age-old colour contrast red/white, hallowed by countless folk-songs; line three, literal repetition; and line four, again grammatical parallelism - all of which constitutes an important indication of how devices learned in the school of the old English folk-ballad could continue to be present to his mind and influence the poet even in a short, fragmentary work of which he himself had a low opinion.

Of course, they were none the less so in his major ballads. Archibald Douglas (N,XX,p.120) offers a fine example of how certain devices can deliver their effect all the more insistently for being used in moderation and subtly. Parallelism of thought is established by repetition of the same verb: 1.11 "So komme, was da kommen soll,

Und komme, was da mag" - thus evoking without stating it his double preparedness to accept a fate which he (rightly) fears might be insistent. Then, the intensification of the emotional meeting between the king and Douglas is underscored by a five-fold parallelism:

- 1.33 "Denk nicht an den alten Douglas-Neid...."
- 1.35 "Denk lieber an deine Kinderzeit...."
- 1.37 "Denk lieber zurück an Stirlingschloss...."
- 1.41 "Denk lieber zurück an Linlithgow...."
- 1.45 "O denk an alles, was einst war."

Two important passages are linked by literal repetition:

- 1.49 "Ich seh' dich nicht, Graf Archibald,
Ich hör deine Stimme nicht...."
- 1.57 "Ich seh' dich nicht, ich höre dich nicht,
Das ist alles, was ich kann...."

And finally, the king's outburst signifying his pardon uses the same means to suggest the suddenness and strength with which the emotion overcomes him:

- 1.85 "Nimm's hin, nimm's hin und trag' es neu..."

We may safely draw the conclusion: Fontane has learned, practised, and become a master. Let it be stated at the same time, however, that he applies the stylistic devices of the folk-ballad with a degree of conscious artistry which is, of course, foreign to that form, indeed, which would seem

artificial or out of place in it. For this he is scarcely to be criticised: he is, after all, seeking to impress a literary audience, and is rather to be praised for remaining receptive to the sound and shape, the subtlety and power of the most primitive of stylistic components, and for having combined them with his own purposes, one of the chief of which was always to remain an artist and a stylist.

The most remarkable influence of this technique upon the novels probably lies in the extremely high incidence of ballads or ballad-like songs and rhymes peppering Fontane's prose works, many of them significantly repeated. One of many cases in point is the inscription on a grave which Lewin reads in the first pages of Vor dem Sturm (N,I,p.9):

Sie sieht nun tausend Lichter;
Der Engel Angesichter
Ihr treu zu Diensten stehn;
Sie schwingt die Siegesfahne
Auf güldnem Himmelsplane
Und kann auf Sternen gehn.

On the next page, he falls asleep with the rhyme in his mind; this happens one other time as well: near the end of the novel, when he is lying in prison feeling genuine "Todesfurcht" (p.598), the thought of it helps him to fall sweetly asleep. And once, too, in the middle of the novel (p.267) he is reminded of it in connection with Kathinka; reminded of it, no doubt, because of her brilliance and glitter, yet, as soon as it comes to mind: "Da fiel alles Verlangen von ihm ab....und der Friede des Gemütes kam über ihn."

Clearly, then, it brings him solace; and, if one of the many stories in Vor dem Sturm is that of an emotionally confused

young man, in love with the wrong girl and unsure of his place in the universe, who attains the right perspective on things, then this is that story's theme song. Once, in connection with Kathinka, it teaches him that all that glitters in this world does not have the glory of one who "kann auf Sternen gehn"; and once, it teaches him the same lesson with respect to life and death itself. And so this piece of repetition serves to identify and unify (as it might in a ballad) an important theme of the novel; and although the exact words are repeated each time, thus leaving no scope for grammatical parallelism, we can speak of a structural parallelism: in significantly altered contexts (Kathinka/death) a great emotional turmoil is stilled.

Very similar in its application is the poem Trost, which unifies the theme of optimism, a necessary counterbalance to mere resignation. Originally written in a fit of depression over Kathinka (p.328) it too comes to mind and revives Lewin's spirits when he is closest to death (p.599).

The various appearances of the ominously repeated Waiblinger song, Der Kirchhof ist Unwiederbringlich would reward detailed examination: more detailed than we can spare here. It stands at the end of the brilliant opening sequence, the evening at home with the Holks, and sums up many of the important themes of the novel which have been developed therein: supremely pessimistic, it denies both life and the possibility of happiness in love, which appeals strongly to Christine and underlines the polar opposition between her character and her husband's; while

the opening line: "Die Ruh ist wohl das Beste", considering the title of the piece, leaves no doubt as to which sort of rest is meant and reminds us of the couple's differences on the importance of restoring the family crypt. Not only does the repetition of the song bring with it this heavy weight of associations, but there is a strong parallelism of situation in the couple's growing physical separation each time it comes up: only the first time (N,V,p.27) are the two together, at which point it emphasises the rifts between them; the second time (p.42) Christine and Julie von Dobschütz are alone, Holk having just grabbed at an excuse to quit a conversation that was becoming oppressive; next, Holk is reminded of it by the chance wording of a phrase of the princess':

"...Die Ruh ist wohl das Beste".

Holk horchte auf. Ihm war, als ob er dieselben Worte ganz vor kurzem erst gehört habe. Aber wo? Und suchend und sinnend fand ers auch wirklich, und der Abend auf Holkenäs und das Bild Elisabeth Petersens traten mit einem Male vor ihn hin, und er hörte wieder das Lied und die klare Stimme. Das war noch keine Woche, und schon klang es ihm wie aus weiter, weiter Ferne. (p.90-9)

And finally, of course, it is the song that accompanies Christine to her death. (p.221ff).

In the same novel, the Uhland ballad Das Schloss am Meere - which is also repeated at the end - as a symbol of Holk's naive hopes but hopeless failure to understand Christine's character, also merits investigation. So too, does the Lenau song Nach Süden in Graf Petöfy, with the significant mis-quote: "Dunkler wird der Tag und trüber", which in its correct form: "Lauter wogt der Bach und trüber" is of infinitely more

significance for Franziska's fate and is repeated after her passions and Egon's have overflowed, just like the rain-swollen stream and lake. But we cannot spend all our time on songs.

Further evidence of Fontane's development of repetition is to be found in his love of motifs, which may take the form of a recurring phrase, a return to the same place, or the re-enactment of a scene. We have already noted how Christine (Unwiederbringlich) is characterised partly by her association with places of death; she is always talking (or listening to someone else singing) about them; and "Familiengruft" and "Kirchhof", never far from her thoughts or lips, form a burial-place motif around her. A burial-place motif, too, winds its way through Vor dem Sturm, though this time in reverse. It opens with Lewin's visit to the churchyard and discovery of the rhyme on the gravestone which is, in effect, a message of hope and comfort in face of death and begins the story of revival and rejuvenation which Vor dem Sturm is. Later, hard-pressed and in spiritual turmoil, Lewin visits a graveyard and finds solace there (N,I,p.327). And finally, the novel ends on the confident note of the eternal overcoming of death and assertion of life in the picture of Renate's grave in: "... ein Begräbnisplatz, der schon wieder Park geworden ist. Blumenbeete, Grabsteine, Fliederbüsche und dazu Kinder aus der Stadt, die zwischen den Grabsteinen spielen." (p.639)

Effi Briest combines a return to the same place and the re-enactment of a scene in the picture of the two Briest parents overlooking their garden and talking, a scene to which we

return time and again, and which provides a satisfying "spatial" centre for the novel: from here everything starts; to here everything returns; Effi remains Effi Briest. And with the addition of old Briest's phrase: "Das ist ein zu weites Feld", it becomes, too, the "intellectual" centre of the novel: the phrase is a refusal to think, to become involved in principles, codes of behaviour, abstractions, a determination to measure one's own behaviour only against the promptings of one's own heart - an attitude which, by dint of repetition, wins out.

We may, then, conclude that Fontane learned to value and master the element of repetition in his ballads; and we may further assert with some confidence that this early experience is likely to have had some influence upon the "balladesqueness" of some elements of structure in his novels, in ways such as we have tried to outline here.

II iii "Sprunghaftigkeit"

Let us refer once again to John Meier, this time as he draws our attention to what is, without doubt, one of the most basic and obvious constituents of the special charm of the folk-ballad: "Sänger und Publikum sind in der Improvisationsdichtung aufs engste verbunden: die Zuhörer sind nicht nur passive Aufnehmer des Vortrags, sondern zugleich Mitschaffende infolge der absichtlichen Auslassung von Zwischengliedern im Vortrag durch den Sänger und ihrer Ergänzung durch die Hörer".⁸

8. Meier, I, p.30.

All commentators upon the ballad would agree with this. Fontane, of course, did not remain insensitive to the charm and the artistic advantages of this characteristic; he was to take it and make of it an uncommonly effective device in both poetry and prose, and one, indeed, which becomes typical of his style of writing. Many of those who have found Fontane's prose "balladesque" have actually been thinking of this quality of disconnection.

As early as 10th May, 1846, the members of the "Tunnel", found themselves challenged to become involved by an effort of imagination in the ballad Der Sterbende Douglas. The central battle itself, and thereby the actual coming to grief of the youthful hero are not reported (we must imagine them to have taken place between verses 2 and 3.). That is to say that Fontane had appreciated and applied this age-old characteristic of the folk-ballad at least two years before he became aware of Percy and Scott. To be sure, this is hardly surprising: if he had not personally read Herder's Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker, glorifying the illogical nature of folksong with its "Sprünge und Würfe", then at least he had noted this characteristic in both folk-ballads and Goethean and other literary ballads. Rather, it raises the question: how did Fontane's perception and use of this element of style become modified after he had experienced the decisive English and Scottish influence? In Der Sterbende Douglas, the disconnectedness is measured, calculated, well prepared and

motivated, and appears at the ideal point in the poem - in short, it is a conscious and unnaive application of a naive phenomenon and as such a typical sign of the literary ballad such as Fontane would have been acquainted with through many immediate predecessors, and above all Strachwitz.

By all indications, we can argue that the manner of disconnectedness with which Fontane must have met so frequently in Percy and Scott was too coarse, too naive, too direct and unprepared to suit his personal artistic feeling; and that, therefore, his contact with the comparatively spontaneous folk-ballad seems only to have strengthened his conviction of the advantage of artifice. However, this is by no means to suggest that he excludes or in any way enfeebles the disconnected effect; on the contrary: he not only retains it everywhere he finds it, but his manner of retaining it clearly shows how greatly he understands and appreciates it.

In Sir Patrick Spence (as found in Percy, I, p. 62) we are aware of a sizeable narrative leap between verses 7 and 8; the gap immediately following the old sailor's warning must be filled by the shipwreck itself, the tragic consequences of which are only hinted at in verse 8. This tear in the narrative fabric was clearly too much for Fontane: thus, he adds, in the interests of quicker and fuller understanding, a whole new verse:

1.29 Es kam der nächste Morgen,
Sie gingen all an Bord,
Sir Patrick und die Seinen
Und mancher schottische Lord

The following passage, with its fragments of hints, is quite difficult and obstructive to comprehension in Percy:

N,XX,p.302, 1.29 O our Scots nobles wer richt laith
To weest their cork-heild shoone;
Bot lang owre a' the play wer played,
Their hats they swam aboone;

Fontane, by contrast, continues his narrative at first in a clear, indeed vivid manner - previous to this passage, too, he has done all he can to prepare us, by means of warning signs, for a disaster; and then he even indicates for us the precise moment of the narrative leap - by a dash:

1.33 Im Winde flaggten die Wimpel,
Hoch tanzten Schiff und Flut -
Drei Tage, da schwamm auf dem Meere
Nur noch ein bebänderter Hut

His poetic aims are clear: he wants to skip the grisly details, and yet somehow clarify the incident which the reader has to amplify for himself; by no means does he wish to forgo the device of dislocation, and yet he wants to help in smoothing over connections which are too tenuous. How essential the sense of dislocation was to him is aptly demonstrated by the attempt to employ new artistic means - preparatory hints, clear narrative line preceding and following - in order to lend it as impressive a weight as possible.

Schön-Margret und Lord William (N,XX,p.293) contains several examples of the smoothing over of disrupted connections: we shall let the most typical one stand for all. The leap between the second and third of Percy's verses - from the lovers' talk to the wedding upon the morrow - is felt by Fontane as

being too large. But he does not sacrifice the effect of such a leap. He simply explains it as he makes it; the leap itself remains unexpected, unmotivated: following William's words to his lover, stands:

1.9 Es kam der Hochzeit smorgen.

This desire to smooth and plane the harsher bumps does not predominate in any and every circumstance; Fontane shows excellent judgement in using his finishing and polishing tools only when they effect - in his terms - a decided improvement.

On the other hand, a work such as Jung-Musgrave und Lady Barnard (N,XX,p.283), where direct speech has a significant part to play, can effectively demonstrate how Fontane has learned the advantage that can often lie in beginning the spoken word out of the blue, to let the disruption in the epic stream be caused by the intrusion of drama. Generally, the speaker is neither introduced nor his way smoothed, yet it is always clear from modulation, context and content just who is speaking. Here, then, the disconnectedness is of considerable service to the dramatic tension of the dialogue.

When we leave behind the adaptations of English or Scots originals and step into the world of Fontane originals, we do not, of course, leave the technique of the narrative break behind. A very large part of the apprehensive, omen-laden atmosphere of Johanna Gray (N,XX,p.126) to take but one instance, is to be attributed to the clever exploitation of this technique. The whole ballad is, upon close examination, only

a string of scenes full of warning signs, from the nightmare of the (then, future) queen to the scaffold. In almost every case, we pass from one scene to the next via a break, and even within each respective scene, important things are often summarily dismissed in such a way that the reader's imagination is continually and strongly stimulated - simply because there are no given details to hinder his feelings or powers of expansion. A good example is verse 11, in which the reader steps into the heroine's shoes, and partakes of her emotions:

1.41 Und nieder aus der Halle schritt sie zur Tower-Kapell;
Inbrünstig warf sie sich nieder an Altars heiliger Schwell;
Auf stand sie leichteren Herzens; noch einmal sah sie herab:
"Auf wessen Grabstein kniet' ich?" "Es ist Anna Bulens Grab."

The poet does nothing at all, but does it quite masterfully. He gives us no information - in order that we too, along with the queen, may be flung brutally down from the state of gathered inner strength brought by prayer (note how this action takes up the slow-moving first three-quarters of the verse) - down, yet again, into a state of torment. Thus, the whole has the effect of confirming once again the certainty and ineluctability of her fate, which one had already sensed in the opening verse.

It is executed in the fine closing stanza, connected with the first in the mention of the purple cloak worn by the heroine (which, in her dream, had turned out to be her own blood.) Here, too, Fontane reckons with the reader's imagination: the scaffold is not described, but circumscribed; not a single word speaks directly of death; but we know exactly what is happening.

In this poem Fontane makes perhaps his most artificial, but perhaps, too, his most artistic use of the subtlety he has acquired in the course of his apprenticeship in the craft of narrative omission.

Fontane's great respect for this craft survives into his late ballad period. In Die Brück' am Tay there are several jerky changes of scene leaving gaps in narration: the ominous machinations of the Macbeth witches give way, not gradually, but without warning, to the description of the bridge and the apprehensions of the bridgekeepers; and reciprocally, at the end of the poem, immediately after the moment of tragedy - which in itself is passed over, betraying itself to the reader only as a plunging spark in the night, which he is left to interpret - stands the blood-chilling chatter of the witches again, as they count up "die Zahl", "die Namen" and "die Qual". Thus we are challenged to fill in with our imagination and join in with our feelings.

And so, even at the end of his long ballad career, Fontane is capable of using with renewed subtlety and effectiveness a stylistic device learned in his earliest, most receptive years and then refined by the example of the English and Scottish folk-ballad.

Dislocatedness of narrative line - "Sprunghaftigkeit" - a form feature both of the "Volksballade" and of the Fontane ballad, is present in abundance in his novels, too. At first, this might strike one as particularly strange, because they are otherwise such well-rounded, artistically whole, smooth

and polished works of art. However, we should bear in mind another important, avowed tenet of his aesthetic: "...man muss nicht alles sagen wollen, dadurch wird die Phantasie des Lesers in Ruhestand gesetzt und dadurch wieder wird die Langeweile⁹ geboren".

