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**Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's Descriptive Technique:  
The Grand Style, Mannerism and External Characterization**

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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

This paper, as its title implies, concerns itself with only certain aspects of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's descriptive technique, principally with the descriptive methods the Swiss writer employs in his character sketches, and, to a lesser degree, with the description of setting or background. This restriction is necessary, I believe, in order to permit a thorough treatment of some one facet of his art in a paper of this length. The works by Meyer which are referred to in the following pages are four: a novel, Jürg Jenatsch (1876); and three Novellen, Der Heilige (1880), Die Hochzeit des Mönchs (1884), and Plautus im Nonnenkloster (1882).

In these four works description of fictional personalities and the settings in which the author places them is very important, much more so, in fact, than in the works of most writers. There are several reasons for this, two of which are suggested in the title of this paper, that is, the "grand style" and external characterization. The very useful term, "grand style," I borrow from Arthur Burkhard's critical work, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer: The Style and the Man. Burkhard believes that Meyer was striving consciously for a striking, unusual effect in his descriptive technique, an effect which the Swiss poet felt he could best attain through imitation of Renaissance

plastic art. Such an imitation requires the artist to emphasize the magnificent, the rich and the universal, requires that he strive to portray the essential, not the incidental, and requires, finally, that he deal with the great and ignore the trivial. Meyer attempts to accomplish this in his work, and the style he employs to do so Mr. Burkhard designates, fittingly I believe, the "grand style." As we will see in the following pages, Meyer had an artistic ideal, and a part of that ideal was to describe his characters and settings in the grand manner. Because the effort to do so was a conscious one we find in his works descriptions which, in their striking beauty and quality of richness, are something more than conventional pictorial representations of reality. Rather, they are impressive examples of Meyer's highest artistic achievement, the synthesis of noble, heroic subject matter with a stately prose style. Thus, the striving for a grand style is one reason for the great importance of the descriptive technique in Meyer's prose work. The second reason, mentioned previously, is what I call "exterior characterization." I mean by this simplified term revelation of character, emotion and state of mind through description of the external, physical appearance of the fictional figure concerned. Meyer, for reasons which will be discussed later, prefers to explain his characters in this way rather than by divulging their thoughts to the reader directly. Obviously this principle places a great burden on descriptive methods as well as



the artist, and it is the second reason for the importance of Meyer's descriptive technique.

The organization of this paper into three chapters and several subtopics is, for reasons of criticism, more desirable than discussion of the four works separately. Thus, some very important descriptions may be referred to as many as three or four times in order to discuss different aspects of Meyer's descriptive technique. Also this form of organization facilitates my task, which is to show how Meyer's timid personality, sheltered life and exposure to great plastic art influenced his descriptive technique, and to show that he was consciously striving to attain an artistic ideal, an ideal which is suggested in the term "grand style," and that occasionally there is artificiality, pose and mannerism in his descriptions, defects which result from Meyer's overstrained efforts to master the grand style.

Three works have been especially valuable to me in the writing of this paper, Burkhard's Conrad Ferdinand Meyer: The Style and the Man, which I mentioned previously, Franz Ferdinand Baumgarten's Das Werk Conrad Ferdinand Meyers, and the biographical work, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer und sein Werk, by Harry Maync.

## The Grand Style

Meyer loved greatness in all things, both because his aristocratic temperament was repelled by crudity and the trivial, and because the present was too brutal, too near<sup>1</sup> him. However, Meyer's reserve is not altogether to be explained by his aristocratic background. From his father he inherited apparently not only a nervous temperament but also a very marked tendency to timidity and even a fondness for utter seclusion. In fact the only friend of his early youth was his sister, Betsy, who remained his closest friend and adviser until he married.<sup>2</sup>

Meyer's knowledge of art was acquired principally on extended tours with his sister. In 1857 the two travelled to München, the art capital of Germany, and in 1858 they travelled for the first time to Rome where they stayed two months. Here, as in München, Meyer absorbed the art of the Renaissance which he was only now discovering. In 1871 the pair journeyed again to Italy and Meyer, who now was struggling to write and thus was more conscious of his need for an artistic model and ideal, found both in Renaissance art. In the works of the Renaissance painters, Meyer told his biographer and friend, Adolf Frey, he saw the very embodiment of his art ideal.<sup>3</sup>

The Renaissance artist by whom Meyer was most influenced was Michelangelo. To be sure, Meyer loved other artists, Titian, Veronese and Raphael to name a few, and in their works he found the heroic atmosphere, sublime gestures and form for which he longed in his own art. Before Michelangelo's

statues he found still more, however; he found the surface expression of emotion and character and the sculptural form which concentrates on the essential and characteristic rather than on the incidental.<sup>1</sup> In Michelangelo's work he found, his sister reports, a model for his own art which he called "gewaltige Verkörperung grosser Gedanken."<sup>2</sup> Whatever his artistic model was, it is true that in Meyer's works can be found the serenity, formal restraint and cold objectivity of Michelangelo's statues; one critic, in fact, finds that "Meyer's men and women seem marble forms cut by a sculptor...."<sup>3</sup>

Meyer's style has even been called "Homeric" because he "reaches his goal not by enumeration of features, but by occasional mention of a single characteristic," and because external description is significant in understanding the psychological processes of a character.<sup>4</sup>

Meyer's sculptural treatment of his figures will be discussed in detail below; the purpose of these introductory remarks is simply to show that Meyer's aristocratic temperament was a very important influence on his "grand style."<sup>5</sup> His timid, introverted personality longed for greatness, and this yearning expressed itself in his art.

The phrase "grand style" refers in this paper not only to Meyer's prose style, but also to the descriptive use of light, color, acoustical effects, and to the pictorial or even sculptural technique used in several descriptions. Each of these topics will be treated below .



One of the first things even a casual reader of Meyer notices, especially in Jürg Jenatsch, is his tendency to fill his descriptions with rich materials, beautiful architecture and elegant, cultivated characters. Meyer apparently never concerns himself with the ordinary and trivial if he can avoid doing so. Thus, when Jürg's friend, Fausch, watches the arrival of Duke Rohan's cortège from his taproom in Venice, he can hardly avoid being impressed by the splendor of the party:

Aus den herrschaftlichen Gondeln...war schon manche zarte Dame gestiegen; manche zierliche Gestalt, umhüllt von den weichen Falten dunkler Seide und das Antlitz durch die sammetne Halbmaske vor der Kälte geschützt...<sup>1</sup> (Jenatsch, p.78).

We find silk and velvet, aristocratic fabrics, in another scene involving Duke Rohan. When Waser and Jenatsch have a short audience with the "good duke" in a cool and spacious garden, they see the shimmering of "Seidengewänder" through the trees and speak to the duke's wife, "eine schlanke blasse Dame," who is leaning on "sammetnen Polstern!" (Jenatsch, p. 50). The duke, one of the most sympathetic and elegant of all of Meyer's figures, is almost always seen in "dunkle Stoffe" (p. 90) which is in keeping with his good taste and Calvinist simplicity. In another scene, when Waser meets Grimanic, hoping to obtain Jürg's freedom, Meyer again provides for his figures a rich, luxurious background: "Das einzige, hohe Fenster war von reichen, bis auf den Fussboden herabfliessenden Falten

grüner Seide halb verhüllt..." (p. 120).

