

# FRIEDRICH HALM AND THE DEMON OF SEX: AN EXAMINATION OF HALM'S EARLY NOVELLE, *EIN ABEND ZU L.*

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## Abstract

*This paper explores the attitudes towards sexuality embodied in Friedrich Halm's early Novelle, Ein Abend zu L., and particularly investigates the potentially positive view of homosexuality which it contains. The paper also considers the divergences between this Novelle and its putative inspiration, Alain-René Lesage's novel, Le Diable boiteux.*

## Introduction

In a perspicacious and informative article entitled "Friedrich Halm and the Comic Muse" (McKenzie and Sharpe, 1998: 158), Peter Skrine intriguingly hints at a repressed sexual "Problematik" (Halm's own) incipiently breaking the surface in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Austrian playwright Friedrich Halm's curious transvestite drama, *Wildfeuer*. Skrine wonders aloud whether the situation presented to the audience's eyes of a man being romantically and sexually drawn towards another young man (who, unbeknownst to the world and "himself", is in reality a young woman, dressed as a man) might not constitute something of a "personal confession in disguise" on the part of the dramatist. *Wildfeuer* does not, of course, provide a

satisfactory answer to this question and can only leave the audience guessing.

Much earlier in Halm's literary career, however – in the year 1828 - this talented writer had composed a noteworthy Novelle of some 19,660 words entitled, *Ein Abend zu L.*, which ranges across sexually provocative material in a much franker manner than his later "dramatic poem", *Wildfeuer*, would choose to do.

It is surely no coincidence that Halm always kept this story well hidden throughout his subsequent life, never (as far as I can ascertain) discussing it with family or friends and, never attempting to get it published, still less speaking of it to his later literary mentor, the Benedictine monk, Michael Enk von der Burg, who would assuredly have been shocked and scandalized by the overtly sexual themes deployed across this humorous yet ultimately serious work. Only with Halm's death in 1871 did the work come to light when found amongst the writer's papers by his literary executors, Faust Pachler and Emil Kuh. They decided to draw a discreet veil over the story and not to publish it. A similar fate, it might be noted *en passant*, excluded Halm's great late Novelle, *Das Haus an der Veronabrücke*, from inclusion within Paul Heyse's celebrated anthology, *Deutscher Novellenschatz* (Heyse, 1876), due to the 'heikele' subject-matter of sexual aberrancy which it contained. As for *Ein Abend zu L.*, it did not see the light of publication until some 185 years after its creation. The present article aims to remedy the situation of unjust neglect that has surrounded *Ein Abend zu L.* and to focus attention on the manner in which Halm's Novelle deviates from the stylistic and moral stance of its literary predecessor, *Le Diable boiteux* by Lesage, as well as how the issue of homosexuality is

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discussed in a manner unusual for German/Austrian literature at that time. The article will further look at the issue of the conflict between Enlightenment and Romantic values and the role of the unconscious mind in the enunciation of key themes by the tale's protagonists.

## Literature Review

Secondary literature on *Ein Abend zu L.* is vanishingly sparse. This is hardly surprising, in view of the fact that the text was not published until the year 2012.

The chief commentator on the story (albeit in a brief compass) is Faust Pachler. In his excellent biography of the early life of Friedrich Halm, Pachler comments that it is "... durch und durch Nachahmung" (Pachler, 1878: 230) of Alain-René Lesage's Asmodeus novel, *Le Diable boiteux*.

Pachler's treatment of the story is, unfortunately, terse and somewhat sloppy: at one point (Pachler, 1878: 230) he mistakenly attributes words to the Devil which are actually spoken by another character in the Novelle (the narrator's friend, K).

Pachler speaks of the story as one in which the devil "... dem auf einem Balle beim Gouverneur befindlichen Autor das wahrhafte Wesen aller Anwesenden enthüllt, natürlich seinem Charakter gemäß, cynisch nach allen Richtungen, Scham, Ehe u.s.w. verwerfend." (Pachler, 1878: 230). Here, Pachler regrettably fails to distinguish between the character of the narrator - created by Halm - and Halm the author; furthermore, the devil certainly does not discuss the real nature of *all* present at the ball: only a small number of guests is "honoured" with the demon's sardonic commentaries. Moreover, Pachler

uncritically takes the tales Asmodi spins regarding the guests as true, whereas Halm's narrator solely has Asmodi's word for this – and a devil's word is not the most reliable of verbal contracts!

Pachler does make one interesting comment, however, but again it is insufficiently nuanced or differentiated to bestow upon it global validity: he states that "... in der Maske des Teufels steckt eigentlich der Autor selbst" (Pachler, 1878: 230-231). Again the reader is unsure whether "the author" refers to Halm or to his literary creation, the narrator. In any case, this remark needs further refinement to justify it and this I hope to provide in a later section of the present essay.

Pachler describes the devil's gossipy stories as constituting the "chronique scandaleuse" (Pachler, 1878: 231) of the town of Linz (where Halm had been living for the previous two years (Schlossar, Vol. 1, 1904: 9). This may or may not be the case – but Pachler provides no evidence to support his contention. It is not even certain that "L" does indeed stand for Linz; internal evidence from the text (Halm, 2012: 11) which speaks of "Deutschland" possibly undermines this assumption.

Pachler's final summing-up of *Ein Abend zu L.* is positive but expressed in tepid phraseology: "Die Nachahmung als solche und die Characterisirung gerade dieses Teufels ist nicht übel," he writes (Pachler, 1878: 231). As I shall subsequently attempt briefly to show, *Ein Abend zu L.* is too divergent from Lesage's novel in tone, purport and plot for it justly to be viewed as mere "Nachahmung". It has its own independent virtues and breathes a wholly different moral air from that of Lesage's picaresque tale.