Thus, the leaving out of connecting segments of narrative is explicitly condoned in the novel (he was writing in connection with Vor dem Sturm) for the same reason as in the ballad: it is an invitation to the reader to participate imaginatively in the creation of the story. This also tells us a great deal about what Fontane saw as being the nature of his own art: his is the art of leaving things unsaid, of shifting the emphasis from the description of events to the framework of atmosphere around them and, at the same time, in the other direction - to the inner mental and emotional processes of the characters. The result can make important turning-points actually more vivid for the individual reader. A most striking instance from the novels is the description, or rather non-description, of the death of Graf Petöfy (N, II, p. 164):

Er ging vom Saal her den langen Korridor hinunter. Als er die Zimmerreihe passierte, darin Franziska jetzt wohnte, traf er Hannah.

"Ist die Gräfin zu Haus?"

"Nein. Eben fort; sie braucht noch einiges für den Abend".

"Es ist gut so. Wenn du sie siehst, sag ihr, dass ich nach ihr gefragt. Aber vergiss es nicht".

Er gab ihr die Hand, was ihr auffiel. Dann ging er auf sein Zimmer zu, darin Andras eben das Fenster schloss.

"Ich bin für niemand zu sprechen, Andras. Für niemand.

9. Letter to Wilhelm Hertz, 17 June, 1866.

Und diesen Brief gib an die Gräfin, wenn sie zurück ist. Und nun geh. Ich will allein sein".

Fünfunddreissigstes Kapitel

Eine Woche danach, nachdem seitens der Kirche sein gewaltsamer Tod auf einen Anfall von Melancholie gedeutet worden war, war Totenfeier bei den Augustinern; und das Wappen der Petöfys stand zu Häupten des Katafalks, darüber die schwarze Sammetdecke mit dem Silberkreuz ausgebreitet lag."

This will cause a distinct slowing in any reader's pace; a pause for thought, perhaps for re-reading. Why? Because of the refusal to do everything for the reader; because it prods his imagination, having given him all the necessary clues.

In the case of Fontane, this technique of leaving large masses of narrative in the dark takes on another aspect, too. Fontane was namely aware that love scenes or erotic scenes, indeed any moment of high emotion, were not his strong point. "...-¹⁰ die Liebesverhältnisse, meine Schwäche, geb ich preis-..."

"...dass ich keine Liebhaber schildern kann, ist nur allzu¹¹ wahr". Which is why he was probably only too glad to adapt the art of leaving things unsaid to what he felt to be his personal limitations. At times he almost overdoes it: there is, for example, that strange moment in Der Stechlin which constitutes Woldemar's and Armgard's engagement. One wonders how many other readers, upon first encountering this passage, read over it, completely missing its relevance and then, when the engagement is referred to in the next chapter as a fait accompli, read back over the whole of the preceding chapter only

10. Letter to Paul Heyse, 9 Dec., 1878.

11. Letter to his wife, 10 June, 1884.

to find that they had not missed anything and that this really was the engagement scene (N,VIII,p.226-7):

Stechlin ging. Armgard gab ihm das Geleit bis auf den Korridor. Es war eine Verlegenheit zwischen beiden, und Woldemar fühlte, dass er etwas sagen müsse. "Welche liebenswürdige Schwester Sie haben?"

Armgard errötete. "Sie werden mich eifersüchtig machen".

"Wirklich, Komtesse?"

"Vielleicht....Gute Nacht".

Eine halbe Stunde später sass Melusine neben dem Bett der Schwester, und beide plauderten noch. Aber Armgard war einsilbig, und Melusine bemerkte wohl, dass die Schwester etwas auf dem Herzen habe.

"Was hast du, Armgard? Du bist so zerstreut, so wie abwesend."

"Ich weiss es nicht, aber ich glaube fast...."

"Nun, was?"

"Ich glaube fast, ich bin verlobt."

When we read scenes like that, we realise that what a character in Vor dem Sturm suggests as the particular attribute and advantage of the ballad is, in Fontane's estimation, an advantage, too, in a novel: according to Hansen-Grell, the good ballad will embody: "Die Kraft in der Knappheit, das Viel im Wenigen....". (N,I,p.370). Thus runs Fontane's version of an age-old rule of poetry which was expressed with incomparable force and simplicity, not with any "includes" or "incorporates", but with the straightforward equation "is", by Servius, some two thousand years ago: "Ars poetica est non omnia dicere".

II iv Simplicity

One more, perhaps less readily discernible and more disparate quality of the old English ballad impressed itself with sufficient force upon Fontane to deserve the status of

having been a definite influence; we shall attempt in the following to make it discernible by means of one outstanding example. Years after his period of intimate contact with Scott and Percy, Fontane was in a lofty and distant enough perch in time to speak in generalising terms of the experience to Liliencron: "Was ist der Zauber der altenglischen Balladen? Ihre Simplizität. Ich entsinne mich noch, dass ich vor beinahe fünfzig Jahren die Chevy-Chase besser als Herder übersetzen wollte und mir auch einbildete, es sei mir gelungen. Jetzt bin ich sehr für Herder und erschrecke vor meinen famosen Vollreimen" (11 May, 1889).

His objective judgement on formal appropriateness, certainly, improved with the years: the replacement of the primitive masculine rhyme - also favoured by Herder - by the feminine can be seen to have been a mistake. Be this as it may, it can be shown that, most of the time, Fontane was alive to the virtues - within the ballad context - of the simplest possible choice of expression, invariably conserving it where it is effective in his model. We are fortunate to be able to compare a translation made by Fontane of Queen Eleanor's Confession with one made by Hirsch at almost exactly the same time. The lines:

Percy, II, p. 128, l. 71: "No matter for that", King Henrye cryd,
"I love him the better therefore"

become, in Hirsch's rendering, something completely different, namely a product of the purest Biedermeier, infused with spurious and, considering the setting, gratingly misplaced

bourgeois spirituality:

Halt ein! Der König schreit - Halt ein!
Mein liebes Kind ist fromm und brav,¹²

If Hirsch is incapable of literal fidelity, then Fontane - even if an unobjectionable translation escapes him - is at least wary of imposing a personal interpretation on his reader: (N,XX,p.306, 1.71) "Mag sein", rief König Heinrich da, "Ich lieb' ihn desto mehr".

An equally important aspect of "simplicity", and one which Fontane both admired and emulated, is the ballad's treatment of everyday things, common objects, and frequent occurrences or actions. Invariably, these are dealt with in simple words and short, straightforward phrases which tend to categorise or generalise, and, conspicuously, not individualise. Possibly the balladiers wished to bring their unusual tales closer to home, permitting their audience to imagine and associate freely, substituting things with which they were familiar; certainly, it is consistent with the striving not to deaden the listener's imagination. A ballad figure will "go on board the ship", without first catching sight from the (noun) where he stands, of the harbour and, tied up by the quay, a (adjective, adjective) sloop of (adjective) appearance whose (number) sails (appropriate verb of action) in the (adjective) (synonym for "wind"); a ballad wife will "fetch a glass from the cupboard" without first opening the (adverb) carved, (adverb) old doors on their (adjective) hinges behind which one perceives (number) wooden

12. Quoted by Kayser, Geschichte der deutschen Ballade, p.226.

or informing ideas of his works, Fontane shies away from actual naming of this idea, and instead drops a hint in the form of a word or a known historical name or event, relying upon our powers of deduction and association. That not everyone can be relied upon to do this is no fault of Fontane's: the wife of Fontane's friend Bernhard von Lepel, upon having Schloss Eger read to her, and hearing the final line -¹⁸ "Rette dich, Wallenstein!" - asked: "Wie kommt er darauf?"¹⁹ Indeed, Lepel, too, associates himself, if not with the remark, then with the opinion that more information and a more obvious connection is required: "...Wallenstein, der Schlussstein und Seele des Ganzen ist, spukt mir zu aphoristisch darin....Wir müssen mehr von Wallenstein erfahren, mehr als wir, was Du voraussetzen magst, ohnehin von ihm wissen".¹⁹ What both have failed to appreciate is the perfectly simple, perfectly appropriate, balladesque understatement. Unlike television, it was never the rôle of the ballad to eliminate individual initiative and intelligence, but to stimulate it. And this being so, it must needs make use of extreme compression, both in choice of pregnant moments and in the technical means associated therewith so that, representing a confluence of forces and affording a wide prospect of many things departing tangentially from it, it can just hint at those powers beyond

18 and 19. Bernhard von Lepel, Vierzig Jahre: Bernhard v. Lepel an Theodor Fontane. Briefe von 1843-1883 (Berlin: Fontane, 1910), p.131.

Kurzgeschichte (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1973) observes
(p.163-4):

Das extreme Misstrauen der modernen deutschen Autoren gegen jedwede Symbolik, gegen die "Aussage", ist vielfach bezeugt. Das hindert nicht, dass die Dichter in einer "offenen" Gesellschaft in neuer Zeichensprache neue Symbole suchen und schaffen. Nach dem Kahlschlag bleibt es zunächst bei "Verweisen". (...) In der Kurzgeschichte blinken einander Leuchtfeuer zu. Die Kurzgeschichte ist gross im Verzicht: sie leistet sich keine üppigen Schilderungen (...), sie versagt sich Reflexionen (...), sie verzichtet auf begründenden und folgernden Kommentar (...) Oft mutet deren (der Figuren) Rasonieren alogisch, prälogisch an, rein assoziativ. Auch hierin steht die Kurzgeschichte dicht in der Nähe der Lyrik (...) (die Kurzgeschichte als Nachfolgerin der Ballade).

One does not wish to argue with this undoubtedly accurate observation; rather, one would suggest that, by extracting the essence of this symbolic-ness, namely simplicity, and successfully transferring it to a longer medium, by choosing to retain it where it is not enforced by dimensions, Fontane has conserved this important ballad-like quality in his novels.

II v Presentiment

In his early "Übersetzungen und Bearbeitungen", we find Fontane imposing on his English models what was to remain a favoured technique, and one which was adapted for use in his fictional prose work, though he later learns to increase the effect by toning it down. The technique is the anticipation of the ending, either directly stated or in the form of broad hints. Again, he took his cue from the old English and Scots ballad; again, he had much to learn.

In his early works, the technique crops up most interestingly

in Percys Tod (N,XX,p.321) where it represents a total deviation from the English ballad. Whereas the original simply tells us that James Swinnard did not like what he saw when he looked through the lady's ring (a broad hint of doom, but subtle in comparison) Fontane paints at this point a graphic picture of how Lord Percy is to come to his sticky end. Of course, since this is a vision and not yet actuality, we still hope that Percy will not trust Douglas, or, having boarded the ship with him, will escape the trap somehow; but it does partially destroy the tension for the reader, and it allows the poet to speed up the ending considerably, indicating by a few broad strokes that the vision is confirmed by reality. Clearly, Fontane's intention differs from that of the original composer; we shall see in a moment in what respects.

The use of the technique is remarkable, too, in Lord Murray (N,XX,p.303). Let us compare Fontane's second stanza with that of Percy's The Honny Earl of Murray (Percy, II, p.176):

1.5 Now wae be to thee, Huntley!
And quhairfore did you see?
I bade you bring him wi' you,
But forbade you him to slay.

1.5 Er kam von Spiel und Tanze,
Ritt singend durch die Schlucht -
Sie haben ihn erschlagen
Aus Neid und Eifersucht.

Whereas the old ballad is indirect, plants a strong suggestion without actually confirming it, and indeed creates a certain amount of tension, Fontane, by using the narrator's prerogative of telling all in one hammer-blow, strives in exactly the opposite direction.

Fontane's hammer-blows can be much softer, too: he recognises the advantage to be gained from letting a strong hint play on the imagination until it gradually becomes certainty, and this is the pattern he settles for in most of his own ballads and in his novels. Rather more subtle than a hammer-blow, for example, is the pattern offered in the dream at the start of Johanna Gray (N,XX,p.126), which is fully confirmed by the closing line of the ballad:

1.3 "... Ich sah einen Purpurmantel treiben auf offener
Flut -
Ich bückte mich nach dem Mantel, da war es
mein eigen Blut."

1.60 Lady Gray trägt ihren Purpur an Anna Bulens Seit.

Johanna Gray shows us Fontane using this method in a ballad of his own invention from his middle period; in his late ballad period, too, it is at work. It would seem to prevent any tension (cf. Lord Murray) again in John Maynard (N,XX,p.167) and it does, as to the eventual fate of the hero; however, it is replaced by a strongly developed tension in the unfolding of the drama, underlined by parallelism of structure and expression. Then, in Die Brück' am Tay (N,XX,p.165), Fontane raises our suspicions to almost total certainty in the dramatic introduction, and leaves it up to our imagination to supply the certainty.

To put in a nutshell the effect that can be produced by this technique (of almost supplying the conclusion from the outset) we could do worse than to remind ourselves of one of Brecht's pairs of distinctions when he is explaining the

"epic" as opposed to the "dramatic" form of theatre:

Dramatische Form des Theaters Epische Form des Theaters

Spannung auf den Ausgang

Spannung auf den Gang.

All one wishes to borrow from Brecht here, let it be stressed, is the neat formulation, not the concepts that go with it. Much, even in those ballads where we have noted Fontane's use of this technique, remains, strictly speaking, dramatic: to give obvious examples, soliloquy and dialogue are not excluded; and in any case, Brecht is using the word "epic" in a unique sense. However, one or two points bear making: first, the anticipation of the outcome will naturally tend to detract from the traditional drama-like qualities of a ballad, at least structurally; and secondly, it will tend to internalise, to shift the stress to the process of motivation, psychology, and links between actions observable from within rather than without, in short, to the "how" and "why" rather than the bald "what". This is entirely consistent with a detectable striving of Fontane's art throughout his life. It is not insignificant that this slant is appropriate to the writer of epics, and more particularly, of prose epics - novels. So, Fontane, having met with the role of presentiment and foreboding in the ballad and being tempted to turn it to outright foreknowledge to encourage "Spannung auf den Gang", leaves it

15. Bertolt Brecht, Anmerkungen zur Oper "Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny", in: Schriften zum Theater (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963-1964) 2: 1918-1933, p.117.

after all, in most of his ballads and all of his novels, at strong foreboding, recognising the need for some "Spannung auf den Ausgang".

The novels, as suggested, are full of such effects.

Unwiederbringlich opens with a discussion of whether or not the Holk couple should move away from their old house to a new, more comfortable one; Christine is firmly opposed to the move, because: "An Ahnungen glaub ich". However, they do move, and with the move, the happy years of their marriage are over. In Vor dem Sturm, the balladier Hansen-Grell confesses, just before going into battle, that he believes in "Ahnungen"; he is captured in the battle and subsequently put to death. In the same novel, the rather crass General Bamme christens a sleigh to be used to rescue the hero - jokingly, he thinks - "Sargschlitten". In the rescue, the hero's closest friend is fatally wounded and the sleigh is used to carry his coffin home to his native Poland. Graf Petöfy is, of course, about the unsuccessful marriage of an ageing count with a much younger actress; the outcome of the match is as good as foretold on their honeymoon - in Italy, of course - when the count wishes to visit Verona: "Franziska hatte lachend eingewilligt, aber doch nur unter dem Zugeständnis, dass ihr das Haus und Grab der Julia Capulet gezeigt werde, "weil Liebesgeschichten mit tragischem Ausgange nun mal ihre Passion seien"." (N, II, p. 76)

Passages such as this could be multiplied almost ad infinitum. Omens and forebodings, then, are frequent; this

feature of the ballads will certainly have been a great influence upon the novels: it is at once very ballad-like and very like Fontane.

II vi Hint

We have noted Fontane's nice appreciation - learned from old ballads - of the moment when a gap or narrative leap will best serve his purposes. Parallel to this, he retains a fine sense of when the lightest of suggestions - one hint, or an accumulation of such tiny indicators - will serve to develop his theme more worthily than a bald statement. This is to be kept distinct from "Sprunghaftigkeit", which was non-statement of plot development; what we are speaking of here is understatement of informing idea - eg. love, fate, historical necessity - because it should make itself obvious to any reader or listener willing to apply his interpretative powers.