Meyer's descriptive use of rich fabrics is a very characteristic but minor element of the grand style. It is characteristic because it shows his striving for a striking, unusual descriptive effect. He strives for such an effect in several ways, one of which is his prose style. Although few critics mention Meyer's prose style except in passing, it is obvious that he consciously was writing in an elevated, pure style throughout his works, and in a rhythmic, even alliterative style in certain passages of his prose.

This careful working of prose is not surprising, for to say merely that the Swiss poet was a careful writer would be an understatement. The fact is that he was a fastidious artist, almost abnormally so. From the original version of Plautus im Nonnenkloster which first appeared in the Deutsche Rundschau to the edition in book form, there are some fifty changes. There were as many as seven hundred and fifty changes in Die Hochzeit des Mönchs from its first appearance until its final version.<sup>1</sup>

Meyer's description of Duke Rohan illustrates this careful, conscious striving for a "grand" prose style which owes much of its effectiveness to a subdued rhythm and very pronounced use of alliteration:

In diesem Augenblicke zeigte ihm der Herzog seine scharfgezeichneten Züge im Profil, und der Ausdruck langgeübter Selbstbeherrschung und schmerzlicher Milde, der auf dem etwas

gealterten geistvollen Gesichte unverkennbar vorherrschte, überwältigte seltsamerweise den Bündner wie mit der Macht einer erwachenden alten Liebe (p. 91).

After close examination of this passage one might even say Meyer has carried alliteration too far, as in the phrase, "gealterten geistvollen Gesichte," were it not for the fact that the total effect of this alliteration is on first reading inconspicuous and subtly pleasing. Unfortunately, there are passages which doubtless do carry alliteration too far, and the total effect is neither subtle nor pleasing. For example, again in Jürg Jenatsch, two beautiful young women pray in a Venetian cathedral as the duke's party looks on admiringly:

Durch die das Angesicht verhüllenden schwarzen Spitzenschleier schienen schwärzere Brauen und Wimpern und flogen Blicke, deren schmachtendes Feuer zwischen der Himmelskönigin und ihren kriegerischen Beschauern sich teilten (p. 94).

We find this same pronounced use of alliteration in the description of the room in Venice in which Jürg and Duke Rohan meet:

Dieses reich vergoldete längliche Gemach mit seiner Reihe von fünf Fensterbogen mochte die auf den Kanal schauende Fassade des prunkenden Bauwerks bilden. Der Herzog kehrte der dümmrigen Fensterwand den Rücken zu. Er sass, in einem Buche lesend, vor dem hohen, mit verschlungenen Figuren und Fruchtschnüren von Marmor umrahmten und überladenen Kamine, in welchem ein lebhaftes Feuer flammte (p. 112).

This description is, incidentally, typical not only of Meyer's prose style, but also his love of architectural beauty, a love which is betrayed in his work. More often



than not description of the background for a "scene" is far more imaginative, detailed and interesting than descriptions of the characters themselves. This might be explained as Meyer's tendency to describe in a sculptural or at least pictorial manner, a manner which is easier to bring to bear on static settings than living characters; this tendency will be discussed in greater detail below.

It should be quite apparent now that Meyer's prose, especially in descriptions of the sort mentioned in the preceding paragraph, was written very carefully and with the intention of creating a striking effect. There are several more passages in Jürg Jenatsch alone which illustrate the use of a stately, elegant style, but one more will suffice to show in particular Meyer's inclination to exploit the alliterative effect. The setting described (again in Venice) is the richly appointed chamber of Jürg's bitter enemy, Grimani:

Das einzige, hohe Fenster war von reichen, bis auf den Fussboden herabfliessenden Falten grüner Seide halb verhüllt, doch streifte ein voller Lichtstrahl die silberglänzende Frühstückstafel und verweilte, von den verlockend zarten Farben angezogen, auf einer lebensgrossen Venus aus Tizians Schule (p. 120).

These passages just quoted are typical of only one side of Meyer's descriptive prose style. Description of characters, especially minor ones, is usually very simple and straightforward. This will be very obvious when we discuss the relationship between description and characteri-

zation in Meyer's work. As one critic points out, Meyer normally uses only one or two adjectives to describe a character, although the description of an important figure may be found in many such short simple phrases over fifty pages or even more.<sup>1</sup>

We have already discussed Meyer's aristocratic background and temperament in the introduction to the chapter on grand style above. Both were doubtless partially responsible for his personal and artistic reserve. We saw that his peculiar temperament was attracted to an artistic ideal which aims to avoid the crude or trivial and emphasizes greatness, in whatever form. As Meyer himself said, "I like above all to absorb myself in by-gone times which permit me to treat the Ewig-Menschliche more artistically than would the brutal actuality of contemporary material."<sup>2</sup> Thus, Meyer sought not only a grand style, but also grand matter as he found it in history. Although the Swiss writer deals with real historical figures in his works, he deals with them in a distant, elevated manner. He heightens some of these superior men into almost superhuman beings, so that we feel we really know nothing at all about their character--indeed, this is the real test of Meyer's great characters, this enigmatic, inscrutable quality. At any rate, the hero is such an important figure in Meyer that it will be worthwhile to see how he describes this type.

The relationship between description and characterization in some of Meyer's prose works will be considered later. The purpose of this discussion of the hero is to show Meyer's descriptive technique in relation to the grand style and manner, and this is perhaps best seen in such hero-descriptions.

Jürg Jenatsch, one of Meyer's greatest and most puzzling heroes, is described, as is Ezzelin (in Die Hochzeit des Mönchs), as a physically superior man who seems to have an unlimited amount of energy. Early in the novel Meyer focuses our attention on Jürg's "breit ausgeprägte Stirn" (p. 12). To anyone at all familiar with Meyer this is a certain indication of mental superiority. Dante and Ezzelin are described similarly. Later in the novel, the hero appears astride a "schäumendes, kohlschwarzes Tier," and we see the "Schimmer eines Scharlackkleides und eine hochragende blaue Hutfeder..." (p. 164). Again and again we find the same description of Jenatsch, or a similar one. We find him on a "schwarzen Hengst" (p. 216), a "schäumenden Rappen" (p. 227) and a "sich bäumenden, stampfenden Rappen;" (p. 261), and almost always his scarlet coat and blue feather are also mentioned. Here Meyer describes the hero in the grand style. A horse is described as a stamping, pawing stallion in order to reinforce the idea of the hot-blooded hero. We cannot imagine Becket on such a horse. The feather and scarlet coat serve the same purpose, to fill out the hero-image; the scarlet color



and description of the stallion add to the masculinity of the characterization. One critic suggests that Meyer was bent on depicting "Ausnahmemenschen, Kraftmenschen, Uebersmenschen, in whom he admired the energy and force of character which he did not possess." This statement is supported particularly by the description of Jenatsch, as seen through his friend Waser's eyes: "Er (Waser) hing wie gebannt an dem starren Ausdrücke des metallbraunen Angesichts. Auf den grossen Zügen lag gleichgültiger Trotz, der nach Himmel und Hölle, nach Tod und Gericht nichts mehr fragte" (p. 260). Jenatsch is no longer a human being; he has committed acts, bad and good, of which a normal being is incapable, and he is superior physically to everyone around him. Near the end of the novel we are told that Jürg's "gewaltiger Körperbau und sein feuriges Antlitz machten ihn noch immer zum Mächtigsten und Schönsten unter allen" (p. 267).

Duke Rohan is a superior person, superior morally to everyone else in the "Bündner Geschichte." Thus, like Becket, he has a "blasse Antlitz" and wears an expression of "schmerzlicher Milde" (Jenatsch, p. 91). Elsewhere we read of his "mildes, durchdringendes Auge" (p. 51).