Another commentator on Halm's Novellen is Dietrich Arendt. His doctoral dissertation (Arendt, 1953) is impressive and remains the most detailed monograph on Halm's fiction to date. Its scope is limited, however, as it focuses solely on the three major Novellen for which Halm is known (*Die Marzipan-Lise*; *Die Freundinnen*, and *Das Haus an der Veronabrücke*). He only mentions *Ein Abend zu L.* "en passant", correctly calling it one of Halm's "ersten novellistischen Versuche" (Arendt, 1953: 20). Unfortunately, Arendt is in error when stating: "Halm hat, abgesehen von fragmentarischen Stücken, nur drei vollendete Novellen hinterlassen" (Arendt, 1953: 14). He is referring here specifically to *Die Marzipan-Lise*, *Die Freundinnen*, and *Das Haus an der Veronabrücke*. Yet these are certainly not the only Novellen which Halm composed and completed. Clearly Arendt had not read *St. Sylvesterabend*, *Das Auge Gottes*, *Die Abendgenossen*, or *Ein Abend zu L.*, for none of these Novellen is "fragmentarisch"; indeed, each is perfectly rounded and complete in itself. Furthermore, Arendt calls *Die Marzipan-Lise* "[Halms] erste gelungene Novelle" (Arendt, 1953: 22), a viewpoint which cannot credibly be sustained in the face of the earlier and thematically richer Novelle, *Das Auge Gottes*.

Regrettably, a charge of ignorance, similar to that displayed by Arendt, can be levelled against myself, in that my own doctoral dissertation on Halm (Page, 1988) displays no awareness of *Ein Abend zu L.*; certainly at that time I had not yet deciphered or read the latter story (the word "deciphered" is unfortunately appropriate when dealing with the handwriting of Halm's original MSS). However, unlike Arendt, I did not express the widespread, inaccurate view that Halm only produced "three completed Novellen",

since my D.Phil. research focused specifically on Halm's early, full-scale Novelle, *Das Auge Gottes*.

If one looks at Halm's literary style more generally and, particularly, if one considers the mood and tone of *Ein Abend zu L.*, one sees that the latter diverges considerably from those features that are usually associated with Friedrich Halm. Henry and Mary Garland write of Halm's poetic style of writing: "His poetic writing is a self-conscious tribute to an ideal of beauty, which excluded all that was crass or harsh" (Garland, 1997: 328). The style and content of *Ein Abend zu L.* are far from expressive of an "ideal of beauty"; indeed, the topics of erotic narratophilia or the dangers of masturbation (touched upon by the Devil) can scarcely be said to fall into this category, any more than can the mention of a character who cannot dance because he is (implicitly) afflicted with syphilis!

Similarly to the Garlands, Schlossar (1904: 90) paints Halm as the "Vertreter einer liebenswürdigen Romantik". Again, there is little that is "liebenswürdig" in this Novelle – romantic though it be. The overall tone of the conversations between the narrator and the Devil is, from the Devil's side, tinged with lewdness and leering, and is clearly calculated to shock.

Writing on the sexual subtext of Halm's drama, *Der Sohn der Wildnis*, Peter Skrine makes a pertinent comment that could apply equally well to *Ein Abend zu L.* Skrine (McKenzie and Sharpe, 1998: 149) writes: "... the text ... is shot through with insights that anticipate ideas which only came into the open as the century ended and the generation of Freud and Schnitzler revealed the hidden depths of the psyche and the subconscious." In speaking of

Halm's drama, *Wildfeuer*, Skrine (McKenzie and Sharpe, 1998: 158) also notes "... a pre-echo of Krafft-Ebing, Otto Weininger, and the Viennese preoccupation with the psychology of sex at the turn of the century". If *Ein Abend zu L.* displays anything at all, it certainly displays a "preoccupation with the psychology of sex." It is this moral and psychological seriousness which, amongst other elements, distinguishes it from the frivolities and satirical fun of Lesage's much lighter work, *Le Diable boiteux*.

According to Faust Pachler, *Ein Abend zu L.* nevertheless takes its inspiration from Alain-René Lesage's celebrated picaresque novel, *Le Diable boiteux* (1727), of which it is "... durch und durch Nachahmung" (Pachler, 1878: 230). Internal evidence from *Ein Abend zu L.* indicates that Halm did indeed have Lesage's devil, Asmodée, in mind when he created his own version of the lustful demon, "Asmodi"; yet it is a minor contention of the present article that neither in plot, mood nor devil is Halm's story mere "Nachahmung" of the work of his illustrious French predecessor.

### **Brief Outline of Lesage's *Le Diable boiteux***

Lesage's satirical novel constitutes a protracted array of verbal cameos depicting various human foibles. Set in Madrid, it begins in comic fashion with a philandering Spanish university student, Zambullo, escaping out of the attic window of the house of his latest wronged paramour. Zambullo is being pursued by avengers whom the injured lady has hired to force Zambullo to marry her. He finds his way into a garret, where he discovers a little demon, "Asmodée", corked inside a bottle as the result of a spell cast upon him by a maleficent conjuror. Zambullo

releases the devil (who is only two feet six inches in height and is supported by two crutches – hence his sobriquet, the "limping devil") and earns the latter's gratitude. The Devil promises to serve Zambullo as his tutelary demon: "Je vous apprendrai tout ce que vous voudrez savoir; je vous instruirai de tout ce qui se passe dans le monde; je vous découvrirai les défauts des hommes; je serai votre démon tutélaire" (Lesage, 1727 : 10). The devil then, almost literally, takes Zambullo under his wing; instructing the student to grasp hold of the end of his cloak, he flies out of the window with Zambullo clutching to his coat-tails over the rooftops of Madrid and – through his supernatural power – lifts off the roofs of the houses to reveal the secret goings-on below.

A whole host of adventures ensues, wherein Asmodée discloses to the student all manner of hypocrisy and human failings, from miserliness and lasciviousness to artistic vanity and iatrogenic slaughter. At the end of the tale, Asmodée temporarily takes leave of the student but not before he has so contrived matters that Zambullo is avenged on the paramour who had set a band of roughnecks upon him (at the story's opening) and is provided with a delightful and wealthy fiancée, amidst hopeful promises that the devil and the student may in the future be re-united. The story ends on a note of marital happiness, as Zambullo weds the ravishingly beautiful heiress whom the devil has procured for him.