Schön-Margret und Lord William (N, XX, p. 293) provides a good example of what we mean, especially as both the original and Fontane's German version have been taken to task for not clearly enough stating their crucial contention: "Völlig unklar bleibt es, ob überhaupt von tieferer Neigung bei ihm (William) die Rede sein kann nach der Äusserung:

"Ich brach eurer Schwester Herze, 16
Doch brach ich keinen Schwur." "

Apart from the fact that the slight contradiction is easily

cleared up: - he loved Margret, but had not promised to marry her - is there ever really the possibility that William's feelings for Margret were ~~not both~~ sincere and deep? To this one can only reply that, in such a case, the ballad would not exist in the first place. And to ask the question: "ob überhaupt von tieferer Neigung bei ihm die Rede sein kann" is to fail to understand that, in the world of the ballad, dreams, symbols and other such "hints" easily outweigh any slightly problematical words spoken by a character. The love-story, William's dream, and the culmination with the rose-bushes intertwining suffice to prove William's love. And Fontane clearly shares the awareness that to put the message any more clearly - this is a story about a love that overcomes death - would be to underline with too thick a pen what must remain essentially a feeling, born out of foreknowledge of other balladesque love-stories, perhaps, but above all confirmed by hints, tones, and dreams. It is one of the notable points about Fontane's rendering that he conserves exactly this suggestion-laden atmosphere which invites us to look to broader horizons beyond the hints. It is a technique which, as we shall see, is to suffuse his novel work.

And it is a technique which derives from the very nature of the ballad, from its earliest days. As Rhyn reminds us: "Die Zusammensetzung des Stoffes in einige wenige, aber dafür um so treffendere Momente ist ja überhaupt ein Merkmal der Ballade" (Rhyn, p. 119). And because the ballad must choose few and poignant moments, these moments must speak for themselves,

among other things by pointing above and beyond themselves. It is thus a most archetypal quality of the ballad to be constantly encouraging us to broaden our vision, to intimate more grandiose contexts.

In many of his most memorable ballads, Fontane has learned to use this to advantage. Archibald Douglas, for example, when still called Der Verbannte, was criticised on that account by his publisher: "Der Einwand, der durch Campe gemacht wurde, dass man etwas zu lange in Ungewissheit über die besondere Situation (als Verbannter) Archibald Douglas' bleibe, ist richtig und ich muss demgemäss die Überschrift¹⁷ einrichten: sie muss bereits Auskunft geben".

The title, however, was all that Fontane altered; the "uncertainty" as to the situation, which existed in the text, remained for him an integral part of the ballad - a means of stressing its generalised nature, and encouraging perception of the theme or "message" which is being hinted at throughout.

It would be rewarding, too, to analyse exactly how the central idea of Johanna Gray - the powers of fate hanging over the ill-starred queen and driving her ineluctably to the gallows - is emphasised precisely by being side-stepped and suppressed each time it is about to raise its head. By thus refusing to describe, but leaving free rein to our interpretation, Fontane makes the powers of fate seem more black and formidable.

Time and again, at moments when he is about to broach major

17. Letter to Friedrich Eggers, 18 August, 1856.

or informing ideas of his works, Fontane shies away from actual naming of this idea, and instead drops a hint in the form of a word or a known historical name or event, relying upon our powers of deduction and association. That not everyone can be relied upon to do this is no fault of Fontane's: the wife of Fontane's friend Bernhard von Lepel, upon having Schloss Eger read to her, and hearing the final line -¹⁸ "Rette dich, Wallenstein!" - asked: "Wie kommt er darauf?"¹⁹ Indeed, Lepel, too, associates himself, if not with the remark, then with the opinion that more information and a more obvious connection is required: "...Wallenstein, der Schlussstein und Seele des Ganzen ist, spukt mir zu aphoristisch darin....Wir müssen mehr von Wallenstein erfahren, mehr als wir, was Du voraussetzen magst, ohnehin von ihm wissen".¹⁹ What both have failed to appreciate is the perfectly simple, perfectly appropriate, balladesque understatement. Unlike television, it was never the rôle of the ballad to eliminate individual initiative and intelligence, but to stimulate it. And this being so, it must needs make use of extreme compression, both in choice of pregnant moments and in the technical means associated therewith so that, representing a confluence of forces and affording a wide prospect of many things departing tangentially from it, it can just hint at those powers beyond

18 and 19. Bernhard von Lepel, Vierzig Jahre: Bernhard v. Lepel an Theodor Fontane. Briefe von 1843-1883 (Berlin: Fontane, 1910), p.131.

it for which it really stands.

Kohler is quite right to observe that, in the novels, these prospects looking out upon specifically balladesque concerns have become peripheral:

Allein auch in den spezifisch modernen Gesellschaftsromanen finden sich in irgend einer Form immer wieder jene charakteristischen Ausblicke in romantische Fernen, auf Historie, Exotisches, Abenteuer und Heldentum, die man als balladeske Prospekte bezeichnen könnte. Gordons Weltreisen in "Cécile" und die Prosaballade von dem Nordpolfahrer Greeley im "Stechlin" seien als Beispiele angeführt. Nicht zufällig sind diese Reminiszenzen aus der Balladenwelt an die Peripherie gerückt, gewissermassen prospekthaf hinter den Fenstern der modernen Welt aufgebaut. Nicht nur in Fontanes Dichtung, sondern in der allgemeinen Entwicklung überhaupt hat sich der Schwerpunkt verschoben. (Kohler, p.341-342).

What Kohler neglects to mention, however, is that even if the larger concerns are different, the technique is seemingly ingrained. For example, by the end of chapter twelve of Graf Petöfy, it should already be clear to us that Egon's passion threatens Franziska's virtue and is causing her to have second thoughts about marriage to the old count; however, in case it should still be unclear, Fontane gives us another discreet nudge, a warning to keep our eyes open on this matter:

(N,II,p.75) "...Ja, der Ehrgeiz ist ein grosser Versucher".

"Aber nicht der grösste."

"Welcher andere?"

"Sag es dir selbst".

In diesem Augenblicke hörten beide, dass draussen die Glocke gezogen wurde, zweimal, aber nicht stark, und Hannah ging, um nachzusehen. Ein Diener gab ohne weitere Bemerkung ein Bukett ab, in das eine Karte gesteckt war. Auf der Karte selbst aber stand: "Egon Graf Asperg".

Franziska wurde rot. Wusste der junge Graf von dem Geschehenen? Oder war es ein Spiel des Zufalls?

Fontane is not going to supply the answer to the question, only the hint that we should look for it. Interestingly

he was later to congratulate himself on his little machination, incidentally indicating that he expected his readers to have enough wits about them to grasp the import of such incidents, not in themselves, but in what they pointed to: "Ich glaube der Schluss des 12. Kapitels (das in d e m Moment eintreffende Bouquet und Karte von Egon) ist ein guter Coup."²⁰

In the exposition of Unwiederbringlich, Fontane does not state that one of the themes of the novel is to be the lack of communication between the Holk couple, founded upon a most fundamental failure to understand one another's nature, and fostered and promoted not least by Christine's refusal, despite her husband's good will, to give him a chance to understand; instead, what the author does is to end a scene with an ominously open phrase pointing at the incipient fault:

"...Ich denke, Christine, wir wollen hier glücklich sein.
Willst du?
Und sie hing sich zärtlich an seinen Arm. Aber sie schwieg.
(N,V,p.8)

Again, in Ver dem Sturm, a whole network of signs connects Lewin and Marie in the reader's eyes long before they realise they are destined for one another. Among these signs: Renate and Tante Schorlemmer visit Lewin when he is sick, leaving behind them a letter to which Lewin turns his attention after their departure; the chapter closes significantly: "Der Brief aber war von Marie".(N,I,p.461) And in this letter, which she had written to Renate and never intended for Lewin's eyes,

20. Letter to his wife, 13 Aug., 1883.

Marie speaks movingly of how beautiful she finds the grave-stone inscription of which Lewin had told - and which is now scarcely less than his guiding light.

The constant prompting to look for something far more deeply interfused, the intimations of love, death of love, death itself or the overcoming of death, romantic adventure, philosophical questions, complex human problems, history, or even immortality among all this mortality, are, we conclude, an eminently "balladesque" quality of Fontane's work.

II vii Name poetry

A curious and common characteristic of the ancient ballads of almost all countries, but in particular of Scandinavia, is the stringing together of long lists of names (of people or places) to such an extent that often entire verses and sometimes almost entire poems consist of them. Their arrangement is often very artistic, but sometimes nothing more than an elaborate word-game.²¹ Richard M. Meyer explains the reasoning behind and the effect of such catalogues: "Bei ausgebildeter Kunst wachsen sich dann solche Namensgruppen zu Schiffskatalogen und Teichoskopien aus; wobei immer noch die reale Lagerung der Personen oder Orte durch die der Namen²² symbolisch nachgebildet wird".

21. For examples, cf. Richard M. Meyer in Euphorion, Erg. 8, 1909, p.167ff.

22. Meyer, p.169.

It would, however, be erroneous to deduce a direct Scandinavian influence upon Fontane; what is certain, on the other hand, is that he encountered similar lists in ancient Scottish ballads. There are miniature versions of these catalogues - often only a line to two long - scattered throughout the collections of Scott and Percy; and the first of his Jakobitenlieder (N,XX,p.351ff), which he translated in 1855, opens:

"Die Duncans kommen, die Donalds kommen,
Die Colins kommen, die Ronalds kommen,
Es kommen die Kenmures Sohn und Vater,
Lord Foster und Lord Derwentwater..."

and goes on:

"Die Intosh kommen, die Quarries kommen,
Die Söhne Lord Glengarrys kommen
Es kommen die Douglas und MacGregore..."
"Die Phersons kommen, die Kenzies kommen,
Die Grants, die Leans, die Menzies kommen..."
Die Camerons kommen, die Gordons kommen...
Die Crabies und die MacFarlane...."

The importance of this device for Fontane's work is two-fold. First of all, he is awakened to the evocative possibilities of sonorous names. Names need not be set to a marching rhythm and used for their news-value in telling who composed the army; they can also be exploited to play an irreplaceable rôle in conjuring up local colour and atmosphere. For this purpose, Fontane is particularly susceptible to the sound of Scandinavian names. Hansen-Grell, the balladier and Fontane's near-double in Vor dem Sturm, has an interesting little speech on the subject, and it might well be Fontane himself talking:

2 2

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"Ich teile ganz den Enthusiasmus unseres verehrten Wirtes, und wenn ich auf das Gewissen gefragt würde, würd ich bekennen müssen, aus dem Zauber dieses Namens (Thyra Danebod), und vieler ähnlicher, so recht eigentlich die Anregung zu meinem Studium altdänischer Geschichten empfangen zu haben. Sigurd Ring und König Helge, Ragnar Lodbrok und Harald Hyldetand entzückten mich durch ihren blossen Klang, und sooft ich dieselben höre, ist es mir, als teilten sich die Nebel und als sähe ich eine wundervolle Nordlandswelt, mit klippenumstellten Buchten und vor ihnen ausgebreitet das blaue Meer und hundert weissgebauchte Segel am Horizont." (N, I, p. 369)

His creator shares Hansel-Grell's enthusiasm. There is massive evidence from Fontane's later work that he rejoiced in these names; in his early and middle periods, he experimented more modestly. In Der 6. November 1632 (1866), he used names as much as anything else in the introductory verses to set the atmosphere. Thus, after "Dalarn", "Lorns Atterdag", "Niels Rudbeck", come the lines:

N, XX, p. 185, 1.12 "Hörst du, wie der Dal-Elf rauscht?"
"Das ist nicht der Dal-Elf, der Dal-Elf ist weit,"

making the page reverberate with the sounds of the Swedish tongue (as well as the denial of the comforting everyday explanation).

In his later work, his playing with names becomes undeniably striking, even a distinguishing personal characteristic. In Nordische Königsnamen, (1889) (N, XX, p. 77) which prefaces the section Nordisches in his Balladen und Gedichte, he expresses his preference for the use of nicknames rather than numbers to serve as surnames for kings ("Geschicht' und Dichtkunst sind zweierlei Zünfte".) However, not only nicknames but also proper names catch his fancy and fire his imagination: Olaf

Kragebeen (N, XX, p. 83) offers a perfect sample of Fontane at play with name-sounds and simultaneously hard at work with the creation of atmosphere:

1.22 Erik Jarl, sein Freund, tritt an ihn heran:
 "König Olaf, der Däne spielt um sein Glück,
 Im Oresund hielt's ihn nicht länger zurück,
 Aus der Kjöge Bucht, aus dem Wassersack,
 Ist er hinaus ins Skager-Rak,
 Hundert Schiffe führt er, zehnhundert an Bord -
 Auf, Olaf, auf, aus Stavanger-Fjord!"

In the novels, too, evocative, sonorous Nordic names, though they do appear, are found only in poetic form. One reason for this is obvious: none of the novels (even Unwiederbringlich) is set in that far-off, romantic ballad-land, so they cannot serve the purposes of depiction or evocation of the subject of the novel. Rather, the opposite is the case, and they are specifically used for contrast. And this is the second, more essential reason why they can appear only in poetry (eg. the reading of Hakon Borkenbart in the "Kastalia" club in Vor dem Sturm; Wie Herr Herluf Trolle begraben wurde in Unwiederbringlich) - their position in Fontane's world, like the Romantic-balladesque in the real world, has shifted. His world is now closer in both time and space and, by familiarity, seedier, less grandiose and noble. In a novel on marital infidelity, a ballad extolling marital fidelity can only be an ironic comment; and the lovingly chosen list of exotic names:

"Betten wir ihn in den Totensaal
 Von Thorslund oder Olafskirke?
 Betten wir ihn in Gjeddedsdal
 Unter der Trauerbirke?"

Betten wir ihn in die Kryptkapelln
In Roeskilde, Leire, Ringstede?..." (N,V,p.140)

can serve only to spotlight the contrast between the world inhabited by Holk and Ebba, and the romantic vistas which open up in Hansen-Grell's vision. This aspect of the balladesque has been pushed out to the periphery, and lends to the novels no more than the slightest breath of the balladesque - in a generally oppressive climate.

But it need not be so with all kinds of names; and this brings us to the second important influence on Fontane's work of the ancient ballad "catalogue". When Richard Meyer casts around for contemporary traces of these "nafnathulur", he comes up with just one poet - our own Th. Fontane; and he rightly points to his Märkische Reime. Now, the Märkische Reime hold an important position in Fontane's poetic, and indeed personal, development. For, written (in 1862-64) in close conjunction with the Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg (some of them were incorporated into early editions) they clearly first give expression (as the larger work did for his love of the "Mark") to his latent sensitivity to the potential expressive beauty of the superficially ugly, harsh local sounds. And, in a particularly happy marriage of sound and form, he goes back to the ballad catalogue, which we know he had experience of from the Anglo-Scots ballad:

N,XX,p.231, 1.5 Sechs Rohrsche Vettern ihn tragen,
 Sechs andere nebenher,
 Dann folgen drei von der Hagen
 Und drei von Häseler

Ein Ribbeck, ein Stechow, ein Zieten,
Ein Rathenow, ein Quast....(Adlig Begräbnis)

Havelland (1872) is even more characteristic:

N,xx,p.244, 1.47 Und an dieses Teppichs blühendem Saum
Die lachenden Dörfer, ich zähle sie kaum:
Linow, Lindow,
Rhinow, Glindow,
Beetz und Gatow,
Dreetz und Flatow,
Bamme, Damme, Kriele, Krielow,
Petzow, Retzow, Ferch am Schwillow,
Zachow, Wachow und Gross-Bahnitz,
Marquardt an der stillen Schlanitz,
Sentzke, Lentzke und Marzahne,
Lietzow, Tietzow und Rekahne,
Und zum Schluss in dem leuchtenden Kranz:
Ketzin, Ketzür und Vehlefanz.