Dante is still another superior man, an enigmatic figure as are Jenatsch and Becket. His superiority is both moral and intellectual, and his physical appearance is apparently very imposing. Like Jenatsch, he has the

"grosse Züge" of the Meyer hero, and in his long garments he seems to be from another world (Hochzeit, p. 280). Physically we know very little about Dante, nor do we need a detailed description. The indefinite, even mysterious quality of the description of the poet is very important in creating the atmosphere of the frame of the story and in making Dante something more than an ordinary human being. The phrase "grosse Züge" tells us very little about a face, but, in Meyer's work, it tells us a great deal about the man. Meyer is hardly more definite when "eine himmlische Verklärung erleuchtete seine (Dante's) strengen Züge" (p. 284). Thus, what we see is not a man described in exhaustive detail, but a shadowy, mysterious figure whose "description...is more interesting than the story itself."<sup>1</sup>

Another undeniably superior figure in Hochzeit des Mönchs is that of Ezzelin who is a cruel, unscrupulous and yet awe-inspiring character. He is described by Cangrande, Dante's model for Ezzelin, as "'eine gebietende Gestalt...mit gestäubtem schwarzen Stirnhaar'" (p. 286). He is very often described in an impressive pose, or running his fingers meditatively through his beard (p.299), and whenever he is in the company of others he sits or stands apart from and superior to them. For instance, after the accident on the Brenta in which Diana loses her intended husband and old Vicedomini his intended heirs, Ezzelin, who unintentionally caused the catastrophe

by making a heroic gesture from the shore, sits at a distance from the others: "Der Gruppe gegenüber sass Ezzelin, die Rechte auf das gerollte Breve wie auf einen Feldherrnstab gestützt" (p. 297).

To summarize: we have seen how Meyer makes style, or manner, fit his subject matter, the superior man or hero, if we use the term in a broad, Carlyle-like sense. To produce an aura of mystery around his heroes, Meyer describes them vaguely, but nonetheless in a manner which causes the individual reader to conjure up his own picture of, say, Dante, with his "grosse Züge" or Ezzelin's "gebietende Gestalt." Meyer's heroes are not described as ordinary men, but neither are they meant to be so regarded.

In critical works on Meyer there is considerable comment on his tendency to visualize scenes and then to describe them pictorially or sculpturally; as to whether or not Meyer really did this, critics disagree. This paper will assume that Meyer did visualize at least some of his "scenes," though Baumgarten says that he did not,<sup>1</sup> and will consider now some of the several influences which led him to use a plastic descriptive technique.

Maync quotes Meyer as having said, "Es ist mir ein unentbehrliches Bedürfnis geworden, alles nach aussen schaubar, sichtbar darzustellen."<sup>2</sup> Critics and biographers give several reasons for Meyer's inclination to describe



pictorially or sculpturally, and one reason put forward by these critics (Lerber, Maync, Burkhard, Silz and Corrodi) is that Meyer instinctively visualized his scenes and merely described them as he saw them.

Ermatinger believes that the author's timidity, which has previously been discussed, influenced his descriptive technique considerably. He points out that in Meyer's childhood the very shy boy remained in his home by day and roamed the streets only during the night. Ermatinger theorizes that Meyer's sensitive, timid temperament caused him to seek an objective manner of artistic expression which would enable him to externalize his figures, and that the method he hit upon is what critics have called sculptural or pictorial.<sup>1</sup>

In Meyer's later life there were several influences which may have caused him to accept the plastisch descriptive technique as a conscious artistic principle. Of these the most important were his journeys to München, Rome, Venice and Florence which were mentioned above.<sup>2</sup> It has also been mentioned that Michelangelo was the most important single Renaissance influence on the Swiss writer, important in that Meyer learned from him "to strive for the essential," as the writer himself put it.<sup>3</sup> Maync makes what seems to be a good analogy when he says what Michelangelo was for Meyer, Rodin was for Rilke.<sup>4</sup>

Meyer found the models for his ideal of pictorial description in literature as well as in painting and

sculpture. He admired Prosper Mérimée's work very much and found in it the pictorially conceived scenes and objectivity which characterize his own art.<sup>1</sup> Meyer was apparently much influenced by one of Mérimée's works in particular, the Chronique du temps de Charles IX, with, as Corrodi says, its "magnificent exterior sculpture," and "close observation of mimicry, gesture and movement." Summing up the influence of the Renaissance artists and Mérimée, one critic says, "Italy, the Renaissance gave him (Meyer) the ideal, the atmosphere, the great figures, Mérimée the technical tools...."<sup>2</sup>

After careful examination of a few of Meyer's more important prose works, it seems to this writer that the insistence of critics on the plastic quality of his descriptive technique is somewhat exaggerated. For instance, one finds this critical statement which could hardly be sensibly applied to the work of any writer: "Meyer's men and women seem marble forms cut by a sculptor from the stone, resembling the firm, plastic figures of sculpture, the most objective of the arts."<sup>3</sup> One has only to call to mind such human, warm-blooded characters as Hans and the Canon (in Der Heilige), Poggio (in Plautus im Nonnenkloster) and Fausch (in Jürg Jenatsch) to see that the statement above can be very misleading. As a matter of fact, in the four works considered in this paper, there are not a considerable number of scenes which are, strictly speaking,

described in a sculptural or static manner, contrary to what one is led to believe by many critics. In Plautus im Nonnenkloster, for example, it is difficult to find even one such scene. This is not to say that the "plastic" quality in Meyer's descriptive technique is unimportant; it is important, and the discussion which follows will be concerned with what Baumgarten calls "sinnliche Plastik."

Often we find in Meyer's descriptions a strong suggestion of arrangement of characters and background, but the description is not specific, in the final analysis, and doesn't permit us to characterize it as really pictorial; that is, the physical data supplied by the description is insufficient for a genuine visualization of the scene. By "genuine visualization" I mean construction of a given scene in the mind's eye which would be basically the same for anyone who has normal imaginative powers.

A scene such as the type discussed above occurs in Jürg Jenatsch when Waser accidentally meets Pompejus and Lucretia Planta and the old servant Lukas:

Neben einem...Mädchen (Lucretia), das im Schatten eines Felsens auf hingebreiteten Teppichen sass und ausruhte, stand ein stattlicher Kavalier, denn das war er nach seiner ganzen Erscheinung, trotz des schlichten Reisegewandes und der schmucklosen Waffen. Am Rande des Sees grast die... Rosse der drei Reisenden (p. 6).

Here we find a suggestion of a pictorial quality in the shadow. There is no color in the description, however,



and the relative positions of Lucretia, her father, the horses and the cliff are uncertain. Since it is not unusual in Meyer to be told the exact positions of the characters and even which hand a character uses to execute a certain gesture, this description must be classified as vague and hardly pictorial at all.

The description of Jenatsch lying dead in Lucretia's lap has also only a suggestion of arrangement, although it is more detailed than the description treated in the preceding paragraph:

Lucretia...kniete...neben der Leiche, das Haupt des Erschlagenen lag in ihrem Schosse. Das Gemach war leer. Um die über ihr schwebende Gestalt der Justitia waren die Lichter heruntergebrannt.... Neben ihr stand Pankraz und legte die Hand auf ihre Schulter, während unter der Türe Fausch dem Bürgermeister Waser das Ereignis jammernd erzählte (p. 276).