### **Synopsis of Halm's *Ein Abend zu L.***

The unnamed narrator of *Ein Abend zu L.* tells of how one winter's evening he is delayed by inclement weather in the town of L., on his way home from an extended stay in Paris. While waiting for the snowy

weather to improve and for fresh horses to be brought for his carriage, he decides to pay a visit to his old university friend, K., whom he has not seen for six years and whom he knows resides in this town.

The two friends greet each other warmly and begin to reminisce about their student days together. In the midst of their conversation, however, as the town clock strikes 8.00 p.m., K. suddenly leaps to his feet and tells the narrator that he has an important duty to discharge: he has been appointed director of a lavish ball, which is to be held that evening at the governmental palace in celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Prince.

The narrator accompanies K. to the Palace, where numerous middle-class and aristocratic couples are present and in whose romantic relationships the narrator expresses a keen interest. He especially desires to gain "tiefe Einsicht in das Wesen der Liebe" (Halm, 2012: 12), yet he is familiar with no one at the ball who could provide him with such information. Feeling isolated and alienated, the narrator begins to drink deeply of the circulating champagne.

At this point a strange little old man suddenly appears beside him and offers to disclose the amorous secrets of the guests present at the ball. He further gives a disquisition on the true nature of love, which ultimately resolves itself into nothing more than an apologia for lust. The narrator listens with fascination, but with growing indignation, as he hears of marital infidelity, mutual erotic narratophilia, masturbation, the unnaturalness of homosexuality, love as the mere satisfaction of the sex drive, and even accidental castration in pursuit of love.

The narrator attempts to oppose the cynical views of the old man but finds the latter's apparent logic difficult to counter. Adding to the narrator's sense of the uncanny, the old man appears to be seized by a strange apoplexy whenever any religious theme is broached. Finally, the mysterious stranger inadvertently mentions a certain "Zambullo" whom he had once aided – and immediately the narrator realizes who is standing before him: it is none other than the devil, Asmodi, the protagonist of Lesage's famous novel (the Halmian narrator has just returned from several months in Paris, the centre of Lesage's literary operations). The old man confirms that he is indeed this demon and now reveals himself in his true form. The narrator is horrified, makes the sign of the cross three times in the face of the devil and commands him, in the name of the Almighty, to leave. Asmodi then dissolves into an ever-thinning mist, leaving the narrator behind, shaken and shocked to the core.

As the narrator rushes out of the Palace, he encounters a poor, young, tearful couple in an alley who are expressing their sincere love for each other and their trust in God, on the eve of the young man's departure for his apprenticeship travels. The narrator sees his own view of the reality of true love and religiosity confirmed by this touching example of loyalty, piety and devotion.

The story-teller concludes his narrative by expressing the wish that mankind may one day grow wise and understand the true nature of love.

### **The Persian and Jewish Myths of Asmodeus**

The earliest records of the mythological demon, Asmodeus, extend back to ancient Persia and Zoroastrianism. The name "Asmodeus" is said to derive from *A\_shma daeva*: "demon of lust" (Ashley, 2010: 17). In the Persian tradition, Asmodeus seems to have been conceived of as a disrupter of marriage. (Quanter, 1913: 416-417)

Moving beyond the religious mythology of Persia, the figure of Asmodeus next became chiefly associated with Jewish demonological lore where, analogously, "... he is credited with breaking up marriages and leading people into debauchery" (Ashley, 2010: 17). According to the apocryphal book of *Tobit*, Asmodeus fell into lust with a woman named Sarah and killed her seven successive husbands, rather than allowing them to enjoy their conjugal rights. He was later seen as the inventor of music and dancing, and was further said to be responsible for "... all the new French fashions" (McGlone, 2009). Particularly interesting in the context of Halm's *Novelle* is that Asmodeus was viewed not only as a promoter of lust and gambling, but also as a defender and advocate of homosexuality (Neale, 2010: 31)

When we come to Lesage's conception of Asmodeus, we read that the latter is a helper of unhappy lovers and a promoter of luxury, gambling and chemistry. Interestingly, Lesage also has his devil say: "Je suis l'inventeur des carrousels, de la danse, de la musique, de la comédie, et de toutes les modes nouvelles de France" (Lesage, 1727: 8). It is not without significance that Halm's *Novelle* is set precisely in a luxurious palace, at a lavish

ball, enveloped by music, dance and gambling. Halm clearly knew the appropriate ambience in which to make his demon of lust appear.

### **Contrasts between the Lesage's Novel and Halm's Novelle**

Lesage's rather sprawling novel (a novel which, as one critic has indicated, could have continued indefinitely (Levi, 1994: 457) as it chiefly constitutes a random agglomeration of satirical anecdotes) strikingly contrasts with the more concentrated, tighter *Novelle*-form of Halm's *Ein Abend zu L*. Halm's tale drives relentlessly towards its climax – the revelation of the demonic identity of the mysterious and repulsive old stranger at the centre of the story – whereas Lesage reveals the name and nature of his protagonist in the very first pages of the novel. In Lesage, there is a total absence of suspense and a complete eschewing of clue-dispersal (present in Halm) as regards the true identity of the central character.

Lesage's *Asmodée* is essentially a benign, humorous and likeable demon, and Zambullo grows increasingly fond of him. The young student feels sad when forced to part from him and hopes to be re-united with him at a future date (Lesage, 1727: 167). Clearly there is nothing repellent or obnoxious about *Asmodée*'s personality and aura, as there is about *Asmodi*'s in *Ein Abend zu L*. Lesage's demon is in fact presented as a devil who always keeps his promises and who sincerely appreciates favours bestowed upon him. The same cannot be said of Halm's demon.