Characteristic, that is, of Nordic name-catalogues, with their playful variations on vowels and consonants, and their internal rhymes; characteristic of their intention and effect, to build up something of the atmosphere of the places by using their sounds as typified in their names, and something of their situation - dotted about like flowers in a meadow or on a tapestry; and characteristic, too, of Fontane's use of Berlin, Prussian or "märkisch" names in and after the Wanderungen. It is not by coincidence that these places, closer both to his heart and to his experience, begin to dominate his works simultaneously with the great step into prose, prose fiction, and his own brand of poetic realism. And so in the Wanderungen, the "märkisch" sounds, combined with the name-catalogue device, serve not as a Romantic contrast to reality, but to describe and heighten reality - and there is a touch of genius in Fontane's doing this in a time-honoured, archetypally

balladesque way. And in the novels, the device can serve two purposes: to introduce a breath of the balladesque into stories whose relevance, if not always setting, is contemporary; while at the same time introducing a note of local realism - for example, in the already ballad-like tale of the brothers' quarrel and the history of the Vitzewitz family: "Die ganze Freundschaft aus Barnim und Lebus war geladen; die Brüder sassen einander gegenüber; neben ihnen, an der Quertafel: Adam und Beteke Pfuel von Jahnsfelde, Peter Ihlow von Ringenwalde, Balthasar Wulffen von Tempelberg, Hans und Nikolaus Barfus von Hohen - und Nieder-Predikow, dazu Tamme Strantz, Achim von Kracht, zwei Schapelows, zwei Beerfeldes und fünf von Burgsdorff". (N, I, p. 15).

In other words, while Nordic names satisfy the need for the Romantic-balladesque, when Fontane looks around him at the names he grew up among, he finds that they can satisfy both poetic needs and the requirements of realism.

Not all Fontane's discoveries of evocative Prussian names are recorded as such in his works; it appears that they would often be transmuted into poems or other works embodying the feeling they had evoked for him. To his friend Georg Friedländer, to whom he had dashed off a letter begging for "Lokalbenennungen" so that he could start work on a ballad, he confesses to an effect on himself and his poetry every bit as powerful as that which Hansen-Grell derived from Nordic names:

...setzte ich mich doch hin, und schrieb unter dem Eindruck von "Heiden-Tilke" und "Hexentreppe" die Ballade nieder, in der natürlich nichts von Heiden-Tilke und Hexentreppe vorkommt, wie das immer der Fall zu sein pflegt. Man braucht die Namen-Anregung und das Bewusstsein, dass ein bestimmtes Quantum von Sachlichem neben einem liegt - und aus diesem Besitz-Bewusstsein heraus producirt man dann. Wie oft habe ich schon gehört: "aber Sie scheinen es nicht gebraucht zu haben". Falsch. Ich habe es d o c h gebraucht. Es spukt nur hinter der Scene. (6th February, 1888).

So much by way of an aside; our conclusion has, in fact, already been reached: namely, that it is hardly surprising that the experienced balladier Fontane, when he "comes home", should discover in the colourful local names surrounding him the same qualities and possibilities as ancient Scandinavian and Scottish bards had in their local names; what is slightly surprising and slightly brilliant is that he should use them in the same way.

These points which betray the influence of the Anglo-Scottish and other folk-ballads are, then, of extreme and lasting importance for all of Fontane's work; when allowances have been made for Fontane's stylistic manipulation of them, they can still be seen to have had a deep effect on the character both of his ballads and of his novels.

III i Mood and atmosphere

Even in his earliest days, and even in his ballads composed after a model, Fontane is by no means content with imitating a folkish flavour; from the start, there is much, too, that is Fontane, uniquely. We have chosen here those characteristics - many of them very small - which are all-pervasive and thus add up to a cumulative effect which one might offer as a description of what is the poet rather than the form.

We note a tendency to reduce to a minimum the amount of direct action, and to compensate for this by laying the stress on mood and atmosphere. To be sure, the popular ballad, in many prime instances, already leans towards the static rather than the kinetic, evocation rather than description, the framework rather than the novellistic (usually because the "story" was already commonly-known legend or recent event), but Fontane takes up the hint and goes well beyond imitation.

He serves notice of what was to become a basic principle of his aesthetic as early as Der Tower-Brand (1844), the first ballad to achieve what was to become his traditional resounding success in the "Tunnel". The work contains no other "story" or "idea" than a fantasy of the poet's imagination: the spirits of those who have been murdered in the Tower of London return to set it on fire. (His inspiration was a real fire in the arsenal of the Tower in 1841.) The entire poem represents a successful evocation of an atmosphere; nor does it attempt

to be anything more: "Das Gedicht "Tower-Brand" machte eine Art Sensation (ich schrieb es nach meiner e r s t e n¹ englischen Reise, noch voll von Londoner Eindrücken...")

Fontane seems, by nature, to have been a master of these impressionistic mood-ballads. In Schloss Eger (1849), while a particularly bloody piece of action is made plain, there is no intrigue (other than the larger intrigue of history working itself out.) The whole is an impressively executed, dark-toned painting of a situation; a snapshot of a moment in history which serves as a brooding omen of a more significant moment to follow. Fontane conjures up for us the pervading mood during the off-stage preparations, not the tragedy itself.

Perhaps the clearest example we have of this style of ballad is to be found in Maria und Bothwell (1851). One can hardly claim any "action" for this poem: after Darnley's burial, Maria lies in the arms of her lover, and Darnley's murderer, Bothwell: After love-making they fall asleep, only to re-awaken and relate to one another their disturbing, ominous dreams. Fontane's treatment of this non-plot, however, is a masterpiece of its kind: since we have in the back of our minds the known historical fate of the two protagonists, and are told the content of their dreams, the whole "meaning" of the poem, - everything there is to "understand" - is contained in the oppressive, guilty atmosphere.

1. Letter to Th. Storm, 14 Feb., 1854.

Gorm Grymme (1864) shares something of the same general characteristic. The crux of the action - the prince's death - is suppressed, and the ballad built up out of two halves of contrasting atmosphere, evoked particularly by colours: blues and golds for the happy scene with the prince playing; reds and blacks for the scene in which no-one dares tell the king of his son's death. It has been well observed that the "action" here is, in fact, a series of artistic images: "Das ist durchaus malerisch empfunden. Es sind kleine Bilder, die sich zur Handlung zusammensetzen". (Rhye, p.162.)

Even at the end of his ballad production, Fontane favours mood and atmosphere: he exploits his ability to evoke them in the introductory lines of John Maynard, which give away the story and remind us that what follows is to be read, not as an exciting adventure, but as a eulogy expressing gratitude to a hero.

All the ballads we have discussed so far in this context have been of Fontane's own inspiration; however, it can be seen that, in modifying older models, too, he did so with an ear for the effect the smallest word would have on his reader's feelings.

Percy, I, p.226, l.29 When he had in Lough-leven been
Many a month and many a day;
(Northumberland betrayed by Douglas)

sounds like something chosen from a balladier's stock of formulae for filling in the passage of time, whilst Fontane's rendition:

N,XX,p.322. 1.17 Es geht der Tag, die Monde gehn
(Percys Tod)

has a slow, ominous tramp to it: parallelism in the verb yet variation in construction to suit two different time-spans; the use of the evocative word "Monde"; and the transference of emphasis from the protagonist's simple need to "be" to the necessity for time to "go". Fontane's version has emotional appeal.

So has his version of the introduction to Lord Murray (originally, The Bonny Earl of Murray, Percy, II, p.170). Fontane suppresses the dramatic (direct speech) in favour of the evocative and descriptive: rather as he does in Gorm Grymme, he involves the reader in the hero's good humour by painting a picture of his merriment, then lets a shadow fall across it:

N,XX,p.303, 1.5 Er kam von Spiel und Tanze
Ritt singend durch die Schlucht -

Even in these 2 lines Fontane has conjured up an atmosphere which is not present in the original, and indeed distracts our attention from the main action, (the murder, which is hurried over in four words of reportage: "Sie haben ihn erschlagen") yet enriches in a typically Fontaneesque way the emotional complexity and subtlety of the ballad.

But not only of the ballad: when we include the novels as well, we realise that this is not a case of isolated, clever structural devices, but a broader striving identifiable throughout Fontane's creative life: the de-emphasising of actual event in favour of mood and atmosphere surrounding it.

The opening chapters of Unwiederbringlich are a good case in point: they form a montage of different pictures, from each of which Fontane extracts a mood contributing to a framework of atmosphere, which determines, indeed already has determined the eventual outcome of the novel, to such an extent that actual events, when they occur, are hurried over. As early as Vor dem Sturm, Fontane has a laugh at his own expense, calling one chapter: "Es geschieht etwas". All this is part of a continuing "Entmaterialisierung" (as Kohler² calls it): the telling of a story by means of traditionally peripheral mood and atmosphere more than by event; and it applies as much - perhaps more - to Der Stechlin as it does to Vor dem Sturm; and as much to Vor dem Sturm as it did to Der Tower-Brand.

III ii Vividness

Throughout his association with the ballad, Fontane is intent upon imparting (or bringing new) vividness into his creations. He intensifies the impression made upon his reader/listener by all the means to his command, in his early "translations" often by a telling detail:

Bercy, I, p. 221, 1.83 "It were a shame at these your yeares
For you to ryse in such a fray"
(The Rising in the North)

N, xx, p. 319, 1.71 "Setz nicht an faulen, schimpflichen Kampf
Deiner siebzig Jahre ehrlichen Preis"
(Percy und die Nortons)

2. Kohler, p. 309.

The three score years and ten represent, clearly, a full life, and a time when activity becoming a young man is both inappropriate and dangerous.

A few verses later in the same poem, the German poet achieves an intensified effect and brings the preparations before our eyes with additional vividness, by making precise times of day play a part:

- 1.93 Then rose that reverend gentleman,
And with him came a goodlye band
To join with the brave Earl Percy,
And all the flower o' Northumberland.
- 1.77 Der Alte rief's - Vor Tagesschein
Brachen sie auf mit Mann und Ross,
Und ehe die Sonne im Mittag stand,
Hielten sie schon vor des Percys Schloss. (my emphasis.)

A little later again, Fontane completely transforms a stock cliché which does nothing to describe Percy's banner:

- 1.105 Earl Percy there his ancyent spred,
The half moone shining all soe faire

making of it, by the use of active verbs, a living, taut image of the flag, the day, the battlefield, and the emotions of the protagonists:

- 1.87 Die Percys liessen zum zweiten dann
Ihren schimmernden Halbmond flattern und wehn.

In more general terms, Fontane has intensified the entire poem, and both the fact that he does so and how he does so are typical. By ruthlessly eliminating verses of secondary importance, replacing dull or expressionless lines, adding new motifs and better emphasising the old ones, placing the personal story of Norton and his sons in the foreground, he raises the

English poem from the level of a historical portrait to that of a tragedy. The Rising in the North, perhaps, offered him a great deal of scope to make these improvements in line with his personal tastes, but the same determination is detectable in most of his ballads.

In the companion poem, Percys Tod, this is achieved, for example, by the insertion of a whole new verse, to bring the crucial action of betrayal - setting sail southwards - before our very eyes:

N, XX, p. 325, l. 113 Und Douglas rief: "Setzt Segel bei,
 Kein Handbreit Linnen sei gespart!"
 Hell lag die Sonn' auf Land und Meer,
 Und rasch gen Süden ging die Fahrt.

The reader may already have discerned an apparent conflict between the Fontaneesque striving for intensity through vividness of detail and that quality which we have already noted as being archetypally balladesque - the suppression of unnecessary detail, where it is known or is to be surmised ("Sprunghaftigkeit"), especially when we have already noted Fontane's appreciation and preservation of the latter quality. Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive, but have their rôles to play at different stages in the telling of a story. And most of the time - certainly when he has acquired mastery of his craft - Fontane gets the balance right. No-one would deny, however, that - especially in his early attempts - he is capable of mistakes of judgement. So, considering that we have known throughout the ballad entitled Percys Tod that Percy is to die, and, at the very end, have even known for some

three verses the details of the means of his death (Er stieg die Stufen fest hinan/Das blanke Beil, er sah es nicht)

We may permit ourselves some amusement at Fontane's expense as we note the needlessness, indeed tastelessness, of the final lines:

Ab flog sein Haupt: - das war das End'
Des Percy von Northumberland.

In a later Fontane original, he masterfully combines the two techniques. In Der 6. November 1632, intensely detailed everyday descriptions draw us into the conversation of two ordinary Swedish men; nor is a vivid account of their ghostly vision denied us, made all the more credible by reason of what has gone before. However, the catastrophe occurs in the eighth stanza, while the reader finds an explanation only in the last line of the ballad, thus allowing Fontane, meanwhile, to extract the maximum from the series of intensely vivid impressions and our puzzlement over the connection between them.

A variation on the same technique is observable in a much later work, Die Brück' am Tay. Here, a series of tensions build up towards the train disaster, which, however, when it comes, does nothing to relieve them, consisting as it does in an observation from afar of a spark in the night, and relying heavily on our prior knowledge or imagination to fill in what we long to be told. Instead of report or description, Fontane gives us a starkly vivid impression:

N, XX, p. 166, l. 49 Und jetzt, als ob Feuer vom Himmel fiel',

Erglüht es in niederschliessender Pracht
Überm Wasser unten...Und wieder ist Nacht.

Add to this the striking image of the witches, which prefigure in almost tangible form the reader's lurid imagination and ghoulish thirst to know the details while at the same time toying with them by leaving them unsatisfied, ("Ich nenn'euch die Zahl"./"Und ich die Namen"./"Und ich die Qual".), and one has sufficient justification for seeing in this work perhaps the highest fusion of Fontane's individual talents and classic ballad technique.

This nice balance, achieved in the ballads, is carried over into the novels; probably in each one, some details, even if not central, will impress themselves indelibly upon the reader by virtue of being described painstakingly and brilliantly: in Ellernklipp, the rock and its situation; in Vor dem Sturm, Hoppenmarieken's living conditions; in Der Stechlin, the lake itself; in Graf Petöfy, the rain and the swelling lake and streams; and in Unwiederbringlich, what better than the description of Brigitte, the wife of a sea-captain we never meet and Frau Hansen's daughter? She is described, characterised and typified by the clothes she wears and the attitudes she strikes:

Diesem (dem Grafen) konnte nicht entgehen, wie berechnet alles in ihrer Haltung war, vor allem auch in ihrer Kleidung. Sie trug dasselbe Hauskostüm, das sie schon am ersten Abend getragen hatte, weit und bequem, nicht Manschetten, nicht Halskragen, aber nur deshalb nicht, weil all dergleichen die Wirkung ihrer selbst nur gemindert hätte. Denn gerade ihr Hals war von besonderer Schönheit und hatte sozusagen einen Teint für sich. Dieselbe Berechnung zeigte sich in all und jedem. Ihre weite Schossjacke mit losem Gürtel von gleichem Stoff

schien ohne Schnitt und Form, aber auch nur, um ihre eigenen Formen desto deutlicher zu zeigen. (N,V,p.95).

...und so liess sie denn die Komödie der Würdigkeit fallen und begegnete seinem Lächeln mit einem Lächeln des Einverständnisses, während sie, wie gleich am ersten Abend, den linken Ellbogen, so dass der weite Ärmel zurückfiel, auf den hohen Kaminsims stützte. (N,V,p.96).

Her clothes seem to hide, yet actually reveal; likewise, she lives with her mother behind a mask of utmost respectability, yet it is common knowledge that she receives lovers in her husband's absence, and still there is much that is secret about her. In a world of such restrained nuances, she is well aware that causing a sleeve to slip down and reveal a shapely arm is an erotic movement: we are not told of Holk's reaction or feelings, knowing only that he notices it and it makes a vivid impression upon him; in the circumstances, we hardly need to be told more.

So an eye for vivid detail, and its uses in summing up a whole scene or conveying an emotional impression without speaking of emotion is something that Fontane brings to the novel, having first brought it to the ballad.

III iii Naturalness

Another occasional technique, frequent enough to be called a tendency, of Fontane's handling of English ballad models is to breathe life into the dead or seriously moribund bones of a passage. Typical of him (and it will remain so in all his works) is the expertly observed - and situated - phrase which brings us back to real life and everyday

experience. Note how he freshens up the following arid spot from The Rising in the North: "When thou wert yong and tender of age". (Percy, I, p.221, l.87). This is art at its most artificial: it is unnatural, divorced from real speech, and flagging inspiration in the second half of the line is made up by tautological repetition smacking of the balladier's stock fill-in formulae; Fontane's line suffers from none of these defects, and paints a most natural picture which stands as an image of a happy childhood (now betrayed):

l.75 "Als Kind auf deines Vaters Knien". (N, XX, p.319, l.75)

Let us consider, too, a verse from Fair Margaret and sweet William:

Percy, III, p.101, l.49 I'll do more for thee, Margaret,
Than any of thy kin;
For I will kiss thy pale wan lips,
Though a smile I cannot win.

against Fontane's transcription. (Schön-Margret und Lord William):

N, XX, p.295, l.53 Ich liebte dich im Leben,
Ich liebe dich im Tod -
Deine Lippen, könnt' ich sie küssen,
Bis dass sie wieder rot!