Here again there is a suggestion of pictorial lighting, though there is no mention of color, nor can one be certain of relative positions of the figures in the scene. Lucretia is "beside" the corpse, and later Pankraz stands "beside" her. Curiously, this scene at first reading seems to be static until one notices that, at the beginning of the description the room is empty; then suddenly Pankraz is standing beside Lucretia, and Fausch and Waser are talking in the doorway.

Very often in the four works which this paper treats Meyer arranges a number of minor character around some important central figure. The arrangement of the figures

is often quite vague, but the total effect of the description borders on the pictorial. Such a scene occurs in Der Heilige just before Becket is murdered:

Seine (Becket's) Kleriker aber alle umdrängten ihn. Die jüngeren und mutigeren füllten die Stufen....Die anderen standen und knieten um den Bischof und drückten sich durcheinander wie eine erschreckte und verwirrte Herde... (p. 419).

Paradoxically some of the most animated scenes in Meyer also have a pictorial quality. These descriptions usually deal with masses of people in a collective manner which only suggests motion. In the scene of revelry on the convent lawn (in Plautus im Nonnenkloster) there is a Breughel-like exuberance, and at the same time we find a Breughel-like concern for composition in the words "Kreis" and "Corona":

Um die von ihren Nonnen umgebene Äbtissin und den zweideutigen Herold mit geflicktem Wams und zerlumpten Hosen, dem die nackten Zehen aus den zerrissenen Stiefeln blickten, bildeten Laien und zugelaufene Mönche einen bunten Kreis in den traulichsten Stellungen,...Bänkelsänger, Zigeuner, fahrende Leute, Dirnen und Gesindel jeder Art...mischten sich in die seltsame Corona (p. 137).

The comparison with Breughel doesn't hold true in every respect however: in particular, Meyer uses no color in this description; he merely suggests color, leaving this matter to the reader's imagination, by drawing his attention to a "bunten Kreis." Also we feel that Poggio, like Meyer, despises the common crowd and therefore portrays it unsympathetically, as Breughel does not.

Another scene which Meyer describes almost as if he had a painting in mind occurs when Fausch and Jürg Jenatsch watch the arrival of Duke Rohan's party before a Venetian cathedral. It seems that here Meyer is definitely striving for a pictorial effect, for the description begins with these words:

Der dunkle Steinrahmen der Tür umschloss ein Bild voll Farbenglanz, Leben und Sonne.

Im Vordergrunde wurden eben an den Ringen der Landungstreppe zwei mit zierlichem Schnitzwerke und wallenden Federsträussen geschmückte Gondeln befestigt. Zwölf junge Gondolieri und Pagen, in Rot und Gold, die Farben des Herzogs, gekleidet, blieben zur Hut der Fahrzeuge auf dem von der Mauer grün beschatteten Kanale zurück... (p. 90). (Italics mine.)

This is the most specific and detailed description considered thus far, and probably the most nearly pictorial. The graphic quality is reinforced by the use of the words "Vordergrund," "Bild" and "Steinrahmen," and by the use of color, unusual in Meyer's work. The lighting of this scene is suggested by the "Sonne" mentioned in the frame of the description and by the "grün beschatteten Kanale" in the body of the description. The "zwölf" is unusually specific for Meyer.

It is in the pictorial descriptions which are essentially static that one can best justify the judgment of German critics who call Meyer an Augenmensch or Eidetiker and of French critics who call him a visuel.<sup>1</sup> There seems to be some confusion in the use of the terms pictorial and sculptural, however, because critics become rather vague



when they comment on Meyer's "sculptural" descriptive method. What seems really to be meant by the sculptural technique or "sinnliche Plastik" is Meyer's method of characterizing or revealing the state of mind of his figures by describing only their exterior appearance. At any rate, it is difficult to imagine a genuinely sculptural descriptive technique in Meyer's or in any writer's work. To call the Swiss poet's descriptive technique very graphic is to be more exact, and this graphic quality will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

One of the most outstanding examples of Meyer's pictorial approach to his subject matter is the description of Gnade's body in Der Heilige. The scene is not only absolutely static; it is also absolutely silent. It is one of the most detailed and carefully worked out of all Meyer's descriptions, even though it is supposedly seen through Hans' eyes and told by him:

Ich schaute in das Halbdunkel der Burgkapelle....  
 Ein Lichtstrom, der durch das einzige, hoch  
 gelegene Fenster sich ergoss, beleuchtete ihre  
 [Gnade's] überirdische Schönheit. Ihr Haupt  
 ruhte auf einem Purpurkissen und trug ein  
 Krönchen von blitzendem Edelgestein. Der zarte  
 Körper verschwand in den von Goldstickerei  
 und Perlen starrenden Falten ihres über die  
 Wände des Schreins ausgebreiteten Gewandes (pp.343-344).

At the very first we are made aware of the consciously pictorial use of light; Hans finds himself in half-darkness. As in several Meyer descriptions there is a single window

through which, Rembrandt-like, light streams and illuminates the figure of the dead girl. Meyer uses color sparingly and, as we will see below, he selects color "aristocratically." Here he uses gold and purple.

The description of Gnade's body is perhaps the best example of the Swiss writer's pictorial tendency, and it also illustrates his artistic restraint and feeling for composition and balance:

Die kleinen, durchsichtigen Hände lagen auf der Brust gekreuzt und hielten keusch den schwarzen Schleier ihres Haares zusammen, der, vom Scheitel fließend, die zarten Wangen einrahmte und, die zwei Wunden des Halses bedeckend, sich unter dem blassen Marmorkreuz ihrer Arme wieder vereinigte (p.344).

Here the progress of the description follows the course which probably would be followed by the eyes in examining a painting of such a scene. It may be that Meyer had this in mind when he wrote the description. Our eyes begin with the white hands, move to the contrasting black hair, to the head, cheeks and finally back to the arms. Everything is in perfect balance--the hair, which frames the cheeks, the crossed arms, even the two concealed wounds in Gnade's throat give the description a symmetrical quality.

In Die Hochzeit des Mönchs we find several pictorially described scenes. In this novella in particular Meyer seems to arrange his figures as if they were in a painting or on the stage, and we are always aware of the grouping of the story's characters and of their positions in relation to each other. The novella opens with this description:

Es war in Verona. Vor einem breiten Feuer, das einen weiträumigen Herd füllte, lagerte in den

bequemsten Stellungen, welche der Anstand erlaubt, ein junges Hofgesinde männlichen und weiblichen Geschlechtes um einen ebenso jugendlichen Herrscher und zwei blühende Frauen. Dem Herde zur Linken sass diese fürstliche Gruppe, welcher die übrigen in einem Viertelkreise sich anschlossen, die ganze andere Seite des Herdes nach höfischer Sitte freilassend (p. 280).

This description is typical of Meyer because its purpose is to create an atmosphere of comfort and luxury, a mixture of an Italian brand of Gemütlichkeit (which we find in its native German form in the opening of Der Heilige) and grace.

Meyer is unusually specific in the description, indicating precisely where the group is located in relation to the hearth. Here we find no circle or "Corona" as in Plautus, rather a "Viertelkreise." Typically, there is a central figure, around whom the minor characters group themselves, Cangrande, although later the central figure is to become the narrator, Dante. This graceful arrangement before the fire is also typical of Meyer's striving for the "grand," as is the use of a rather elevated prose style, and such words as fürstlich and weiträumig. The description continues:

Von den Frauen, in deren Mitte er [Cangrande] sass, mochte die nächst dem Herd etwas zurück und ins Halbdunkel gelehnte sein Ehweweib, die andere, völli beleuchtete, seine Verwandte oder Freundin sein...(p. 280).