Halm's *Asmodi* is indeed radically different - morally degraded, duplicitous, repellent and with a decided aura of the uncanny about him. Unlike his French

predecessor, he evinces a perverted delight in witnessing wayward sexual escapades and infidelity, positively revelling in immorality and debauchery. Whereas Asmodée deplores human sins and failings, Asmodi derives pleasure from them and seeks to promote them to their fullest extent.

As mentioned above, Halm skilfully scatters clues throughout his story as to the true nature of this repugnant old devil: on several occasions Asmodi has a convulsive fit when his interlocutor mentions spiritual matters. Asmodée, by contrast, is never shown as fearful of religious discourse or Christian symbols. He seems wholly indifferent towards Christian notions. His protégé, Zambullo, is also not exercised by ideas of Christian virtue and certainly at no point expresses support for Christian morality or decency. In fact, this hedonistic student has long been devoted to the “demon of luxury, the god Cupid” and affirms to him: “il y a longtemps, comme vous savez, que je vous suis entièrement dévoué” (Lesage, 1727: 8).

Furthermore, Zambullo is delighted to be able to render assistance to the devil (of whose fame he has heard with much approbation) by releasing him from the glass phial in which he has been enclosed. Halm's narrator would be aghast at the idea of releasing and aiding a demon – as indeed he is horrified when he discovers the true identity of the strange man with whom he has been locked in passionate debate.

Halm's narrator is, in fact, the opposite of Zambullo in every imaginable way (at least on the surface). Whereas Zambullo is a young libertine, promiscuously enjoying nocturnal flings without compunction and

subsequently craving revenge for a perceived wrong done him, Halm's narrator is more conscientious in his attitudes and behaviour: his student days are six years behind him, and at the commencement of the *Novelle* he is leaving Paris, with a heavy heart, out of a sense of propriety and the need to renounce the allurements of a voluptuous Polish girl – whereas Zambullo is chased out of the bedroom by those who would force him to “do the honourable thing.”

As a student, Halm's narrator had been an idealist, striving towards the goal of self-betterment, “von Nebeln der Selbstsucht unumhüllt” (Halm, 2012: 1). Indeed, he has a particular disapprobation of selfishness, referring to it as the “pestartige Seuche des Egoismus” (Halm, 2012: 28). Self-disciplined and mature, the narrator is a serious-minded individual who does not indulge in the frivolities of dancing or gambling (Halm, 2012: 2) and yet who, far from being “superior” in his attitudes, has a pronounced capacity for compassion, such as when he evinces pity towards a corpulent elderly gentleman present at the ball whose rather bloated face and form betray signs of a liver disorder. His feelings of compassion even extend to those who are hypocritical calumniators of the worst kind (Halm, 2012: 10).

More significantly for the thematic “Gestalt” and purport of the tale, its narrator is a deeply religious individual who perceives the world through a strikingly moral and spiritual lens. When plunged into the midst of the aforementioned group of slanderous, malicious gossips, he experiences their raucous laughter as “das höllische Gelächter, das meine Tischgenossen über ein neues hingemordetes Opfer ausstießen” (Halm, 2012: 11). Yet he does not feel himself morally superior to them;

he does not despise these slanderers – rather, he feels a sense of communal guilt or sin, saying to himself: “Ich bin auch ein Sünder wie ihr” (Halm, 2012: 11). It is only the desecration of pure love which arouses moral outrage in him, as will subsequently be shown.

The narrator, furthermore, has progressive political views, ardently wishing to see the advent of world peace, the implementation of a civil constitution modelled on Plato’s republic, and the abolition of world slavery (Halm, 2012: 13).

At the conclusion of his verbal duel with the devil, the narrator confesses that he has been unable to defeat the demon’s offensive vision of a new “morality” and various unsavoury claims through logic and reason but that “... die innere Stimme in meinem Busen, das lebendige und innige Gefühl der Wahrheit, meine ganze Seele sich dagegen sträuben ...” (Halm, 2012: 29). In the whole of Lesage’s novel, by contrast, one does not find one sentence, not even a phrase, which reflects such moral probity and sensitivity on the part of the debauched student, Zambullo.

When we turn to the figure of Asmodeus himself, we find considerable differences (*pace* Faust Pachler) between Lesage’s envisioning of the demon and Halm’s. Firstly, Lesage’s Asmodée is tiny in stature, a midget measuring only two-and-a-half feet in height and possessed of the legs of a goat. These features are absent from Halm’s Asmodi, who, while indeed “zusammengeschrumpft” (Halm, 2012: 12), is still recognizably human.

Asmodée’s clothes are far more eccentric and peculiar than those of Asmodi: the demon’s head is enveloped in a kind of turban of red crape and on top of this are

placed some cock’s and peacock’s feathers (Lesage, 1727: 9). Halm’s Asmodi wears no turban but is instead the owner of a hat, crowned, it is true, with some blue and greenish cock’s plumes (an emblem of his vanity and pride). Lesage’s Asmodée wears a cloak painted with all manner of scenes of amorousness and debauchery (Lesage, 1727: 9), whereas Asmodi simply wears a red uniform embellished with gold braiding, and belonging to a national style completely unknown to the narrator (Halm, 2012: 12). The implication is that this uniform is, in fact, alien to the entire world. It is with touches such as this that Halm begins to sow the seeds of suspense: who is this strange individual?

Lesage’s Asmodée has a distinctive voice, but it is not singled out as grating or discordant; on the contrary, it is described as “une voix qui avait quelque chose d’extraordinaire” (Lesage, 1727: 7). In contrast, Asmodi speaks with “eine unangenehme schnarrende Stimme” (Halm, 2012: 12) and has “ein widerlich heisres Lachen” (Halm, 2012: 13), which is lacking in Lesage’s demon.