Apart from avoiding the non-sequitur (there is no mention that none of Margaret's kin would kiss her), Fontane makes his lover's pain more painfully natural by the introduction of two themes not present in the original: the love which survives death (liebte - liebe); and the impossible longing (the theme of impossibility being rather tamely represented in the English balladier's fourth line.) In addition, Fontane has realised the unlikelihood of a lover coming out, at this moment, with a reasoned, balanced syllogism ("Though...") and therefore

substituted the fractured syntax of his last two lines.

In these last examples, we have seen Fontane move beyond an art which, for all its spontaneity, (this being what one generally means by the "naturalness" of ancient ballads) essentially reduces nature to artificiality and move towards an art which, for all its artistry and poetic form, consciously seeks to imitate nature. To give a poetic representation or appearance of the natural - this striving, discernible already in his early ballad translations, also goes to the heart of Fontane's uniqueness in the novel and, is the soul of his excellent success in that most Fontaneesque area of literature - the conversation.

If the natural conversation is a viscous solution in which are suspended "au hasard" fluid traces of wit, relevance, topical commentary, and even some grammar, then the Fontane-novel-conversation is a concentrated, compounded, crystal extracted from the same, in a shape freely occurring in nature but polished to a high poetic gloss by the artist; containing the same basic elements, but in form, utterly incomparable.

His conception of poetic naturalness, then, was something Fontane worked on and developed in his ballads, and finally perfected in his novels, out of which we have selected, as the single greatest example, the conversation; and, for the sake of brevity, we would refer the reader to any of the more dialogue-rich novels, in particular perhaps Die Poggenpuhls and Der Stechlin.

III iv Psychology

Fontane, even early on and even when working from a model, demonstrates a distinguishable tendency to apply psychology - in small doses and where appropriate - to his ballad characters, where it was not present originally. His ability to place himself inside his character's mind enables the reader to do likewise. In other words, his use of psychology - usually for the purposes of more fully characterising or motivating a person's actions - serves, again, to clarify and to make more understandable, and thus to make the poem a more vivid and intense experience for the reader, though no longer in the visual sense.

The poet's "psychologising" can explain the addition of a whole new verse; the second stanza of Bertrams Totengesang is entirely Fontane's invention:

N, XX, p. 300, l. 5 Sie ritten zu ihres Vaters Haus
Und sprachen: "Es ist geschehn;
Unsre Schwester, die zu oft ihn sah,
Soll ihm nicht wieder sehn".

This stanza does more than tell us who murdered Bertram and give us their motive for it; it also expresses the tragedy of the situation and elicits our sympathy for the girl whose brothers have murdered her lover. It thus has a deep and a lasting effect on the spirit in which we read the poem.

Applied psychology can also explain the exclusion of an entire passage to be found in Fontane's model. -Lines 169-188 in Percy's Northumberland betrayed by Douglas show the

omens and warnings which Earl Percy ignores as he departs to meet his treacherous fate: his wife faints, and his impulse is to rush back on shore to help her, but Douglas' glib exhortations to leave quickly are triumphant. Lady Percy had earlier warned her husband to beware of Douglas' treachery and his wife's magic powers. Fontane suppresses both this earlier passage and the omen in the departure scene: why? Clearly, the effect is to cut out secondary characters and motives, and thus to lay the stress squarely on the two men whose lifetime friendship has been bartered for English money. Fontane, then, eradicates any suggestion that Percy is led to his death by witchcraft, or even has any fear of supernatural omens: he has nothing but a belief in Douglas' good faith, and this strand of action leads in a single ascending line to its inevitable climax. The tragedy is turned inwards, made more psychological by becoming an uncluttered story of betrayed faith.

At one point, Fontane applies a very basic piece of psychology to the story of Marie Duchatel, but the simple reversal has a brilliant effect:

Scott, III, p. 90, l. 21 The King is to the Abbey gane,
 To pu' the Abbey tree,
 To scale the babe frae Marie's heart;
 But the thing it wadna be.

N, XX, p. 137, l. 33 Nun pflücket sie heimlich vom Klosterbaum
 Und ringt ihre Hände wund,
 Doch das Leben unterm Herzen
 Wird lebendiger jede Stund'.

Of course, pregnancy is a much greater disaster for the girl. We are not greatly moved by the image of the king plucking the abbey tree; indeed, we may wonder why he need indulge in such

anxious activities. Fontane shifts the psychological perspective into the world of feminine attitudes and thought-processes, by implication associating the individual story of the king and the courtier with a whole world of Maria Magdalene stories of women caught in this "eternal-feminine" fate, and deepening incomparably the desperation and fear of scandal portrayed by the image of plucking the tree.

The observation of a natural psychological nicety serves to give Fontane's Sir Patrick Spens a more regal king, - one who is used to expressing his wishes as commands; one who knows he has many good sailors, and demands the best one:

Percy, I, p. 62, l. 1 The king sits in Dumferling toun,
 Drinking the bluid-reid wine:
 "O, quhar will I get guid sailor,
 To sail this schip of mine?"

N, XX, p. 301, l. 1 Der König sitzt in Dumferlin-Schloss,
 Er trinkt blutroten Wein:
 "Wer ist mein bester Segler?
 Er muss in See hinein!"

The fact that people often characterise their personalities by external attributes such as clothes or the objects surrounding them does not escape our poet's attention. Thus, where the poet of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard has:

Percy, III, p. 57, l. 65 "Is not thy hawke upon the pearche,
 Thy horse eating corne and haye?"

Fontane improvises:

N, XX, p. 285, l. 65 "Dein Falk hat Schellen und Bänder,
 Dein Röss hat Streu und Korn"

The bells and ribbons tell us as much about Musgrave's frivolous nature as does the second line of the poem about his intent to dazzle by superficial impressions:

"Sein Kleid war gold und blau"

One could quote many more instances of psychological refinement vis-à-vis English or Scottish ballads, even in his early days; but the point, one hopes, has been made. The discovery that psychological finesse was compatible with his concept of the ballad is not without relevance for Fontane's later departures in that realm. In a work of his own, though on an English theme - Der letzte York - he uses the ballad form, rather surprisingly, for the specific purpose of portraying a psychological development, something to which, perhaps significantly, the novel is eminently better suited. The thought of the poem is the metamorphosis of the dull and indifferent last son of a great house into someone who is aware of who he is. Even the noble action of the second half of the poem - his attempt to avenge his family against the Tudor camp - is expressly subordinated to the spiritual turning point, which Fontane, literally, italicises:

N, XX, p. 124, l. 24. Mit eins lebendig worden ist in ihm das alte Königsblut.

Probably the classic example of what a marvellous job Fontane can make of deepening our insight into the mind and soul of a ballad character is Archibald Douglas. Of course, the fact that there is no actual ballad in Scott, but only a long explanatory footnote in the introduction (containing most of the elements in Fontane's subsequent poem) makes a direct comparison unfair, but the juxtaposition of what Fontane had to draw on and what he made of it is telling. Instead of

narrating chronologically, Fontane immediately starts drawing us into Douglas' mind and thoughts by using direct speech, in which his hero thinks back to a mysterious "es" which he can no longer bear. The development of the means by which we learn the stage in life the hero has reached is significant: Scott (to whom we are being very unfair) has simply: "The aged warrior"; this Fontane makes poignant, immediate, personal: "Ich bin ja worden alt" (N, XX, p. 120, l. 8). The very important third and fourth stanzas are entirely inventions on the part of the German poet: the third gives direct expression to the hero's fears and attitudes; the fourth evokes by image his physical state and by implication his mental one:

1.9 "Und trüg' er noch den alten Groll,
Frisch wie am ersten Tag,
So komme, was da kommen soll,
Und komme, was da mag".

Graf Douglas spricht's. Am Weg ein Stein
Lud ihn zu harter Ruh,
Er sah in Wald und Feld hinein,
Die Augen fielen ihm zu.

Further comparison between perhaps hastily jotted down footnote and perfected ballad would go too far; suffice it to say that Archibald Douglas represents the placid and fruitful marriage of Fontane's introspective, mental art with classic ballad tradition, the latter emerging perfectly undistorted.

In general, then, Fontane combines his analytical, 19th century individuality with his overwhelming - and ballad-like - sense of fate, by offering an "explanation", or a hint of motivation, yet leaving an essential something blurred, or refusing a rational tying-together. It is in perfect harmony

with Fontane's concept of "realism", which remained consistent throughout his life, and it is one of its triumphs whenever it succeeds - in the novels just as much as in the ballads - that he should proffer an explanation in this way, implying yet enigmatically shying away from a total interrelationship between psychology and fate.

He does the same thing in the novels, with equal success. Unhappy marriage and unfaithfulness of husband or wife is, as we noted earlier, an internationally common fate in all "Volksdichtung"; it is the fate of many of Fontane's novel heroes and heroines, and he has much scope to develop its psychology. In Effi Briest, for instance, the psychological background goes far beyond the psychology of the situation: a bride, plucked too young from her playmates and tied to a boring and ambitious government official in a remote and lonely province, who falls easy prey to a dashing, young army major who suddenly represents glamour and excitement. It is made clear that she would not be easy prey were it not for Instetten's crude attempt at psychology in his "educational" methods - the invention or willing exploitation of rumours of a ghost - to increase Effi's dependence on him and keep her in line, all of which betrays his presumption of flippancy and flirtatiousness on her part and, worse, shows her that he prefers to have, from the beginning, a bond of terrified subjugation rather than to work towards the ideal willing dependence. How unused the public was to the marriage of this kind of psychology with this kind

of story is illustrated by the fact that Fontane wrote to congratulate the one reviewer who realised and mentioned that the ghost interlude "steht...nicht zum Spass da, sondern ist ein Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte."

Obviously, when Fontane wrote Rosamunde, Schön-Margret und Lord William, Jung-Musgrave und Lady Barnard, he was not criticised on account of their content; this is mainly because of the form, but also because they were comfortably distant in time and setting. However, when he transported the same themes to contemporary Berlin, it got too close for comfort, and Fontane became the object of moral outrage. It is amazing to us to realise that a novel as innocent (to the modern mind) as Irrungen Wirrungen caused readers to cancel their subscriptions to the "Vossische Zeitung" (in which it was serialised before publication as a book) and editors to publish articles inveighing against the author. This reaction caused Fontane to take a stand, too, and to admit that he was using this story - the kind of story he could, without risk, have formed into a ballad - among other things in order to expose the hypocrisy of contemporary society:

Auch darin hast du recht, dass nicht alle Welt, wenigstens nicht nach aussen hin, ebenso nachsichtig über Lene denken wird wie ich, aber so gern ich dies zugebe, so gewiss ist es mir auch, dass in diesem offenen Bekenntnis einer bestimmten Stellung zu diesen Fragen ein Stückchen Wert und ein Stückchen Bedeutung des Buches liegt. Wir stecken ja bis über die Ohren in allerhand konventioneller Lüge und sollten uns schämen über die Heuchelei, die wir treiben, über das falsche Spiel, das wir spielen. Gibt es denn...irgendeinen gebildeten und

3. Letter to Joseph Viktor Widmann, 19 Nov., 1895.

herzensanständigen Menschen, der sich über eine Schneidermamsell mit einem freien Liebesverhältnis w i r k l i c h moralisch entrüstet? I c h kenne keinen...(...)Empörend ist die Haltung einiger Zeitungen, deren illegitimer Kinderbestand weit über ein Dutzend hinausgeht (der Chefredakteur immer mit dem Löwenanteil) und die sich nun darin gefallen, mir "gute Sitte" beizubringen. 4

However, we do not wish to dwell on this aspect: it is, as Fontane says only "a little bit" of the purpose of the novel. What is important is that infidelity and adulterous relationships are a pervasive theme of his prose works, from Vor dem Sturm to Effi Briest with, in between, Irrungen Wirungen, Stine, Graf Petöfy, Unwiederbringlich, Cécile, and L'Adultera. This is an important way in which Fontane brings "Kunstdichtung" nearer to "Volksdichtung", for this topic had previously been reserved for "coarser" forms of poetry or, at best, the ballad. Between them, Irrungen Wirungen and Effi Briest caused the same sensation in Germany as Madame Bovary had in France, and mark the same advance in her literature: never before had there been an adulterous heroine, with her author's feelings at least as much on her side as society's, and the topic treated in an appropriately mature and contemporary fashion, with the fullness of psychological detail that had been applied to every other subject. Fontane infuses the modern German novel with the accumulated power of an undying, traditional ballad theme; and discovers for this old theme its latter-day relevance by placing it in a contemporary context and exploring its psychology.

4. Letter to his son Theodor, 8 Sept., 1887.

III, v
Direct speech

A comparison of Fontane's "translations" with the Percy and Scott ballads will reveal, even from the earliest days, an increased use by the German poet of direct speech - an early indication of the importance for him of this stylistic element with which he is generally identified. In Percys Tod, for example, he is concerned to enliven the purely epic by the addition of a dramatic moment:

Percy, I, p. 230, l. 141. He pulled his hatt down over his browe,
 He wept; in his heart he was full woe;
 And he is gone to his noble lord,
 Those sorrowfull tidings him to show.

N, XX, p. 324, l. 97 James Swinnard trat vor seinen Herrn,
 Er sah ihn an und weinte laut;
 Er sprach: "Bleib hier, mein teurer Lord,
 Ich hab' nichts Gutes da geschaut."

Fontane shows fine judgement in employing direct speech for the final stanza of Marie Duchatel, taking advantage of the ability of the form to leave a more moving impression than the more distant epic narrative:

N, XX, p. 140, l. 105: "Ach, meine arme Mutter,
 Als in der Wieg' ich lag
 Und du mich herzttest und küsstest,
 Wie fern war d i e s e r Tag!"

In the early "Übersetzungen und Bearbeitungen", however, all we note are small - though significant - substitutions. It is not until the very end of Fontane's first ballad period that the use of direct speech completely affects the character of a ballad, and not until the late period that a ballad is built around it.

Archibald Douglas (N, XX, p. 120), written in 1854, is not based on any existing model: it probably owes its inspiration to a long footnote in Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.⁵ It is surely significant, in the light of Fontane's further literary development, that when he has a free hand in this way, he produces a work in which 16 of the 23 verses are entirely devoted to direct speech - a high percentage for any form of ballad, and high even considering the fact that the centre of the action is formed by a fateful interview between king and repentant subject. What Fontane has to say about the writing of the poem is extremely relevant to our point (quite apart from forming an interesting anecdote): "Die Hauptstücke des Gedichts: Die Ansprache des Douglas und die Antwort des Königs darauf, schrieb ich noch an demselben Abend (the same one that he had read the footnote in Scott), und zwar auf dem kalten weissgetünchten Vorflur des k. Schauspielhauses."⁶ So, having just read the story (which Scott relates chronologically), Fontane picks his character at his most poignant moment, and goes straight to the actual conversation as the most direct means of getting at what, for him, is the core theme of the ballad - loyalty earns forgiveness. The rest, we can safely assume, was for him in the nature of necessary filler and background scene-setting. However, even

5. In the 1806 edition, this footnote appears on pp. xxi-xxii of the introduction to vol. I.

6. Letter to Richard Maria Werner, Jan., 1893.

here direct speech is exploited to the maximum; I refer in particular to the first three stanzas, which contain the words of Douglas himself, and do a masterful job of arousing our interest and putting us in the picture by means of flash-back. The point for us to note, then, is that in this work, at once marvellously balladesque and Fontaneesque, the poet is exploiting the dramatic (direct speech in monologue and dialogue) to serve the purposes both of the epic (in the introductory verses, to be sure, and later, for example, when the hero asks the king to think back to his youth and in doing so, describes it) and of the abstract. For Archibald Douglas has some elements of a Schillerian "Ideenballade," in that it both formulates and demonstrates an "idea", an enduring truth or axiom:

1.87 Der ist in tiefster Seele treu,
Wer die Heimat liebt wie du.

And so, while not only not harming the "balladesqueness" of the work, but taking an archetypal ballad element to a sort of logical limit, Fontane unconsciously anticipates a technique of his novels, where conversation - rather than direct pronouncement - very often bears the weight of developing the plot and putting across the author's ideas.