Here again we find a Rembrandt-like lighting effect, a contrast between light and shade, which we found in other descriptions. This emphasis on light and dark in Meyer



is one of the principal characteristics of his graphic descriptive technique although it seems to have been overlooked by most critics.

In the four works treated in this paper perhaps the largest pictorially described scene, in terms of the number of people involved, is that which depicts the departure of Duke Rohan, who has been betrayed by Jenatsch, from Chur. The scene described below shows Meyer's fondness for the solemn, grand and picturesque, and illustrates his tendency to arrange his figures impressively in definite, static groups:

In der Strasse, die Rohan durchreiten sollte, standen die Churer barhaupt in zwei gedrängten Reihen längs der Häuser, und alle Fenster bis zu den Dachluken hinauf waren mit neugierigen Köpfen gefüllt....

Als er [Duke Rohan] an der Spitze seines stolzen Zuges langsam dem Tore sich näherte, fand er einen löblichen Rat und die Geistlichen der Stadt zu seiner Rechten aufgestellt. Die Herren hatten sich in vollem Ornat jeder nach seinem Range auf den Stufen einer breiten Freitreppe verteilt, die zu der Pforte eines patrizischen Hauses führte. Beide Türflügel standen weit offen, und im Flur wurden in schwarze Seide gekleidete Frauengestalten sichtbar....

In der Mitte der Ratsherren fiel der Amtsbürgermeister Meyer als wahrhaft imposante Erscheinung ins Auge (Jenatsch, p.225).

It is interesting to see how Meyer views this scene at first from a distance, and then moves to a certain part of the scene, concentrates on that, and finally describes this one person, the mayor, the central figure we have come to expect in Meyer's group descriptions. Also we find again the swiss author's fondness for framing a

scene, or a part of it; women dressed in solemn black silk are framed by the doorway of a patrician home. During this long description the only movement is that of Duke Rohan and his train. The populace of Chur is motionless, in respect to the duke, and the point of view of the latter part of the description seems to be that of Rohan himself, who rides past the dignitaries of Chur to his right. Although it is not certain the viewpoint is Rohan's, it is implied by the fact that the women standing within the house "became visible"—apparently as Rohan rides to a point opposite the house.

It has been pointed out several times that lighting effects play an important role in C. F. Meyer's descriptive technique, and that such effects are partially responsible for the pictorial nature of many of the scenes in his work. His use of light has other important artistic purposes however, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Meyer is an artist who stresses chiaroscuro in his descriptions, as we have seen, and this tendency is so pronounced that very often the light source of a scene, a lamp, the sun, a fire, candle etc., is described or at least mentioned, though, as Burkhard points out, Meyer usually uses the rarer word Ampel for Lampe. Thus, when Waser spies on a scene between Pompejus Planta and an Italian who vows to kill Jenatsch, we learn that the room

is illuminated by a "beschirmte Hängelampe." At first Jürg's friend doesn't know to whom the Italian is speaking and the description of the light falling full on Planta's face augments the effectiveness of this abrupt revelation:

Jetzt beugte er sich [Robustelli] mit demonstrierender Gebärde vorwärts, und über seiner Achsel ward in der grellsten Schärfe des Lichtes das auf die Hand gestützte Haupt des andern, --Waser erschrak-- des Herrn Pompejus Planta sichtbar (p. 26).

In a later scene in Jenatsch strange lighting effects cause superstitious Catholic peasants to believe a martyred priest has returned and is reading mass. Here the light sources are two candles:

Auf dem Hochaltar flackerten zwei düstere Kerzen, deren Licht mit dem letzten von aussen kommenden Schimmer der Dämmerung kämpfte. Die zwei Flämmchen bewegten sich in einem...Luftzuge...und tanzende Schatten trieben auf dem Altare ein seltsames Spiel (p. 38).

The conflict between artificial and exterior light often occurs in Meyer's descriptions, in particular, in a scene between Astorre and Antiope in Hochzeit.

The scene occurs when the unfrocked priest accompanies Germano who is to ask for Antiope's hand in marriage. The first mention of light comes as the two men stride through "schon dämmernder Gemächer." They find Antiope sitting at a clover-leaf window which frames her head with a background of "Abendglorie." The beauty of twilight helps to create the tender, passionate atmosphere of the remainder of the love-scene whose climax comes when darkness falls. This all occurs gradually, however, and is described



very subtly. When Antiope learns that Germano wants to marry her she stands with her back to the window, her face dark in the "Dämmerlichte." When Astorre begins to woo her, her head is shown against a "blassen Goldgrunde," and when he can find no words to express his love for her there is only "Dämmerung und Schweigen." When Germano asks Antiope roughly if she will become his wife, she makes a gesture of negation with her head which can be seen in spite of the "wachsenden Nacht." Then, after Germano leaves the room in anger, Dante relates he doesn't know whose mouth, Astorre's or Antiope's, first sought the other, because "die Kammer war völlig finster geworden!" (pp. 352-355). Discussion of this one scene shows how important are lighting effects in Meyer's descriptive technique, not only in producing a pictorial effect, but also in creating atmosphere or in producing the unusual effects cited in the two scenes above from Jürg Jenatsch.

One of the most striking manifestations of Meyer's striving for the grand style in his descriptive technique is the precise recording of his characters' gestures. Several critics have pointed out that Meyer didn't hit upon this descriptive method by accident. There were several important influences, principally non-German, dating from the time of his youth, which are probably responsible for the emphasis on dramatic gestures in his work. Maync points out that German writers before Meyer

(e.g., Otto Ludwig and Heinrich von Kleist) had described gestures much as he does, but the biographer maintains that this German influence was not important. Maync argues that as a youth Meyer admired the dramatic gestures he saw in performances of French classical plays and performances of Shakespeare. Also, the argument continues, Meyer's tendency to the graphic description of gestures was instinctive. Maync also allows the influence of Michelangelo and Mérimée in this respect. Meyer himself noted that this phase of his descriptive technique was of non-German origin. "What I received from the Romance countries is, in a word, the sense for gesture and bearing," he said. The most important of these Romance influences appears to have been the French writer Mérimée. One critic states that Meyer learned his "epic technique," that is, "the magnificent exterior sculpture, the close observation of mimicry, gesture and movement," from Mérimée's Chronique du temps de Charles IX. Maync's belief that Meyer's description of gesture was instinctive is supported by the Swiss author's external method of characterization and fondness for dramatizing important scenes in his works; thus, the examination of the influences on Meyer's description of gesture has been limited to little more than brief reference to those names most often mentioned in this connection by critics on Meyer.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of gesture in Meyer's work becomes

apparent only after careful reading. Once this awareness is awakened, one realizes that Meyer uses gestures not only for dramatic effect, but also for purposes of characterization. The gesture becomes remarkably expressive and flexible in Meyer's technique. One critic, in a study of all Meyer's prose, finds at least fifty-five adjectives which modify the noun Gebärde. In seven of his Novellen, there are references to three hundred and twenty-nine separate gestures.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the many gestures of Meyer's characters are the conventional ones of the stage, and the Swiss poet has his figures express their emotions, as do the personages of a play, by means of gestures which are more a stock formula for the expression of emotion than the natural reactions of living, breathing men. In fact this use of the stock gesture occurs so frequently in Meyer that it seems strange that the critics consulted in the writing of this paper have, with few exceptions (notably Baumgarten), accepted Meyer's use of gesture-description as an unqualified artistic success. A few examples will serve to illustrate how Meyer uses gestures as a formula for certain emotions. In many cases, the use of gesture is effective; in other cases, gesture becomes convention, pose, affectation.