More importantly, Asmodée is genuinely beneficent, grateful and obliging towards the student, Zambullo, throughout their association, whereas Halm’s Asmodi is typically sardonic, sarcastic and highly critical of the narrator for the duration of their encounter. Asmodi frequently castigates the narrator for being “schwärmerisch” (Halm, 2012: 13) and full of “Vorurtheile” (Halm, 2012: 26). As their conversation approaches its highpoint of conflict and the narrator refuses to subscribe to the demon’s perverse views, Asmodi impatiently tells his moral antagonist:

“In der That, mein Herr! so häufig und lange ich mit jungen Leuten



umgegangen bin, so habe ich doch an keinem den Erbfehler der Jugend, Eigenwillen und Hartnäckigkeit in einem so hohen Grade entdeckt als an Ihnen. Mir thut es leid um Sie, aber die Ausdauer selbst müßte alle Hoffnung aufgeben, Sie von Irrthümern zurückzubringen, die Sie vielleicht bloß deßwegen so hartnäckig verteidigen, weil es Ihnen zu unbequem ist, sich neue Grundsätze anzueignen. In welche unangenehme und traurige Lagen wird Sie dieser Starrsinn noch bringen ... ” (Halm, 2012: 28).

Unlike Lesage's Asmodée, Asmodi is intent on gaining the narrator for the Devil's side. The French demon, Asmodée, is critically aware of the folly of those who give themselves over to vice, but Halm's Asmodi constantly attempts to paint a portrait of morality in which virtue equals vice and vice equates to virtue. In his closing words to the narrator, before literally transforming himself into a cloud of infernal smoke, Asmodi makes one final attempt to induce the former to renounce virtue and to luxuriate in vice:

“Du hast mich erkannt, Sterblicher! ... ich bin zu dir gekommen, dein Glück zu machen: folge mir, verlaß, was du Tugend nennst, was dich elend und unglücklich macht, und du sollst schwelgen, wie noch keiner deines Geschlechtes geschwelgt hat” (Halm, 2012: 30).

It is noteworthy here that the Devil implicitly presents himself as a member of an alien species, significantly different from the narrator: this is no mortal human, but a demon from the smoky depths of Hell itself.

This is, perhaps, an appropriate juncture at which to note that a major difference in “atmosphere” between Lesage's picaresque tale and Halm's Novelle is generated by the element of magical fantasy - strongly present in Lesage but largely lacking in Halm. Whereas Lesage's story involves magicians, magical spells, curses, the capacity to fly through the air and remove rooftops from houses, as well as the power to transform the physical form into that of any person selected, Halm very skilfully shifts the locus of the action from the external realm of the supernatural and the fantastical to the interior sphere of the unconscious - as we shall shortly see.

## **The Themes of Love and Sex**

The central preoccupation of *Ein Abend zu L.* is the nature of love. The narrator of the story specifically requests the (as yet unrecognised) Asmodi to enlighten him on this topic.

The narrator's own vision of love may justly be called idealistic-spiritual, tinged with a degree of sentimentality; unsurprisingly, it is rejected as “überspannt” and a “jugendlich schwärmerische Ansicht” (Halm, 2012: 13) by the devil. Despite the latter's mockery, the narrator is happy to speak of love as “ein so heiliges Gefühl” (Halm, 2012: 14); he insists further upon “die heilige Würde reiner Liebe” (Halm, 2012: 19) and says that it should always be enveloped in a “verklärenden Lichte” (Halm, 2012: 14). He is initially loathe to think ill of the lovers whom he encounters at the ball and is disposed to view their relationships as “zart und rein, ja ... überirdisch” (Halm, 2012: 18).

Unlike his demonic interlocutor, Halm's narrator emphasises the positive qualities

of a genuinely loving relationship and criticises Asmodi for excluding these from his cynical stock-taking of love:

“Die warmen sehnsüchtigen Gefühle des Herzens, das unermessliche Entzücken, ein dem unsern gleichgesinntes Gemüth gefunden zu haben, die stillen unerschöpflichen und unvergänglichen Freuden, die aus solchen Verbindungen für uns hervorgehen, die Beruhigung, den Trost, die Erquickung, die sie uns in allen trüben Stunden, in Noth und Elend in den Zeiten der Verlassenheit gewähren, alles dies bringen Sie nicht in Anschlag” (Halm, 2012: 24).

When the narrator hears from the demon of the aberrant, promiscuous and morally incontinent life-styles allegedly pursued by some of the guests (who, amongst other erotic practices, enjoy sexually stimulating their spouses by regaling them with lascivious accounts of their recent extra-marital erotic flings), the narrator refers to the perpetrators as “so niedrige Charaktere”, who display an “unwürdiges Benehmen” and “sträfliche Gesinnungen” (Halm, 2012: 19). He views them as shameful desecrators of love and even invokes divine judgment upon them, commenting to the devil: “... wenn ich nicht wüßte, daß uns Sterblichen den Blick in das heilige Geheimniß der Weltregierung verwehrt ist, so würde ich Sie fragen, wie ist es möglich, daß der Herr keinen Blitz heruntersendet, um jene Entheiliger der Liebe zu zerschmettern” (Halm, 2012: 19). Most fascinatingly and unexpectedly, the narrator apparently does not include homosexual love in his strictures, as we shall presently observe.

What precisely constitutes the devil’s view of love? He regards love as nothing more

than “Geschlechtstrieb” and deems love relationships and specifically marriage as merely a license for the satisfaction of that same bodily drive. He declares to the narrator: “... die Liebe ist nichts anderes als ein ... abgeschlossener Vertrag. Ihr Zweck ist Befriedigung des Geschlechtstriebes” (Halm, 2012: 25); marriage is solely for providing sexual “Freuden, deren Genuß doch der einzige Zweck der Ehe ist” (Halm, 2012: 27).

Some couples, the devil notes, do not possess the sex urge in equal measure; in such cases, the sexually driven person is effectively purchasing sex from his partner, in return for the satisfaction of “anderweitigen Bedürfnisse” which that other person possesses (Halm, 2012: 25). Where the partners experience a sex drive of equal intensity, there one can legitimately speak of mutual exchange rather than purchase (Halm, 2012: 25).