The use of direct speech increases in Fontane's later, own ballads. One may look, for example, at Die Brück' am Tay (N, XX; p. 165) or Die grosse Karthause vor Papst Paul (N, XX, p. 178), for excellent instances of the poet's growing skill in evoking much of the plot, relationships, character and attitudes

they contain by artistic use of the protagonists' direct words.

In his prose, Fontane is known above all as the artist of the social novel, and in particular as the supreme artist when it comes to conversation. For his **conversations** are not merely still points in between narrative and action: they bear much of the responsibility for the advancement of the narrative; they carry plot and intrigue forward; and they supply information not only about a person's character, but also on his background, history and present situation. The most extreme example is Die Poggenpuhls. Here, over 80% of the novel is conversation: once the narrator has briefly introduced the characters composing the household, they are left to themselves, and their interactions are traced almost entirely in their own words. A typical chapter will begin with a sentence or short paragraph explaining on what pretence the characters are assembling - typically, afternoon tea or supper - and will end with a few words explaining that they are breaking up and going off to whatever had been arranged. And in between, they will talk about what they have done that day and/or what they plan for the next day. It is not, of course, as awful as this makes it sound - let us not forget that no-one was better than Fontane at making even what promises to be the dulllest conversation between the dreariest participants lively, or at least interestingly relevant - though the technique can sometimes reach a point of compression which is almost comic, as witness the end of one segment and the beginning of the

next in chapter six (N, IV, p. 314):

"Kommt nicht zu spät; zwei Uhr", mahnte Sophie, was denn auch versprochen wurde.

*

Leo und Manon hielten Zeit, und Punkt zwei ging man zu Tisch...

And so, what plot there is will emerge in the apparently natural give-and-take of an essentially dramatic situation. Fontane may not have felt that he had what it took to produce an entire drama, but he put what dramatic talent he had to extremely effective use in both ballad and novel.

His novel conversations are - like most ballad conversations, which derive the quality mostly from the moment at which they are set - pregnant, heavy with the weight of what is compressed into them; and at the same time they are open, in all directions: they draw lines back to the past, project them forwards, intimate meaning over and above the immediate, and suggest undercurrents which have a tangible influence on the present. They are pure present, yet open up vistas and prospects that go far beyond that present. For all these reasons, the conversations in Fontane's novels can be called truly balladesque; but in their perfection of form, they are even more truly Fontaneesque.

III vi
Rounding-off

From the start, we sense a tension between the

spontaneity and at times formal crudeness of the works Fontane was translating and his own artistic conscience. We should not forget that Fontane could not help but be, to a certain extent, a typical writer of the nineteenth century, and as such have certain convictions, which remained with him until his death, of what constituted a work of art. He was doing his first translations of old English ballads in an era which had long since ceased to be as bold as the "Sturm und Drang" in its experimentation, or as tolerant of primitive forms. This being so, it is interesting to compare Fontane's version of Edward, Edward (Percy, I, p. 46f.) with that of Herder (who, while not strictly counted a "Stürmer und Dränger", did much, particularly with his ballad translations, to lay the foundation for the movement).

Herder, in general, is more accurate in his translation, preserves the original's sound better, and its clumsiness of form almost completely. Fontane's work, however, shows a multitude of improvements which make it, in essence, part of a completely different idiom: it is smooth, it flows and reads well, aided by occasional added details to make the story clearer, and in its boldest innovation, achieves a neat thematic rounding-off by the addition of a fifth line to the final verse. Of course, ~~it~~ is not quite fair to compare the two: Herder never claimed to be more than a pure translator, whilst Fontane happily and openly avowed his intent, in dealing with the old English ballads, to produce new, semi-original works of art. The fact that, where he came across something that seemed

to him incompatible with his concept of a work of art, he had no qualms about smoothing and rounding-off, says a great deal about his personal aesthetic. Nor does the fact that he later was to find his Edward a "Verfehlung" and expunge it from his Balladen und Gedichte, declaring himself "sehr für Herder", detract from the strength of his convictions as the main guideline of his aesthetic: what dismays him is: "...meine Tamtamübersetzung neben der grossartigen Schlichtheit des alten Generalsuperintendenten (oder was er sonst war)." ⁷ I think it is fair to say that what he reproaches himself for here is a lack of subtlety, and that even at the time of making these comments to Erich Schmidt, he would not have disavowed the concept of trying to make a new, personal work of art out of the old ballads. In the Argo of 1854, he defends the elimination of what he perceived to be an obscurity in Die Jüdin (his version of The Jew's Daughter, from Percy) and its replacement by a clearer hint: "Wer mich deshalb tadeln will, vergegenwärtige sich meine Absicht: nicht literarhistorisch interessante Beiträge, sondern Gedichte liefern zu wollen". ⁸ If his versions, then, sacrifice some quaintness, it is because they are to have more than curio value: they are to be contemporary balladesque works of art. This concept remained with him

7. Letter to Erich Schmidt, 7 Oct., 1896.

8. Notes on Die Jüdin, in Argo for 1854 (Dessau: Katz, 1854), p.234-5.

throughout his activity as a balladier; and it is Gillian Rodger's contention that he was successful in fulfilling it:

If, therefore, one takes Fontane's conception of the folk-ballad into account and remembers his intentions in writing Kunstballaden, one must admit his success. His Kunstballaden are indeed ballads - folk-ballads in mid-nineteenth-century dress. They are also vital and original works of art. His deviations from the strict pattern of the folk-ballad are thus proof rather than denial of his insight into the form. (....) Thus Fontane's position in the history of the ballad genre is clarified - he re-created the old form to suit his generation. 9

Having identified this aspect of his art, one can discern its effects everywhere. It profoundly alters the formal appearance of a poem: his Lord Murray (N,XX,p.303), for example, concludes - in contrast to its model - with a repetition of the two opening stanzas, neatly bringing the narrative wheel full circle. His art also motivates the composition of a wholly new stanza - the second of Bertrams Totengesang (N,XX,p.300) - which makes the ballad more unified, complete, and well-rounded; in short, a more pleasing shape.

This formal aestheticism is, of course, at least as noticeable in Fontane's original ballads. We shall mention just a few examples, of which an important one is Maria und Bothwell (N,XX,p.133f.). Here, the device of repeating the opening lines as the conclusion is again exploited:

König Darnleys blutiger Schatten
Schreitet den Saal entlang.

This device - lest one be misunderstood - is not a Fontane

9. Rodger, "Fontane's conception of the folk-ballad", Modern Language Review 53,1,1958,p.58.

copyright, but as old as the ballad itself (viz. The Chevy Chase, Percy, I, p.202) In Fontane's case, however, it is never a question of mere formal correspondence of words as a means of announcing the end; but - and perhaps Maria und Bothwell is the best example of this - of establishing an inner relationship between the two, so that the second means something much more significant to the reader than the first. The lines quoted serve, at the start, as little more than a reminder of the bloody event which has just occurred; at least, their ominous content is unspecified, undirected. At the end, after our glimpse into the minds and consciences of the queen and her new lover, it is all too precisely defined and directed - against the central figures; its ugly portent, their troubled future; its ultimate vision - which now opens up - the course of history, with which the two have tampered.

Man's tampering with external, superior, irrational forces, and their revenge in the form of "fate", is the theme, too, of Die Brück' am Tay (N, XX, p.165), which is likewise rounded off by being brought back full circle to the witches. Although the words are not exactly similar, the effect is very much the same as in Maria und Bothwell: it is the superhuman forces that have the first and the last say, the hopes, aspirations, and fears of puny men being swallowed up within them.

In an optimistic work of his old age, this scheme of things appears to be contradicted; though in fact, the "message" of Herr von Ribbeck is that, if man cannot beat the superhuman

forces and immutable laws to which he is subject, the good man can at least join them in their constant overcoming of what is, to mankind, the final barrier - death. Two kinds of wheel are brought full circle here - of form and of thought. Not only does the final line repeat almost exactly - save for one short word - the opening line, but the final stanza has, if not the old man, "something" (...so flüstert's im Baume) in the tree which has grown out of his grave still whispering to the children of the district: "Wiste' ne 'Beer?" To emphasise the rounding-off, some elements of the exposition are repeated almost word for word:

N, XX, p. 249, 1.3 Und kam die goldene Herbsteszeit
Und die Birnen leuchteten weit und breit,
1.35 Und in der goldenen Herbsteszeit
Leuchtet's wieder weit und breit.

Not least because of this conscious and formal attempt to give his art the appearance of art, without betraying the balladesque, this most accomplished and polished of Fontane's ballads may well be considered also his most typical.

In a moment we shall suggest, in the light of specific novels, possible consequences of these aesthetic strivings; here, however, it is worth mentioning a few further implications. For example, it is worth reminding ourselves that, if it is the aim of the lyric to possess and involve us in a moment, and of the drama to portray confrontation, change, development and becoming, then the sinking back again at the end into the stillness which reigned before the beginning, and the resignation and reconciliation which such a pattern of rounding-off implies,

betrays an essentially epic point of view. Seen from this angle, Fontane's characteristic ballad conclusions can remind us of the endings of many of his novels.

From what has been said, it will be clear that in his ballads "frei nach dem Englischen", Fontane sets stylistic pattern above musicality or lyricism, and thus brings about a fundamental character change in the emotional appeal of the originals. Further, in his own ballads, he continues to affect smoothness and polish of form. In both, he is not only following his own predilections, but displaying the influence of the literary ballad tradition, which came filtered down to him - particularly - through the "Tunnele". And although he may later have recognised his partial failure in attempting to press the old English ballad into this tradition, it is undeniable that it met, for a while, his needs, and that not only during his early ballad period, but permanently, it is typical of his style.

The neat balance of construction, the smooth roundness of conclusion are qualities for which the Fontane novel has been praised often enough; one scarcely need give examples: any will do. However, for a specially literal example of the subsiding of the waters and the return to pristine peace symbolised by a return to the actual opening scene, one would recommend the reader turn to the first and last chapters of the novels Schach von Wuthenow or Effi Briest. In fact, all the novels contain this, whether spatially symbolised or not. All, too, are characterised by fulfilment, whether of an actual

prophecy (Vor dem Sturm), or of suspicions for which the ground-work has been well laid, (Unwiederbringlich; Irrungen Wirrungen) or simply of a feeling, composed of innumerable small signs, that a fitting stage has been reached in a continuing story (eg. the pause between death and promise of re-birth - "Morgen früh zieht das junge Paar in das alte Herrenhaus ein"- which forms the closing moment of Der Stechlin.) Fontane himself explains how important it is to him that one should perceive a pattern of smoothly developing roundness, fullness and appropriate inclusiveness when his work is viewed as a whole: "Ich möchte etwas Feines, Graziöses geben; ob ich es erreiche, steht dahin. Nur das bitt ich Sie schliesslich freundlich zu erwägen: wenn Dinge durch eine gewisse Eleganz des Vortrags wirken sollen, so muss es eben kein Stotternder sein, der vorträgt. Mein M.S. aber stottert. Wenn das alles einst rund und nett an Sie herantreten und ununterbrochen, glatt¹⁰ hinfließen wird, wird Ihnen manches besser gefallen".

III vii Toning down

Another influence of the contemporary ballad tradition leaves its mark on the language of Fontane's versions. These abound in examples of passages where Fontane has judged the vocabulary too coarse or direct for his liking, - or, perhaps more accurately, for his audience's. Of course, he could not

10. He is writing in connection with Vor dem Sturm to Wilhelm Hertz, 17 June, 1866.

leave the ending of The Queen's Marie as he found it:

Scott, III, p. 94, l. 93 "I charge ye all, ye mariners,
That sail upon the sea,
Let neither my father nor mother get wit
This dog's death I'm to die".

And so, in Marie Duchatel, we find:

N, XX, p. 140, l. 101 "Erzählt nicht meiner Mutter
Von dem Brett, auf dem ich stand,
Und nichts von meinem Tode
Und nichts von meiner Schand'."

The reality is side-stepped by being made into an abstraction -
and that by the woman who is about to suffer it.

A good example of a vital alteration in wording is afforded
by Jung-Musgrave und Lady Barnard, a story of marital
infidelity which, in the English original, is put quite plainly.
Fontane's preference for the power of suggestion over plain
speech at turning-points of emotional or intimate moments will
certainly have influenced his choice of language here, but
the intention to tone down in order to suit the taste of his
immediate audience (the "Tunnel") and eventual German public
will most surely have played at least an equal rôle.

Percy, III, p. 55, l. 23 "If thoult wend thither, my little Musgrave,
Thoust lig in mine armes all night".

N, XX, p. 283, l. 19 "Und willst du kommen, Jung-Musgrave,
Jung-Musgrave, so komm heut nacht!"

1.27 "And wether it be to my weale or woe,
This night will I lig with thee."

1.23 Er sprach: "Ich komme, lieb Lady,
Und wenn ich sterben müsst'".

1.61 "Lye still, lye still, thou little Musgrave,
And huggle me from the cold".

1.61 "Gib mir die Hand, Jung-Musgrave,
Deine Lippen sind so kalt."

When considerations of taste lead Fontane to alter not just vocabulary but a whole metaphor, he does so very significantly. Let us consider the case of the ominous dream in Fair Margaret and sweet William (Percy, III, p.99):

1.29 "I dreamt a dream, my dear ladye,
Such dreames are never good:
I dreamt my bower was full of red swine,
And my bride-bed full of blood."

N, XX, p.295, 1.37 "Ich sah zwei rote Rosen,
Und die eine liebt' ich heiss,
Und als ich brach die andre,
Da wurde die eine - weiss".

Rhyn's comment on this passage is: "Das Bild von den Rosen ist zarter und inniger, jedoch nicht sehr originell".¹¹ Which is a strange comment, since it is exactly its lack of originality that recommends it as a replacement for the former: what the two images have in common is their archaic appropriateness. Wild boars, often encroaching upon a bed, or seen in a dream pursuing a loved one, are an age-old and almost universal symbol for broken faith - especially in love - leading to dire or bloody consequences. Flowers - often roses - being broken, or turning red, or both, are a no less venerable symbol for exactly the same thing. The two are combined in Kriemhild's warning dream the night before Siegfried's death by treachery: 921, 2 "mir troumte hinaht leide, wie iuch zwei wildiu swin jageten uber heide, dâ wurden bluomen rôr."

Fontane, then, has rather brilliantly solved his problem by using an image which, albeit "zarter und inniger", yet says, in

11. Rhyn, p.75.

effect, the same thing. In so doing, he provides more evidence of that quality which we have remarked upon intermittently and which makes him - in whatever tradition - a master of the ballad, namely the ability, even where he alters or innovates, to avoid doing violence to balladesque form or feeling.

The ballad experience stands him in good stead for the novels: he has already proved that extreme reticence and tastefulness in linguistic areas need not spoil the balladesque flavour. For example, what could better embody the less easily acceptable facets of the ballad - the ghostly, grisly, and gothic - than the ~~story~~ of the brothers' quarrel, the murder, and the legend of reconciliation contained in the rhyme, all of which open Vor dem Sturm? Indeed, Fontane himself seems to want to dismiss it all, to stand back from it and speak of it in cool distant generalisations: "Aber wenn sich das nach dem Spukhaften und Schauerlichen drängende romantische Bedürfnis in diesen trüben Bildern mit Vorliebe aussprach; so drängte doch auch ein anderer Zug in den Herzen der Hohen-Vietzer ebenso entschieden auf endliche Versöhnung hin..." (N,I,p.18). But in fact his attitude is like that of the peasant towards the ghost: "Man scherzte über ihn und fürchtete sich" (N,I,p.18). He may appear to laugh at it all, but he very deeply respects it. For, having thus appeared (and it is never more than appearance) to take it lightly, he ironically (and very consciously) strengthens the case of balladesque and folkish superstitions when his whole novel turns out, ultimately,

to be the fulfilment of the prophecy, the completion of the ghost-story - a ballad in prose, trucked out with more folk-rhymes, more ghosts, symbolic dreams, and Hoppenmarieken.