Jürg Jenatsch has just made the decision to betray Duke Rohan in the best interests of his homeland. The decision to do so has been a difficult one, but he makes



it with firm resolution and closes "die eiserne Faust"(p. 179).

Rudolf Planta makes an infamous proposal to Jenatsch that he turn Duke Rohan over to the Spanish forces in return for the fortress of Fuentes. Jürg, who admires and respects the duke even more after his betrayal, flies into a rage and tells Planta to make his exit before he murders him. As he does so he tears "den Degen aus der Scheide," in a characteristic gesture of extreme anger.

Still later in the novel Rudolf Planta berates his sister for not carrying out revenge on Jenatsch, as, according to the code of their family, she should. Lukas, Lucretia's faithful servant, is angry to see her abused and steps forward to defend her, "die Fäuste ballend"(p. 249).

This same formula for emotion is used in the novella Der Heilige. Becket, who at this stage has become an ascetic, is followed by a throng of Saxons, whose representative he has become, to King Henry's court. The Saxons begin to sing, enraging the Normans who "ballten die Fäuste oder legten sie an den Knauf ihrer Schwerter" (p. 374).

Although Meyer's description of gesture often more than borders on the melodramatic and conventional, he also describes gestures imaginatively, to produce an unusual effect, to replace the spoken word, or to express an idea or describe an action symbolically.

This symbolic use of the gesture is seen when Jenatsch decides, in the face of the Spanish-Catholic

threat, that he can serve his country better with the sword than with the Bible. Not only is the act of laying aside the priestly garments symbolic of Jürg's break with a spiritual mode of life, he also speaks with symbolic meaning, accompanying his words with the symbolic gesture described below:

"Schwert und Bibel taugen nicht zusammen. Bünden bedarf des Schwertes, und ich lege die geistliche Waffe zur Seite, um getrost die weltliche zu ergreifen." Mit diesen Worten riss er sein Predigergewand ab...(p. 58).

Meyer's characters don't limit themselves to conventional gestures, as we have seen. Often their gestures are complicated to accompany or express involved human emotions. Jenatsch, in conversation with a Spanish representative, Serbelloni, becomes almost violent in presenting the claims of his fatherland. He feels that Bünden is hemmed in vise-like by "two giants," France and the Spanish powers. To illustrate his emotions he "warf seine gewaltigen Arme wie ein Schwimmer auseinander, als machte er Platz für die Ströme seiner Heimat" (p. 239).

Perhaps the most unusual series of gestures found in the works considered in this paper occurs in Plautus im Nonnenkloster. Poggio, who has discovered the hoax of the abbess, the substitution of a light replica for an ancient and very heavy cross, to be carried each year as a "miracle" by a girl who is about to take the vows of a nun, wants both to upset the scheme and to free a young

girl, Gertrud, from her self-imposed oath to become a nun. To do so, he goes through an elaborate process of mimicry involving symbolic motions and gestures. He describes his ruse, from which he apparently derives as much aesthetic pleasure as the pleasure which comes with the execution of a noble act, saying that in the course of his mimicry he "begann mit ausdrucksvollem Gebärdenspiele..." and "rätselte mit wiederholten Fingerzeigen nach beiden Seiten: 'Die Wahrheit im Frei'n, die Lüge im Schrein!'" (pp. 157-158).

Characters in Meyer often use gestures rather than words to express themselves and prove that action can speak more eloquently than words. In a heated conversation with Pompejus Planta (in Jenatsch), Robustelli, an Italian, makes clear his intention to kill Jenatsch without putting his thoughts into words:

"Den Giorgio Jenatsch!" lachte der Italiener wild und stieß sein Messer in einen neben ihm liegenden kleinen Brotlaib, den er Herrn Pompejus vorhielt wie einen gespiessten Kopf an einer Pike (p. 27).

At the fortress of Fuentes Jenatsch asks a Spanish Captain about one of his friends. The officer, rather than informing him verbally of his friend's death, "streckte ...den Zeigefinger seiner Knochenhand nach den dunkeln Zypressen einer unfern gelegenen Begräbniskirche aus" (p. 48).

In Der Heilige, Hans deduces the frame of mind of four men bent on murdering Becket without hearing their



conversation. "Ich stand zu ferne, um ihre Worte zu verstehen, aber ihre Gebärden sprachen deutlich genug" (p. 409).

Meyer's method of characterization is based for the most part on the exact description of features, bearing and gestures. Very often a Meyer character makes a gesture, frequently a typical, recurring gesture, sometimes used as a leitmotiv, which reveals more of his character than a static description of his appearance. Since practically all of Meyer's important figures are treated in this manner, it is not difficult to document this statement.

King Henry's regal character reveals itself, says Hans, in both his "gewaltigem Wuchs und herrischer Gebärde" (Heilige, p. 308). In Hochzeit, Ezzelin's awe-inspiring physical appearance and strong personality which make him the most impressive figure of this Novelle, with the exception of Dante himself, is suggested by his "weiten Gebärde" to the bark (p. 287). In fact, it is this gesture which indirectly causes the boat to capsize and causes Vicedomini to lose all his heirs and Diana her husband, thus setting in motion a chain of circumstances which ends in almost spectacular tragedy. Although Ezzelin is brutal and cruel, and is so portrayed, we sense Meyer's admiration of this powerful, superior man, a man to whom a "weiten Gebärde" comes naturally.

Ezzelin is characterized as a wise, powerful man by a much more precise gesture, his "Lieblingsgebärde," as

Dante calls it--burrowing with outstretched fingers through his magnificent beard (pp. 299, 318). This gesture is so striking that one critic believes Meyer had in mind Michelangelo's famous statue of Moses.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, the gesture is remarkably suggestive and conjures up in our mind's eye the image of a vastly intelligent, imposing figure.

Meyer has a gift for suggesting great mental activity or emotion with a brief exterior description, such as the one mentioned above. One critic, referring to Uhland's Schriften zur Geschichte der Dichtung und Sage, points out the similarity between Meyer's use of gestures in the revelation of character or a state of mind and the middle high German epics which use descriptions of gesture in a similar manner. Hence, description of the gesture is not only an element of Meyer's grand style; it also shows his fondness for the compression and economy found in the German Volkepos.<sup>2</sup>

Description of gesture is a part of Meyer's grand style because of the dramatic, grandiose quality which is found in such descriptions, e.g., those discussed above. The use of color in Meyer's descriptive technique is also considered in this chapter on the grand style but for a very different reason. The use of gesture by Meyer's figures to express emotion or to reveal character occurs so frequently that the reader doesn't really notice it

after he has become accustomed to the author's style. Meyer uses color very sparingly, on the other hand, and when he does make use of it in his descriptions, it is very noticeable and usually very effective. Moreover, in these descriptions which deal with color, it is obvious that Meyer is not striving merely for a more realistic description but also for an ornamental effect, an effect for which he strives in his descriptions which involve peculiar lighting conditions also. This conscious effort to produce an unusual effect is another characteristic of Meyer's grand style. Another reason for discussing color in this chapter can be mentioned here. We have seen that the grand style aims to deal with noble, magnificent subject matter--heroes, grandiose gestures, beautiful lighting effects, for example--and the particular colors Meyer most often uses reflect this fondness for the great and imposing. One critic points out that the Swiss author almost always uses "aristocratic adjectives of color," by which he means red, purple and gold, the colors of "bright pageantry, of pomp and circumstance, of festive state and splendor."<sup>1</sup> Both Meyer's striving for a rich descriptive effect and his aristocratic preference for the "aristocratic" colors are shown in this description of Fausch's taproom in Venice:

Das schmale Gemach lag jetzt im Halbdunkel, nur durch ein hochgelegenes Rundfenster über der Tür drang ein rötlicher, von goldenen Stäubchen durchspielter Sonnenstrahl in seine Tiefe und



blitzte in den aufgereihten, fein geschliffenen  
Kelchen und funkelte in dem Purpurweine...(Jenatsch. p. 85).