If all people are possessed of a sex drive, albeit of varying degrees of force, then why not simply satisfy these bodily urges through masturbation? The devil answers his own implicit question by stating, “... daß wir uns zu seiner [i.e. des Geschlechtstriebes] Befriedigung, wenigstens nicht ohne bedeutenden Nachtheil der Gesundheit, nicht selbst genug seyn können” (Halm, 2012: 25). This was, of course, the prevailing (erroneous) 19<sup>th</sup>-century view of masturbation: that it was injurious to the health. One might expect that the devil would advocate masturbation – after all, he is not noted for his devotion to moral or physical health and self-restraint. The reason he does not, of course, is that Asmodeus is not only the demon of lust and sex, but also the devil of marriage-breakups: he *wants* people to enter into relationships wherein they can use sex as an exchangeable commodity (a “...

käufliche Waare" – Halm, 2012: 24) and then purchase extra-marital sex when the relationship subsequently fails to satisfy their physical needs.

To the devil's claim that 'love' is simply a purchasable commodity, the narrator indignantly observes that brothels must then constitute the temples of real love: "Ich erwiderte [sic] die Anrede des Fremden ... nur mit der Bemerkung, daß nach seiner Ansicht Bordelle – die Tempel wahrer Liebe seyen" (Halm, 2012: 25). The demon concurs, indicating that love is nothing more than "der erwachte Geschlechtstrieb" (Halm, 2012: 25), and adds the biting comment that people who subscribe to the narrator's mediaeval notion of love are mentally ill and should be treated accordingly:

"daher rührt jener grundfalsche romantische Begriff von Liebe, der aus dem Mittelalter stammend sich bis auf unsere Zeiten erhalten hat, und billig als eine Art von Geistesverwirrung der damit behafteten Menschen betrachtet und behandelt werden sollte" (Halm, 2012: 25).

A striking aspect of the exchange between Asmodi and the narrator is that whereas the narrator represents a more romantic, feeling-based defence of love, the devil operates with the dialectical tools of a veritable Enlightenment philosopher. He is predominantly cool, seemingly objective, "reasonable" and detached and characteristically speaks of "folgerechter Schlüsse" (Halm, 2012: 24) with a "kalten ruhigen Beredsamkeit" (Halm, 2012: 13). He presents himself as a wise old gentleman possessed of "reife Beobachtung und Besonnenheit" (Halm, 2012: 14), as well as "Kaltblütigkeit" (Halm, 2012: 23), claiming to be able to provide a rich fund of "Einsicht" (Halm, 2012: 13) and "Erkenntnis" (Halm,

2012: 14). It is thus not surprising that the narrator should turn to him for "Aufklärung" (Halm, 2012: 14). This word is significant and in fact constitutes one of the motifs of the tale (appearing at Halm, 2012: 16, 18, 20): the clash between a putative "Enlightenment" approach to love and that of the "Romantic". It should be noted in this context that Halm was writing at a time when Romanticism was still a living force on the literary scene of Austria and Germany: just two years earlier, for instance, Eichendorff had published his *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*. Halm himself was born in the year 1806 directly into the temporal heart of the Romantic movement. One of the poets he most admired in his youthful years was the Romantic lyrical poet, Ludwig Uhland; he was additionally influenced by the early poems of Heinrich Heine. Halm's affinity with broadly Romantic ideas and ideals and his suspicion of *ratio*-fixated Enlightenment values are evident in *Ein Abend zu L.*

The devil's specific form of Enlightenment embodies itself in sharp, chilly intellect – and such cold acuteness of mind is specifically condemned by Halm in his poem, "Dämonologisches: Zwei". Here the poet speaks of the 'Kunstgriff' which the Devil employs to drag man into perdition: excessive emotionality lacking in insight or brilliance of intellect bereft of warmth of heart can lead man to satanic damnation:

Und soll ich ihn mit einem Wort euch nennen,  
Vernehmt, das ist des Bösen ganze List,  
Und wird es sein und war's zu jeder Frist,  
Er läßt in uns sich Licht und Wärme trennen!  
Bald stiehlt er listig uns des Herzens Schätze,  
Und schärft und stählt und waffnet unsern Geist;  
Gefühllos, kalt und darum doppelt dreist,  
Verstrickt uns Selbstsucht bald in Satans Netze.

...  
Das ist es! Kaltes Licht und dunkle Flammen,  
Das ist der Grund, auf dem sein Reich beruht;  
Verstandeshelle ohne Herzensgluth,  
Gluth ohne Einsicht sind's, die uns verdammen.  
(Halm, 1856, Vol. 1: 89)

Feelingless “Verstandeshelle” is a perfect characterization of Asmodi: he is frosty logic, intellect and rationalisation (albeit of a specious kind) personified and knows nothing of the “treasures of the heart.” His very face reveals his nature: the narrator speaks of the “wohl scharfen Verstand, aber gar kein Gefühl verrathende[s] Antlitz des Fremden” (Halm, 2012: 19). For this demon, marriage is merely the legalisation of lust and when combined with the “prejudice” of morality, constitutes nothing more than a “Fessel und Kette” (Halm, 2012: 23). All such laws relating to morality should be abrogated, he insists. He believes that all men – not just politicians and administrators – should be free to amend and make all laws, including the marriage laws, since they rest on nothing but mere “opinion”:

“Wenn nun Gesetz nichts ist, als Meinung, warum sollte es, da es so viele verschiedene Ansichten auf Erden gibt, nicht auch eine Behauptung geben können, die jener, die das Gesetz aufstellt gerade zuwider ist und warum sollte die letztere dem Gesetze widersprechende nicht auch die richtigere seyn können ... warum sollte also die Meinung, die Gesetz ist, nicht durch die Meinung derer, die Unterthanen des Gesetzes sind, aufgehoben werden können. Und dieses ist auch wirklich der Fall ...” (Halm, 2012: 23).

With views such as these Asmodi falls into the “type” of Enlightenment philosopher manifested (at least in the popular imagination) by such as Adam Weishaupt,

of whose secret Enlightenment society, the Illuminaten-Orden, the Abbé Augustin Barruel said: “With respect to Government they had also asserted, that all men were equal and free, and they had concluded that every citizen had an equal right to form the laws ...” (Barruel, 1799: 14). Halm’s devil is an Enlightenment egalitarian – but solely along lustful lines.