Our conclusion, then, would be that a different linguistic level from that of the ballad can also be balladesque, provided that the right attitude is present.

IV 1 Fontane's originals

We shall now note features which are to be found exclusively in ballads owing their inspiration and composition entirely to Fontane; in which, therefore, since no model guides him and no peculiarity may be a variant of an earlier one, that which is uniquely Fontane is most likely to lie. Most interestingly, it is possible to suggest, quite without prejudice, that the unifying quality of these features lies in their anticipating the novels; each one embodies at least the germ of what was later to become fully developed as a recognisable characteristic, even trademark, of the Fontane novel. Because of this unifying factor, we can touch upon the following points more briefly than has been our practice hitherto: much of what we mention will be obvious to the reader of even one or two Fontane novels; or is to be found there passim; or has already been discussed by others both better and more fully than we are able to do here. Further, we shall leave the totalling-up of implications until later; at present, we shall discuss by example, and that mostly from the ballad.

IV 11 Anecdote

It is in the "Preussenlieder" that we find Fontane making his début as the narrator of anecdotes as a means of characterisation. From his earliest youthful encounters with his historical heroes, he was convinced that one learned more

about a character by means of a telling personal anecdote than by any amount of analysis or objective description - see his affirmation in Von Zwanzig bis Dreissig: "dass eine Menschenseele durch nichts besser geschildert wird als durch solche kleinen Züge" (N,XV,p.319) - and in these songs of praise to a group of historical characters of whom he was particularly fond, we first find him putting this conviction to the test of literature - with triumphant success. We may measure the extent of this success by comparing a less successful "Preussenlied" with others which make good use of anecdote. Der alte Dessauer (N,XX,p.205), for example, consists of a series of statements declaring the nature of its subject to have been anti-academic, unphilosophical, gruff, narrow-minded, but utterly dependable. We are not left with a vivid impression of **this** personality, in spite of some nice details. It is quite a different case when we read Der alte Zieten (N,XX,p.207). The story about his quip in the middle of a losing battle: "Ich kehre/Erst noch mein Schlachtfeld aus", together with the story illustrating the king's respect for his general, the way in which it manifests itself (he lets him oversleep), and the reason for it - "Er hat in mancher Nacht/Für uns sich wach gehalten" - give us a concrete framework on which to hang the abstract adjectives used to characterise him. The impression is even more vivid in the first two parts of the "Seydlitz" cycle (the third is less an attempt at characterisation than a relation of the already fully depicted character to his background), where the poet begins with the anecdote, and

lets it comprise practically the whole ballad, adding only a few generalisations at the end. It is, one feels, because of the natural and spontaneous effect produced by their anecdotal technique that the "Preussenlieder" were thought, time and again, to be fully authentic and anonymous "Volkslieder": "Herrlich brachte mir heute früh das einliegende "Festblatt". Der alte Zieten wird vö¹llig als Volkslied angesehen und jeder änderts und verbessert."

IV iii
"Volkston"

It is also relevant to mention here that - as Wandrey was the first to observe - Fontane, in his "Preussenlieder", "finds himself" for the first time from another momentous point of view. Wandrey is moved to speak of the re-birth of the true folk-song, restricting the term to the mass appeal of the contents. He notes with perfect accuracy that here: "das Volksliedmässige nicht nachgeahmt, sondern recht eigentlich wiedergeboren wird, auf neuer, moderner, individueller Basis, aber ebenfalls umfassend und typisch. In gewissem Sinn bleibt auch Fontane in diesen Liedern nur Exponent des grossen Ganzen, des Volkes, sagt was alle bewegt, gleich den unbekannten Dichtern von einst."² The Prussian ballads, therefore, made

1. Letter to his wife, 13 April, 1880.
2. Conrad Wandrey, Theodor Fontane (München: Beck, 1919), p.367.

a profoundly important contribution to Fontane's spiritual and artistic development; he was never, of course, an obscure, esoteric, ivory-tower aesthete, but the "Preussenlieder" show him in the act of discovering that his forte lay in expressing broad interests, popular themes; that he was destined to be, in its basic sense, a "popular" writer, giving, on behalf of people in general, poetic expression to the concerns of people in general. This, as much as anything else, is the reason why one of the terms most frequently - and most vaguely - used in Fontane criticism is his "Volkston".

IV iv The epic narrator

Another feature which stands out in the group of ballads which are Fontane originals is the extent to which narrative elements predominate; that is to say that, in the synthesis of forms which the ballad is, the epic tends to gain the upper hand. It is especially noticeable that he is the epic narrator rather than the ballad singer in, for example, Der Tag von Hemmingstedt (N, XX, p. 180), a ballad into which he put more of his true self than most. On January 3rd, 1851, he wrote to Friedrich Witte that he was "höchst interessiert" by the material; on the same day, a letter to his publisher Wolfsohn announces that he is working on the ballad "mit voller Begeisterung". We know that the work absorbed him utterly for an unusually long period; and what emerges is a chronicle, consisting mostly of description, with few dramatic and no

lyric elements. If we set beside this other equally good examples, such as Der letzte York (N,XX,p.123), Herr von Ribbeck (N,XX,p.249) and many others, it becomes evident that there is a strain in Fontane's ballad-writing which betrays a natural affinity for epic narration.

IV v Humour

Characteristics which distinguish Fontane's original ballads also include certain, more abstract qualities, such as humour - that indefinable yet ever-present humour which, in German literature at least, is uniquely Fontane's. What one alludes to here is neither the humour of the comic, nor even of the witty writer, though there is some comedy and much wit to be found in Fontane. Rather, it is an all-pervasive, fine, subtle attitude of openness and anti-dogmatism which is a constant rebuke to those who approach life "mit tierischem Ernst". It is an attitude which, for example, is able to imagine a situation such as that in Herr von Ribbeck as being worthy of making into a poem; and is then able to make of it a poem which evokes all the subtleties of that attitude. Whereas it is the use of dialect³ that makes us smile in Herr von Ribbeck, it is the entire situation and the way it is described that convey the poet's rich, still humour. However, if it is most of the time intangibly present, there are, too,

3. Another Fontane device which comes into its own in his own ballads - cf. Jan Bart.

instances which permit us to identify and analyse it. One such occurs in the marvellous second stanza of Harald Harfager:

N, XX, p. 81, l. 5 "...Und auf und ab im Saal
 Im Schlosse zu Drammen sassen die Grossen allzumal,
 Und dazwischen in lachender Jugend und wie Kinder
 anzuschau'n
 Sassen blond und stolz und glücklich Harald Harfagers
 neunundzwanzig **Fraun**".

A touch like this would immediately set this ballad apart - were there any doubt - from a copy or "re-working"; it is possible only in a Fontane original. Of the many aspects of his humour, the one which emerges here is a forgiving understanding of human foibles and idiosyncracies, even ridiculousness, a love of humanity "warts and all"; the very antithesis of idealism, a kind of philosophical pragmatism... the necessary basis for poetic realism, whether in poem or novel.

There is every indication that Fontane, who in his letters emerges as a great anti-naturalism theorist, fully realised the importance of humour to his stance as a realist and a poet.

Here one would refer the reader to Heinz Eugen Greter, who discusses Wolzogen's article theorising that it is humour that makes the vital difference between realism and naturalism, and that humour (good-natured acceptance of things as they are, as opposed to idealistic repulsion and desire to change man) is nothing less than love of humanity. The article, needless to say, was very well received by Fontane. Again, one is indebted to Greter for the observation that in 1872 Fontane

4. Heinz Eugen Greter, Fontanes Poetik (Bern: Lang, 1973), p. 105-6.

(recalling no doubt his Herwegh experience and the dangers of being what one would nowadays call "engagé") had praised Willibald Alexis, whom he ranked highly among contemporary talents, for his lack of too intimate a "Herzensstellung" with regard to his subject, and had declared as the best of all possible attitudes: "ride si sapis"⁵. Significant, too, is what has impressed him "above all" in his great example and influence, Sir Walter Scott: "vor allem...immer gleich bleibenden Humor,⁶ der alles trägt, alles durchdringt und durchleuchtet".

In spite of appearances, we do not digress: our point is that humour, so clearly an innate Fontane characteristic, does not begin to emerge until his own ballads of his middle and more particularly late periods, and that the way is then prepared for it to become a central tenet of his faith when it came to novel-writing.

IV vi Humanity

A related, equally abstract Fontane characteristic whose origins we can trace to his original ballads is an all-softening breath of humanity which would have been foreign to the anonymous bards of earlier centuries. One aspect of the human touch is clear in his series of "lyrical portraits" of historical figures ("Preussenlieder"). Although they are

5. Greter, p.104-5.

6. Fontane, Walter Scott, N, XXI/I, p.410.

generally built up out of events and external descriptions, these are not their focus of interest; nor is the noble or exceptional nature of the character, but rather his essence, which reduces him to a human, common, understandable - though perhaps not everyday - level. He sings not of the military leader, but of the human being; his songs bear the names of national heroes, but are about eccentrics and madmen. This peculiar, personal Fontane reaction to them sufficiently explains in what sense they are "lyrical".

His humanity can express itself in different ways: a more problematic justice, for instance, than the cruel, black-and-white, elemental kind one rightly associates with the folk-ballad. Such is the case of Lord Athol (N,XX,p.290), where the problem is Goethean, and posed in Goethean terms. The monk, in his forbidden intercourse with the lord's daughter, is clearly a most reprehensible sinner - from the church standpoint. Yet this is not what emerges from the ballad: rather, it is the father (Lord Athol) who is punished by a life of misery and repentance, receiving absolution only in dying. Fontane not only finds it in his heart to pardon the monk - as he found it in his heart to forgive and understand all the abysses of the human soul, - he implies that the monk may have been closer to his God than many who kept His commandments. For, like the Bajadere,⁷ like Faust, he is redeemed by having the right kind of love, which is neither the exclusively

7. In Goethe's Der Gott und die Bajadere.

possessive and stifflingly protective love of the father, nor the dogmatic and institutionalised love of the church. The poet who wrote this ballad is truly the poet of L'Adultera.

Here, too, we should make mention of his markedly developing attitude to a theme such as that of guilt and retribution. This is one of the great themes of ballads of all times and places, and it is one of Fontane's particular obsessions. Very early, he is fascinated by the fate of the Stewart family, whom he sees as acquiring guilt simply by belonging to that family - a planned drama was to deal with their attempts at retribution - and later we find him writing ballads like Lord Athol and Archibald Douglas, and novels like Effi Briest. Of course, any work dealing with guilt and redemption will automatically deal with the means at the disposal of the society in question to deal with the guilt in question, and discussing precisely this question, with a modern twist, is what Fontane is doing by placing, say, an Effi, a Grete (Grete Minde), a Martin (Ellernklipp) or a Holk (Unwiederbringlich) in an archetypally balladesque situation. If the situation is the same, however, his attitude towards it has changed dramatically. For, in his early works, he had been haunted by the longing for an unrealisable ideal justice (hence his Herwegh infatuation); while in his versions of English-Scottish ballads, he had merely recorded how the world, society, or fate dealt with guilt; but it is only in his own ballads, and more so in the novels, that he shows up for what

it is the dogmatism of the world, society, or fate, and finds the means to give subtle but forceful expression to his own free and flexible attitude towards guilt. That is, he only becomes the critic he had been all along, only lets his innate humanity express itself aggressively, in his later works.

Kohler, too, has observed: "...wie sich der Moralist von einem mechanischen Dogmatismus zu einer tieferen und menschlicheren Ethik durchfindet".⁸

Both Fontane's ballads and novels, then, raise the question of the need for an extra-individual moral order - and it is seen in both cases as being necessary;⁹ and with that, the question of the conflict between that need for order and strict moral dogmatism. This is where the answers differ; for, in the one case, it is seen as a tragic necessity, and in the other, as unnecessary and destructive. Both the traditional ballad and Fontane novel are, however, similar again in suggesting sympathy for the hero or heroine who suffers at the hands of dogmatism, but both realistically show the hero or heroine nonetheless running afoul of it and being destroyed by it. This severity of fate, this lack of an easy way out is one of the most balladesque qualities about Fontane's prose. Again, the development is in his attitude towards the implications:

8. Kohler, p.343.

9. Fontane had not expected, for example, that Instetten would be so badly judged and misunderstood for his scrupulous struggle with himself and the "Etwas" (cf. letter to Joseph Viktor Widmann, 19 Nov., 1895, *Dichter über ihre Dichtungen* 12, II, p.454.)

as he develops from a faithful recording mechanism to the mouthpiece of the quality of humanity, so does his scope broaden from the purely artistic to include the social; and this coincides with the division between his early and/or adapted ballads on the one hand, and his own ballads and prose on the other.

IV vii Indirect action

Let us turn now to an aspect of form. There begins to emerge in these ballads a distinct quirk in the shape of an indirect approach to the relation of the action. Fontane is no longer the simple epic narrator speaking to his audience and telling them a story; he is behind the scenes of an orchestrated production, manipulating plot and switching to sub-plot, keeping an eye on the balance and timing the delivery of the punch-line. To be sure, he does all these things unostentatiously and without sacrificing simplicity, but they nonetheless constitute an interesting departure. Das Trauerspiel von Afghanistan (N,XX,p.159), for example, represents one of the first times Fontane deals with contemporary subject-matter in a ballad, and it is also - by no coincidence - the first time he makes use of a double action, relating the main action through a subsidiary one. Or rather, he relates ninety percent of the main action through the mouth of a soldier who is reported arriving at the fort, then he breaks off to describe the subsequent activity at the fort, finally making a quick

end to the ballad with the shattering summing-up of the final stanza. Fontane seems to have been so pleased with the effect that he used the pattern again in Der 6. November 1632 (N,XX,p.185). More significantly, however, in two late ballads also contemporary in subject-matter, the narrative also follows an indirect route, avoiding the most obvious line. Die Brück' am Tay (N,XX,p.165) has the Macbeth witches as its frame, their final cacklings both hiding and revealing the full impact of the tragedy; while John Maynard (N,XX,p.167) starts off with the statement that the hero lost his life in becoming a saviour of others, and then proceeds to give details of how, and this about-face, by forcing us to notice details, strangely increases the tension, which in any case is underlined by the countdown at the end of each stanza:

- 1.17 "Noch dreissig Minuten...Halbe Stund."
- 1.23 Und noch zwanzig Minuten...
- 1.29 Und noch fünfzehn Minuten...
- 1.37 Und noch zehn Minuten...
- 1.43 Rettung: der Strand von Buffalo.

So, while they become predominant only in the novels, contemporary concerns do emerge in the ballads; and where they do, we find Fontane instinctively avoiding poetic journalism or outright social comment - a far cry indeed from the poems of the thirties and early forties, when he had no higher aspiration than to emulate Herwegh; now he is instinctively distancing himself one remove further from the contemporary and adding the dimensions of tension and structure to make it both readable and art, thereby adding the further dimension of lasting value.

IV viii
Realism

We have mentioned the step towards realism; this latter is quite concretely represented in the ballads of Fontane's late period, too. Die Brück' am Tay contains, for example, both realistic modernity and purest Romanticism, in the gothic form of the Macbeth witches; but the effectiveness and point of the poem lie in the fact that they combine no more than oil and water. The strict segregation serves to underline the essential miscalculation of man's brave new technology in its blithely Promethean refusal to take into account the power of the elements and the supernatural. This is by way of demonstrating that realism and Romanticism co-exist in such a way as to highlight the fact that the realism is intentionally not Romanticised. The treatment of the near-disaster on board the steamer in John Maynard marks a significant step, too. To be sure, the action is melodramatised, and John Maynard made a hero; however, the very choice of a theme which is exotic¹⁰ neither in time nor in setting and which the poet makes no attempt to make appear exotic, shows us a Fontane who now has found he can create a powerful ballad from a real-life detail of the modern world.

10. Although the names "Eriesees", "Detroit" and "Buffalo" are dropped, they serve only to emphasise the contemporaneity, and the point that, even within the contemporary world, adventures and heroes are still possible; really, the steamer is any steamer, John Maynard a symbol of the brave man.