The quotation above is typical not only of Meyer's use of color, but of his descriptive technique as a whole, particularly in Jürg Jenatsch which has several descriptions similar to the one above. We are introduced to a new setting, Grimani's palace, or that of Duke Rohan, for example, and the narrative stops, in effect, while Meyer describes the richness of the mise-en-scène. Often the scene is described in a static manner, or very nearly so, and almost always pictorially. It is in scenes such as this that Meyer most often uses color. The description of Duke Rohan's party at a Venetian cathedral is of this sort, and we find here also the use of Meyer's favorite colors, red and gold:

Zwölf junge Gondolieri und Pagen, in Rot und Gold,  
die Farben des Herzogs, gekleidet, blieben zur  
Hut der Fahrzeuge...(Jenatsch, p. 90).

In Der Heilige also we find "aristocratic" colors, not only in the description of the fine garments of the king and Becket, but also in a description of Bertran de Born's doublet:

Und er [Born] deutete auf ein flammendes Herz  
in feiner Stickerei von Gold und Purpur, das  
auf der linken Seite sein schwarzes, eng  
anschliessendes Wams zierte (p. 393).

In Die Hochzeit des Mönchs we find Antiope's head outlined against a "blassen Goldgrunde" (p. 355).

Just as the colors of Duke Rohan are red and gold, Jenatsch seems also to have favorite colors. The colors are black, scarlet and blue, and one may assume they are

used as another external method of characterization, to strengthen our image of Jenatsch as an almost superhuman figure, a man with unlimited strength and energy, just as the color white, often associated with Becket, aids in characterizing him as a physically frail, but morally superior person. Thus, Jenatsch is seen astride a "kohlschwarzes Tier" and the people see the shimmer of a "scharlachkleides und eine hochragende blaue Hutfeder..." (p. 164). This costume is so customary to Jenatsch that he is recognized by it:

Es waren Bündneroffiziere, voran auf einem schwarzen Hengst ein Reiter in Scharlach, von dessen Stülphute blaue Federn wehten, der jedem Kinde bekannte Jürg Jenatsch (p. 216).

Occasionally it seems that Meyer uses color in his descriptions for no purpose of characterization, but simply ornamentally, as a method of creating contrast for pictorial effect. In Hochzeit two members of Ezzelin's bodyguard, a German and an old Saracen, are probably described with this ~~effect of contrast~~ effect in mind:

Der hingestreckte Deutsche hatte seinen schlummernden rotblonden Krauskopf in den Schoss des sitzenden Ungläubigen gelegt, der, ebenfalls schlummernd, mit seinem schneeweissen Barte väterlich auf ihn niedernickte (p. 294).

In the same Novelle, Astorre recalls an incident several years before, when Antiope's father was executed for dealing with representatives of the Pope. In this recollection of the scene--which also illustrates Meyer's tendency to put himself at a distance from his subject,

since the scene is observed by the monk, who is a creation of Dante, the narrator--we find again the use of contrasting color to create a pictorial effect:

Jetzt leuchteten die Farben so kräftig, dass der Mönch die zwei nebeneinander liegenden Hälse, den ziegelroten Nacken des Grafen und den schneeweissen des Kindes [Antiope] mit dem gekräuselten goldbraunen Flaume, wenige Schritte vor sich in voller Lebenswahrheit erblickte (p. 327).

It seems doubly evident from the last few words of the quoted passage that here color is used with the intent of increasing the realism, the graphic quality of the description, and not merely as rich ornament for a pictorially conceived description.

In considering all the examples above of Meyer's use of color this much should have become apparent: Meyer has a preference for certain "aristocratic" colors which occur again and again in his descriptions, especially in those which tend to be pictorial or plastisch. Moreover, Meyer uses obvious, raw colors and not subtle or unusual ones; his use of color, and this is true of his descriptive technique in general, is broad and bold. As one critic says, "there is in his [Meyer's] writings no 'romantic' tendency toward accurate and subtle distinction of color with a fondness for unusual contrasts and combinations...."<sup>1</sup>

Another obvious manifestation of Meyer's grand style, in the frame of reference of his descriptive methods, is his tendency to describe many scenes from his works,



especially in Jürg Jenatsch, in a dramatic manner which is more of the stage and theatre than of prose fiction.

Although Meyer had to give up the effort to write plays, he seems to have had a certain dramatic talent; gesture and posture are marked all through his prose works and, in many scenes, the author's narrative becomes stage direction, the characters' words actors' lines.<sup>1</sup>

Meyer always wanted to write drama, not only because he thought it was the highest form of art but also because he saw that one successful play would give him a rapid fame which his poems and Novellen could never bring him. He felt he was driven by a demon to write drama, and references to dramas which were never written appear all through his letters.<sup>2</sup> His novel, Jürg Jenatsch, was originally planned to be a drama and yet Meyer never completed it, nor any other play.<sup>3</sup> Several critics have tried to explain why Meyer was never successful as a playwright, and the most acceptable explanation seems to be this one: the Swiss writer was instinctively unsuited for writing drama because he tended to see his scenes and figures from the point of view of the observer and didn't place himself within the character as the playwright must. Meyer wanted his figures to be explained from without rather than from within (that is, by having them explain their own motives in asides, soliloquies etc.), and this is difficult to accomplish in drama. Nor does drama permit the character to be seen through an eyewitness

who explains the character he sees, as often occurs in Meyer's works.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the fact that Meyer never finished a play, his prose fiction has many dramatic qualities which show either that the author saw at least some of his scenes instinctively as scenes from drama or consciously made these scenes dramatic. The latter supposition seems the more likely since most of Meyer's descriptive techniques, e.g., alliteration, lighting, use of color, gesture, acoustical effects, appear to have been used consciously. There are, in a manner of speaking, three sorts of scenes in Meyer: the static, plastisch scenes in which there is little or no movement and usually no sound, e.g., Gnade's lying-in-state in Der Heilige; the opera-like scenes in which there are closely described motion and accompanying acoustical effects; and the dramatic scenes which we are about to discuss. Obviously one of the most important factors in determining the opera-like, static or dramatic nature of a scene is the manner in which it is described. In opera-like scenes Meyer concentrates on acoustical effects, music, chanting, bells, or similar sounds; in the static scenes there is emphasis on sensory detail, light and color, and in the dramatic scenes greater emphasis is placed on gesture and intonation of the voice.