An intriguing difference between Asmodi and his idealistic interlocutor, however, manifests itself in the sphere of homosexuality. As was indicated earlier in this essay, Asmodeus has traditionally been viewed as a defender of homosexuality. Halm inverts this attribute, and presents Asmodi as an antagonist of homosexual love. The narrator, by contrast, seems to view homosexual affection in a positive, ennobling light – reminiscent of ideas encountered in Plato, of whom the narrator is an avowed admirer. It is appropriate at this juncture to provide pertinent quotations on the issue from the text itself.

After hearing of Asmodi’s recommendations that the narrator should follow the faithless example of some of the couples at the ball and pursue a path of wanton promiscuity, giving in solely to the sex urge - which for Asmodi is the alpha and omega of love - the narrator reacts by saying that if such an orientation be “natural”, then he would prefer to follow the path of “Unnatur” (Halm, 2012: 22). He then follows this up with a striking comment, remarking:

“Und ist wirklich Geschlechtstrieb Liebe, ja auch nur ihre Bedingung, die ältesten Mythen kennen schon Liebe auch zwischen Männern oder verdiente die unzertrennliche Freundschaft des Pylades und Orest, Kastors und Pollux, Theseus und Pirithous nicht diesen schönen Nahmen?” (Halm, 2012: 22).

The narrator, a votary of Plato, here invokes a series of Greek male relationships whose names are bywords for homoerotic intimacy (writing of Castor and Pollux, for example, James Davidson states that gay Spartan couples modelled themselves on this devoted pair - Davidson, 2008: 335). Moreover, Halm's narrator concedes that, even if the sex drive is the determinant cause of love, that fact does not vitiate the beauty of loving relationships as evinced by these famed mythological male lovers. This is a stunning remark and brings us back to Peter Skrine's lightly veiled speculation that Halm himself, perhaps, had homoerotic proclivities. I myself (Page, 1988) have delineated a homosexual orientation (whether overt or repressed) as revealed by some of Halm's early writings. The present work is further evidence that Halm found the topic of homosexuality or homoerotically-tinged relationships of interest and that he certainly did not view the subject in a negative light.

It is quite otherwise, however, with his devil. Asmodi castigates the narrator for being a supporter of something that is contrary to nature and dismisses stories of intimate male friendships as mere inventions of idle poets. He even includes Halm's favourite poet, Schiller, in this stricture:

“Was ferners die Liebe betrifft, die nach Ihrer Behauptung Männer für einander empfunden haben sollen, so liefert diese Aeüßerung einen neuen Beweis für den oft bewährten Satz, daß selbst ein vollkommen und gründlich ausgebildeter Verstand nicht von den Irrthümern schützen kann, zu denen jugendliche Unbesonnenheit und eine gewaltsame Uiberspannung [sic] des Nervensystemes uns hinreißen. Glauben Sie mir die Mythen von Pylades und Orest, Kastor und Pollux, Theseus und Pirithous

sind eben so gut Fabeln, als das Verhältniß des Marquis Posa und des Don Carlos und nur die Erfindungen müßiger Köpfe, die um Beifall einzuernten, sich nicht scheueten den gesunden Menschenverstand durch ihre abentheuerlichen Fiktionen vor den Kopf zu stoßen, da der ungebildeten Menge nichts so sehr gefällt, als was der Natur und aller Wahrscheinlichkeit am meisten entgegen ist.” (Halm, 2012: 23).

According to Asmodi, belief in the reality and validity of love between men is simply the result of heady youthfulness and an overwrought central nervous system. As with masturbation, surprisingly this demon views intimate male relationships as being linked to physiological disorder and danger. His idealistic interlocutor, however, proves himself to be more liberal in this sphere than the demon of lust to whom he is unwittingly speaking. As remarked earlier, the narrator insists that if Asmodi's view of love and sex is “Natur”, then he, the narrator, would far prefer to follow the path of “Unnatur”. This is again a striking statement issuing from an aristocratic Austrian (as the text indicates the narrator to be and as indeed Halm himself was) in the year 1828.

### **The Role of the Unconscious**

More than once in this Novelle, the narrator remarks how he finds Asmodi “unheimlich” and “sonderbar” (Halm, 2012: 14, 27, 33). This calls to mind Freud's famous essay on “Das Unheimliche” (Freud, 1919), in which the Austrian psychoanalyst links feelings of the uncanny with eruptions into the conscious mind of repressed psychical material which the possessor would prefer not to face.

Is it possible that Asmodi represents strata of the narrator's psyche which have been repressed until now and which, under the influence of alcohol, rise up as veritable hallucinations? Is Asmodi the externalized, subliminally engendered figure on whom the narrator projects his own innermost fears and longings?

It seems permissible to read the story in this light. At the commencement of the tale, the narrator meets up with his old university friend, K., and makes an interesting comment regarding their encounter: "Ein Schatz von Ereignissen, Beobachtungen, und Erfahrungen blieb in unserm Gedächtnisse unbenützt und unbeachtet liegen" (Halm, 2012: 1). Mental material, left unattended, ignored, is the matrix out of which the later encounter with the devil will spring. As the two friends reminisce, the narrator feels that powerful dreams "umgaukelten" him and his friend (Halm, 2012: 3). Dreams arise precisely from the realm of the unconscious and it is thus fitting that the narrator should tell of how previously buried feelings and ignored memories of past experiences begin to rise up again into conscious awareness: "... alles stieg in frischer Lebendigkeit aus dem Grabe der Vergangenheit zu uns wieder herauf" (Halm, 2012: 2). It is in this mental framework that the narrator sets off with his friend to the ball, where certain "Gefühle tratten in innigere Lebendigkeit aus der Tiefe des Herzens ... hervor" (Halm, 2012: 16) and where the demon of lust will rise up before him.