Although based on a legend at least a generation old by the time Fontane heard about it, Herr von Ribbeck auf Ribbeck im Havelland (N,XX,p.249) can illustrate another aspect of Fontane's realism - lovingly graphic detail. From the "laughing" pears in the "golden" autumn, old Ribbeck stuffing his pockets full, the boy "in Pantinen", the "Doppeldachhaus", to "alle Bauern und Budner mit Feiergesicht" at the old man's funeral, the visual qualities of this ballad add tangibility and credibility to a cosy legend. This tangibility, together with the use of dialect, persuasively situates the cosy legend in real life, endowing it with what might otherwise have been an unperceived relevance.

IV ix "Umgangssprache"

Another tendency that creeps in during this late period is the wide use of, or at least the appearance of everyday, even slangy speech, "Umgangssprache". The speeches we hear from Fontane's protagonists are natural, unforced, lacking in artificiality as never before in the history of the ballad. At a time when he was mainly preoccupied by prose writing, his ballads often approach the comparative clumsiness of prose - and without losing thereby. He was doubtless learning from his novels that to give the appearance of facility required a high degree of control and stylisation (nothing is easier than to give the appearance of artificiality) but that the end product gained in directness and communicability. He was at the same time - as we shall see from the next section -

refining his notion of what it meant to be a "stylist". Here, meanwhile, one might point, by way of example, to Die Grosse Karthause vor Papst Paul (1885) (N,XX,p.178), with the marvellous speeches, first of the abbot (one must remember that this is an abbot speaking to his monks of the pope):

- 1.13 Und es sprach der Abt: "Frei sei's gesagt,
 Es haben uns unsere Feinde verklagt,
 Ein Neider oder ein Leckerling
 Den heiligen Vater hinterging,
 Der sieht nun die Dinge von Grund aus schief,
 Sonst schrieb' er uns nicht einen solchen Brief..."

and then of the deputation, speaking directly to the pope, - in particular:

- 1.39 "Dass morsch wir würden, noch hat es nicht Not..."

Or there is the intentional off-handed brusqueness of Letzte Begegnung (1888) (N,XX,p.247):

- 1.1 König Oskar, vom Mälar kommt er daher,
 Fährt über den Sund, fährt über das Meer,
 Nun sieht er die Küste: Deutsches Land,
 Heide, Käfer, märkischen Sand,
 Und nun Avenuen und Schloss und Alleen -
 Er kommt, um den sterbenden Kaiser zu sehn.

Dem melden sie's. "König Oskar ist da".
 Kaiser Friedrich wie suchend um sich sah...

...and so on. What we have here is no less than a striven-for, achieved clumsiness, in imitation of natural story-telling.

Somewhat analagous is the language of Herr von Ribbeck auf Ribbeck im Havelland, in at least one noteworthy respect. In a perceptive imitation of everyday usage, "und" here is used as the universal conjunction, standing for both short and long passages of time, as well as the introduction of consequences and explanations. It stands at the start of 12 lines of the

42-line ballad, the distribution over the four main stanzas being 4,2,2,4, a particularly fine touch, since the first and last are entirely concerned with the adumbration of the old man's character - homely, warm, easy-going, and the middle two, dealing with his death and the stern nature of his parsimonious son, are altogether more formal and distant. That the amount of conscious intent that went into Fontane's writing down the word "und" is not to be underestimated, that in fact its use is one of his most stolidly defended stylistic points, we may gauge from a letter to Gustav Karpeles:

Und so ist es auch mit den "Unds". Wollt ich alles auf den Undstil stellen, so müsst ich als gemeingefährlich eingesperrt werden. Ich schreibe aber Mit-Und-Novellen und Ohne-Und-Novellen, immer in Anbequemung und Rücksicht auf den Stoff. Je moderner, desto Und-loser. Je schlichter, je mehr sancta simplicitas, desto mehr "und". "Und" ist biblisch-patriarchalisch und überall da, wo nach dieser Seite hin liegende Wirkungen erzielt werden sollen, gar nicht zu entbehren.¹¹

IV x
Formal break-up

Entirely to be related to this individualisation and popularisation of language is a move towards an independence of strophic form in Fontane's late ballads. In 1848, the poet was first exposed to and fell under the spell of Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border and Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry; were one given a representative selection from the ballads written during a ten-year period following this momentous event to compare with a similar selection from those

11. Letter of 3 March, 1881.

written after 1870, one of the first things one would remark upon would be how different they looked upon the page. The first are characterised by simple, four-line, archetypal verse-forms with regular or tightly controlled rhythmic patterns; almost the only constant in the later group (though it is not universal) is a four-foot line in rhyming couplets. The rhythm has lost its automatic musicality and, though gaining in appropriateness, has become more difficult and demanding of the ear. There is no standard length of stanza; they range, even in Herr von Ribbeck, from two lines to twelve; in John Maynard, from five lines to ten, these subdivided and broken up (cf. stanza five), and even this does not count the two independently floating opening lines; and the opening eleven and closing eight lines of Die Brück' am Tay can be classed as stanzas only by the most generous interpretation of the term. None of this, of course, detracts from the works in question; on the contrary, what all these apparent madnesses have in common is method. The two fast-moving opening stanzas of Letzte Begegnung, describing Oskar's journey, are followed by a long, slow-moving, purely descriptive one dwelling on the moment of meeting between the two men and the impression Emperor Friedrich makes on his friend. This having been the high point, King Oskar's reaction and departure can be cleared aside in four lines - the shortest stanza in the poem. In Herr von Ribbeck, the stanza that drags its feet is the one relating the old man's death; the fourth stanza, being in essence a recapitulation

of the first, can be shortened; and is; while the final "stanza", which serves a traditional ballad-ending function - re-instating present reality by relating the action of the ballad to it - does not need, in Fontane's free-form ballad, to fill out a complete verse, so that these two lines emerge as a humorous, almost parodistic nod of acknowledgement to the requirements of tradition. And in Die Brück' am Tay, the amorphous unpredictability of the surrounding frame serves to underline the artificiality and brittleness of the works of man, which are described in regular verses. In this work, then, archetypally, and in the other late ballads scarcely less so, we see traditional ballad form being burst apart in favour of a form decreed by content. This is commensurate with the theory of what it meant to possess "good style" that Fontane developed in particular during his novel-writing years: "Ich bilde mir nämlich ein, unter uns gesagt, ein Stilist zu sein, nicht einer von den unerträglichen Glattschreibern, die für alles nur e i n e n Ton und e i n e Form haben, sondern ein wirklicher. Das heisst also ein Schriftsteller, der den Dingen nicht seinen altüberkommenen Marlitt- oder Gartenlaubenstil aufzwängt, sondern umgekehrt einer, der immer wechselnd seinen Stil aus der Sache nimmt, die er behandelt".¹²

Fontane, one feels, would have received warm applause from the 18th century philosopher and literary critic Johann Jakob Engel, who once wrote in a similar vein of what makes

12. Letter to Gustav Karpeles, 3 March, 1881.

for a "Wahrheit, der Natur" in the novel:

Es giebt ja eine Beredsamkeit des Herzens, die keinem Dinge zu viel thut; die ihren Ton genau nach dem Gegenstande, den Grad des Affekts genau nach den Ursachen abmisst, die in ihrem Schmuck sparsam, in ihrer Erhabenheit einfältig, in ihrem Pathos natürlich, immer ganz in ihren Stoff vertieft ist, immer nur an richtige Vorstellung der Sachen denkt, immer selbst getäuscht und gerührt, das Täuschende und Rührende trifft, ohne es ängstlich zu suchen, immer selbst erwärmt - und voller Theilnehmung, mit nachdrücklicher Kürze von einem zum andern forteilt.¹³

The Enlightenment spoke of possessing a "Beredsamkeit des Herzens"; this is as surely Fontane's as it is what he meant by his definition of a "Stilist".

13. Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freien Künste, vol.16 (1774), p.298; quoted in: Hans-Gerhard Winter, Dialog und Dialogroman in der Aufklärung (Barmstadt: Thesen Verlag, 1974), p.119.

Conclusion

Our investigation of certain basic stylistic elements in Fontane's ballads, followed by a few glances shot at his novels, confirms the suspicions of many earlier writers - and our thesis - that his fascination with and affinity for the ballad survived to affect his prose fiction to the extent that we can with justification speak of a "balladesque" element in his novels. However, it was found that the word "balladesque" could not be used as a blanket term to cover all the stylistic elements referred to above, for, although a kind of consensus could be arrived at as to its meaning, it was necessary to distinguish elements found in the traditional folk-ballad from elements which are unique to Fontane's ballads. Often, therefore, a balladesque element in a Fontane novel has its closest counterpart in a Fontane ballad. Most of the time, this is not to deny true balladesqueness, for Fontane is always true to the spirit of the ballad, and many of his innovations are exaggerations of tendencies in the traditional ballad. From some features, however, it is clear that, in his ballads, he was feeling his way towards prose and the novel.

An attempt at a definition of the ballad was avoided, and replaced by a collection and comparison of impressions and definitions from various sources. By this means, no definition, but a consensus was arrived at as to what is to be found in ballads, and it was decided that Fontane had produced at least one example of almost every sub-species and variety of ballad

mentioned. He is thus a versatile balladier, and one well versed in the traditions of the form. In conclusion, it was suggested that one could best approach something all-embracing about the ballad by considering it an "idea" or a metaphysical symbol (as does Hans Fromm).

It was decided that Fontane's favouring the ballad and joining the "Tunnel über der Spree" had no political motives, but only artistic ones. He recognised that both the ballad and the forum provided by the "Tunnel" could help him develop artistically, at a time when he had been disappointed: by Herwegh; and by his own lyrical gifts. Further, the ballad satisfied his particular interest in history; at the same time, his attitude to realism also made him suited to the ballad. He realised, too, that this was a step towards the epic. Fontane does not hide the fact that he was concerned, along with other things, to learn certain tools of the poetic trade during these years: "die Mache". Finally, however, he became worried about two things: that the "Tunnel" had become over-indulgent of its star, no longer providing needed criticism; and that it was no longer possible for a serious artist to express himself in (at least traditional) ballad form. This led to his period of renunciation of the ballad per se, and eventually to the balladesque novel Vor dem Sturm, which expresses a new attitude towards the ballad, and the necessity of prose.

In order to elicit the nature of Fontane's ballads before

deciding what was balladesque in his novels, we asked three questions: 1) what are clearly influences from the old (especially Anglo-Scots) ballad tradition? 2) what are Fontane hallmarks even in his adaptations of known models? 3) what are the Fontane hallmarks to be found only in his own original ballads?

In reply to the first question: we can trace Fontane's learning the device of repetition, as well as grammatical and structural parallelism, from the Anglo-Scots ballad. He develops it in his own ballads. We suggested that it might have left its mark on the novels in the form of significantly repeated songs and ballads, as well as motifs such as a recurring phrase, a return to the same place, or the re-enactment of a scene. Next, we considered dislocation of narrative - "Sprunghaftigkeit" -, one of the most evident characteristics of the traditional ballad, and one commented upon by Herder ("Sprünge und Würfe"). Fontane sometimes found too many "leaps and sallies" for the modern reader's comfort, and painstakingly devised means of giving the reader more clues, while never expunging the device: he always appreciated it not only for its archaic note, but because it encouraged the reader to use his powers of imagination. He uses it masterfully in his own original ballads, too. Neither does he, in the novels, want to tell everything, lest he risk putting his reader's imagination to sleep. A strikingly obvious characteristic of his novels is the non-description of moments of emotion: deaths, love-

scenes, engagements. Another quality of the ancient ballad to impress itself upon Fontane was its simplicity: its straightforwardness; lack of complication and cluttering detail; and its use of generalising words for everyday objects. Fontane remains true to this quality in his translations, and in his novels, too, refuses to seek complexity or profundity in a detail where there is none to be found. Thus his surroundings tend, like those of the ballad, towards the universalised. The evocation of a presentiment of the doom awaiting a ballad figure is often met with in Fontane's models; Fontane notes this effect, and makes of it near or total certainty, thus increasing interest in the "how" rather than the "what". His use of presentiment and foreboding becomes more and more subtle; and so fond is he of the effect that he fills his novels, too, with this most ballad-like device. We saw that Fontane's natural propensity was in perfect harmony with the practice of the ancient ballad in the reluctance of both to make a bald statement of their informing theme, preferring to drop hints that the reader should watch out for it. Again in the novels, he lets a few poignant moments build up into a network of signs which speak for themselves. Long lists of names for the evocation of armies or other groups or of geographical places, and a symbolic imitation of the situation of both are a feature in particular of old Scandinavian, and to a certain extent of Anglo-Scots ballads. In his earlier ballads, Fontane makes use of Scottish and Scandinavian names; however, in late ballads and novels,

these names become peripheral, as Fontane begins to appreciate the harsh beauty in the names of "his own" countryside, in particular those of the Mark Brandenburg. We concluded that the form of Fontane's novels had indeed profited from the direct and deep influence of Anglo-Scots and traditional ballad form upon the poet's own ballads.

In response to the second question, we noted that personal Fontane additions included a shift of stress from direct relation of action to the framework of mood and atmosphere. And in his novels, we observed that he liked to tell the story by means of these traditionally peripheral elements. Then, he adds detailed touches which intensify the vividness of the originals. In each novel, certain vivid details, summing up a whole scene, character, or emotion, impress themselves indelibly upon the reader. Fontane also adds a higher degree of naturalness to his versions: he uses unforced images, avoids non-sequiturs, makes pain more painfully real, sidesteps unlikelihoods. This art of constructing something so that it has the appearance of naturalness is best exploited in his novel conversations. Fontane also begins to add the dimension of psychology to the ballad: he supplies motivation; elicits our sympathy; cuts out secondary characters and motives to turn the story inwards; shifts the psychological focus on to the right person; understands, enhances, and better evokes the personality of his characters. Then we considered infidelity in his heroines (and heroes) as an example of how he had

explored the psychology of a typically balladesque theme in his novels. We observe in Fontane's versions of older ballads an increased use of direct speech: this is how Fontane put his dramatic talents to use, and is reflected in his prose works by the very high percentage of conversations, which are not still points but carry plot forwards and supply information on character and situation. We noted further that Fontane likes to smooth rough edges and round off conclusions: this corresponds both to his own personal and mid-nineteenth-century views on art; yet he manages, in his ballads, not to harm the balladesque effect, exploiting for example the traditional close or exact correspondence between opening and closing lines. The novels, too, are characterised by a return to the beginning, or a feeling of fullness or wholeness. Fontane will also often tone down too direct or crude an expression in an original English ballad, but will as often as not replace it by an excellent, appropriately archaic or traditional word or image: he kept his ears open, always concerned for the right effect in his ballads. And so it is with "the balladesque" in his novels: he may seem to take it lightly, even deny it, but it affirms itself in the end, in spite of the change of form. We decided that all of the above factors were either enlargements upon hints and tendencies contained in the traditional ballad, or at the very least did not do injury to the ballad or betray the balladesque: this in itself is no mean achievement.

In reply to the third question, we established a list of

features which, within the context of Fontane's ballads, constitute the originally and uniquely Fontaneesque. We suggested that the unifying quality of the elements of this list lies in their anticipating, or in many cases reflecting the novels. When one glances over them, it becomes clear that these are not the, but some of the hallmarks by which Fontane's novels are known, so that he was probably both a) feeling his way towards the novel in his ballads and b) reflecting in his novels what he had learned in his ballad years: the use of telling personal anecdote for characterisation; an infusion of "Volkston", meaning that he gives expression to what interests and moves the multitude; a preference for epic narration; a unique, subtle, all-pervasive humour; a softening breath of humanity and compassion, pointing the way towards a new, more flexible standard of ethics than the harsh ineluctable one of the old ballad; construction of an indirect action, that is, distancing himself from direct expression of contemporary, political or social concerns; realism, in the form of real and graphic details observed from the world around him; the use of words and constructions from everyday spoken language; and the break-up of traditional rigid form into a flexible one derived from the subject: in other words, his becoming a stylist. The fact that many and disparate typically Fontane qualities developed and developing in the ballad are, then, found wholesale in the novels should, of itself, suggest the likelihood that he brought to bear upon the novel form the full weight of

experience earned in the traditional ballad school; and we hope to have provided some corroborating evidence that this was so.

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