At the ball itself, the narrator repeatedly imbibes the champagne that is circulating amongst the guests. Just minutes before Asmodi makes his unexpected appearance before the narrator's startled gaze, the latter seems to be lapsing into a dreamy reverie. It is not unreasonable to assume

that the narrator is, at this point, teetering on the brink of inebriation and that the apparition of the devil has sprung from his own released unconscious mind. No one else seems to notice Asmodi, even when the latter is gripped by an apparent epileptic fit; it is evident, therefore, that the demon is either a projection of the narrator's own imagination, or else a supernatural perception to which this sensitive man, loosened by alcohol, has broken through. When the narrator leaves the government palace, at the end of his encounter with the devil, he inwardly comments that he does not care if the other guests think him drunk or deranged (Halm, 2012: 30), and as he makes his way along the dimly-lit alleys, he has to take care not to bump into the houses at his side (Halm, 2012: 31). Halm thus indicates that his narrator is, to say the least, somewhat tipsy.

It is in this state of semi-inebriation that the narrator faces notions and feelings that he would normally exclude from his conscious mind. Again and again during his colloquy with the devil, he feels disgust at the viewpoints advanced by Asmodi, and in the end has to rush out of the brightly lit palace into the darkness of the night outside. This is an enactment of the narrator's temporary exposure to repressed psychical material, his "enlightenment" of denied desires and his subsequent renewed repression of them when the intensity of their illuminated presence threatens to overwhelm him.

What is the nature of that repressed psychical material? Clearly the desire to live life under the sway of the sexual impulse, to luxuriate in sheer sensuality, unbridled eroticism and unrestrained promiscuity. The narrator is, on the conscious level, a very decent, moral individual. Once his super-ego has loosened its grip, however

and his inhibitions are dissolved by alcohol, he is confronted with feelings and desires which he normally would reject – at least in part - with disgust and horror. This is the source of the “Unheimliche” which he experiences whenever Asmodi (his own embodied unconscious) is verbalizing the narrator’s deepest dreads, longings and fears. In connection with the term, “un-heim-lich”, we note too that the narrator of the story is precisely away from his “Heim” – on a return journey - and that he had intended to visit the theatre that night. Instead, he is exposed to the theatre of his own unconscious mind.

Part of that repressed theatre of the unconscious consists of Enlightenment values that the passionate narrator has pushed out of his consciousness and into subliminal regions, from whence they now break forth. The narrator is depicted as ‘schwärmerisch’, a young man given over to extreme and passionate feeling. Such *Schwärmerei* is a quality and attitude of mind that had been rejected, for instance, by leading Enlightenment thinkers and writers of earlier decades, such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (see his *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* and, not least, his dramatic poem, *Nathan der Weise*). Halm’s narrator does not wish to acknowledge an inner need for Enlightenment cool-headedness. For him, such things are ‘of the devil’ and thus are rejected, indeed repressed. But the stirrings of his unconscious will not be brooked and these ideas rise to the fore in a distorted form, edged around with heartless chilliness.

It is further in this context of a distorting unconscious that the demon’s rejection of homosexuality must also be seen. At a conscious, rational level, the narrator can see nothing to deplore in the phenomenon

of idealised male friendships, as found in the myths of the Greeks and also portrayed by Schiller. Yet it is evident that the narrator chooses not to emphasise the possible *physical* dimension of such affections. In his unconscious, however, there is the knowledge that such intimate relationships can be more than “platonic” and deep within him there lurks the fear that such attachments are contrary to nature and expressive of a defective inner-emotional world. It is such “homosexual panic” that Asmodi represents as he castigates the narrator for espousing a form of love that is “contrary to nature”.

Yet despite this, Halm’s narrator (a complex and far from uni-dimensional character) finally aligns himself with the path of “Unnatur”, rather than with the devil’s cold dismissal of male love as a mere perverted phantasm. While the narrator could at one level perhaps be seen as a rather conservative figure, rejecting on the conscious plane the sexual potentialities of close male love, this view needs to be balanced against the narrator’s explicit concession that the ‘Geschlechtstrieb’ can truly constitute love or, at least, its precondition and that the noble title of ‘Liebe’ should not be denied such devoted male pairs of whom he speaks (Halm, 2012: 22). It is important to remember that behind the narrator stands Friedrich Halm himself, who at precisely the time of the composition of this Novelle was deeply in love (his early poems make this clear) with his friend and mentor, Herr J. C. von Reich – to whom in fact this and other stories and poems of the period are dedicated (see Page, 1988). By conceding, through his narrator, that the sexual drive aligned to mutual male affection can still be worthy of the name of ‘love’, Halm is presenting a *Weltanschauung* that is more ‘enlightened’ and progressive than that of the

Devil, for all the latter's representations of quasi-liberal and distorted 'Enlightenment' values. The issue of homo-erotically tinged male bonding and its legitimacy seemingly remained a matter of interest for Halm well into his maturity and manifested itself once more – as Peter Skrine has hinted - in his much later drama, *Wildfeuer*.

## Conclusion

In view of its daring delineations of human sexuality and repressed sexual urges, its potentially progressive view of same-sex love and general exploration of the human psyche in the grip of passion *Ein Abend zu L.* constitutes a remarkable early 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary document, providing pre-echoes of psycho-analytical ideas that would take the Western world by storm less than a century later – ideas that issued, of course, from Halm's Viennese compatriot, Sigmund Freud.

*Ein Abend zu L.*, sounds the opening chords of a theme of aberrant (from the contemporaneous viewpoint) sexual behaviour that would preoccupy Halm throughout his life and rise to a humorous crescendo in *Wildfeuer* and a much darker one in his final great Novelle, *Das Haus an der Veronabrücke*.

In the words of Peter Skrine, in a different Halmian context, it might be asserted of Halm's early yet daring Novelle that *Ein Abend zu L.*, is indeed nothing short of a "personal confession in [devilish] disguise" (McKenzie and Sharpe, 1998: 158).

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