This emphasis on the gesture and tone of voice is illustrated very well in a scene between Jenatsch and his close friend, Waser. Obvious factors make the scene

essentially dramatic: there is very little author's narrative, and the characters' speeches, especially Jürg's, are theatrical, even melodramatic and are made more so by his emphatic gestures. Jenatsch meets the friend he hasn't seen in several years "mit ausgebreiteten Armen" and clasps him by both shoulders. Waser, who cannot control the sorrow he **feels** because his friend has become a Catholic simply for political reasons, "wandte sich ab und bedeckte das Angesicht mit beiden Händen." These actions are described as if the characters were on the stage, and the last ~~quotation is very~~ **like a stage direction.** In this scene Meyer makes the reader very conscious of just how Waser and Jürg speak, as if trying to simulate the intonation of actors' voices on the stage. Waser speaks "bang," while Jenatsch speaks "mit dem alten, fröhlichen Lachen" and "mit frevler Heiterkeit." He becomes serious, "plötzlich den Ton wechselnd" (pp. 262-263).

Another dramatic scene occurs in Jenatsch when Duke Rohan's wife, a very emotional woman, asks him to aid and protect Lucretia. Meyer himself emphasizes the dramatic nature of her speech "in welcher sich der Schwung des damals Mode werdenden Corneille fühlbar machte," while at the same time giving the story additional historical flavor. This is one of the most dramatic scenes in the four works by Meyer discussed in this paper. There is scarcely any author's narrative, and the characters' words are not conversations but **speeches**



which have a dramatic rhythm and vigor. For instance, Lucretia says, "Ich bin ein vom Stamme gerissener, auf dem Strome treibender Zweig und kann nicht Wurzel schlagen, bis ich den Boden der Heimat erreiche und getränkt werde mit dem Blute gerechter Sühne." Dramatic speeches such as this one are accompanied by equally dramatic movements and gestures whose description constitutes about the only author's narrative in the long scene. The duke's wife finishes her impassioned plea for Lucretia and "hier brach die gerührte Fürbitterin von neuem in Tränen aus und warf sich, das Antlitz mit den Händen bedeckend, in einen Lehnstuhl." The duke is sympathetic to Lucretia and takes "väterlich ihre Hand...." When Jenatsch dramatically enters the room where this scene is taking place Lucretia lifts her arms and lets them fall in a theatrical gesture. Later, torn between love and hate for Jenatsch, she wrings her hands. In this scene also one is made aware of the characters' tone of voice: Rohan speaks "mit überlegener Milde," and when Lucretia sees Jürg she moans out loud (pp. 112-118).

The description of gestures and tone of voice plays an important role in a dramatic scene between King Henry and Becket. Henry can't make Becket remain his chancellor and falls into a blind rage as a result. That, in brief, is what occurs in the scene, but Meyer doesn't develop the story this simply. Instead, the scene is made up of a series of dramatic speeches and gestures

whose description will be discussed below.

When Becket attempts to give Henry back the seal of state, the latter cries "Keineswegs!" and "Trat einen Schritt zurück." When Henry speaks to Becket "seine Stimme klang misstönig." Throughout the scene there is a marked contrast between the outraged gestures and outcries of the king and the motionless calm of Becket. Thus the ex-chancellor whispers at one point, which doesn't lessen the explosive effect his answer has on the king: "So spricht kein Bischof!" rief Herr Heinrich in ehrlicher Entrüstung." This emphasis on tone of voice continues. Becket begins to speak "mit sinkender, veränderter Stimme," but this answer apparently pleases the king no more than the first: "Ich bin ein Betrogener!" schrie er und sprang von seinem Sitze empor." When the Saxons outside, who have followed Becket to the royal palace, begin to sing, Henry again becomes enraged: "Du wiegelst mir die Sachsen auf, Rebell! Verräter!" schrie er und tat einen Schritt gegen den Primas." The description of his enraged gestures and movements continues when "er griff mit den nervigen Händen in die Luft...." The scene becomes still more dramatic when Eleanor "stürzte herein und warf sich, in Tränen aufgelöst, dem Primas zu Füßen." Her tone of voice is mentioned also: "Ich bin die grösste der Sünderinnen," schluchzte sie..."(Heilige, pp. 378-380). There are many more such scenes in the works by Meyer considered in this paper, and most of them owe much of

their dramatic quality to close description of gesture and tone of voice which has been discussed above.

Meyer's patrician outlook on life has been mentioned above, as well as his extreme timidity which led him to write about times which were more appealing to him than the "brutal" present. Since several critics (Burkhard, Baumgarten et al.) have tried to analyze Meyer's art by explaining it as the artistic outgrowth of his personality and Weltanschauung, this paper will make a modest attempt to interpret Meyer's crowd descriptions in the light of his character. Naturally descriptive technique in such scenes is not entirely to be explained by their author's personality, and other considerations of an artistic nature which led the Swiss writer to describe masses of people as he did will also be considered.

Meyer never describes crowds sympathetically. One senses in his descriptions an aversion to and even a fear of the common people; probably Meyer's personality is responsible for this fact. A critic points out that "his [Meyer's] aristocratic nature felt repelled by everything common, petty and vulgar; his nervous frailty made him instinctively shun the rough and tumble of the present and take refuge in the past."<sup>1</sup> Meyer occasionally deals with the "rough and tumble" of the past in his works, however, and seems even to take pleasure in doing so, since the violence he depicts is imaginary. He



apparently has much less aversion to violence and bloodshed (e.g., conclusion of Hochzeit, of Jenatsch, murder of Becket in Heilige) than to vulgarity and pettiness. Thus, in his works the aristocratic side of his nature is more important than the timid side, it seems, and it is this aristocratic outlook which probably explains Meyer's unsympathetic treatment of crowds and common people in general.

A large crowd plays an important part in Die Hochzeit des Mönchs, both during the trial of Astorre and Antiope and during the wedding ball at the Vicedomini palace. We first become aware of it as Ascanio and his uncle, Ezzelin, await the arrival of the plaintiffs and defendants in the matter of Astorre's infidelity to Diana:

In einer Morgenstunde...lauschte der Tyrann mit seinem Neffen durch ein kleines Rundbogenfenster seines Stadtturmes auf den anliegenden Platz hinunter, den eine aufgeregte Menge füllte, murmelnd und tosend wie die wechselnde Meereswoge (p. 363).

The contrast between the powerful, intelligent tyrant, who looks down on the masses below with mixed pity and scorn, we feel, and the crowd, which is described almost as a raw elemental force, is obvious. The scene is viewed from Ezzelin's vantage point, a safe and distant one, which permits Meyer to treat the throng collectively and to describe its changing emotions acoustically rather than visually. For instance, when the now unpopular monk appears the crowd vocalizes its disapproval:

Jetzt erhob sich drunten auf dem Platze ein Murren, ein Schelten, ein Verwünschen, ein Drohen (p. 366).

Meyer's tendency to describe a crowd acoustically is seen also in this description of the festivities on the night of the ball at the Vicedomini palace:

Das niederste und schlimmste Volk--Beutelschneider, Kuppler, Dirnen, Betteljungen--blies, kratzte, paukte, pfiff, quiekte, meckerte und grunzte...(p. 377).

In this description Meyer is nearer the crowd and he makes some effort to divide it into separate elements. Again we sense that Meyer(through Dante) feels nothing but revulsion for the crowd, and the two verbs, "meckerte" and "grunzte" are particularly unsympathetic. It may also be argued that Meyer describes masses of common people unsympathetically because the story demands it. This is certainly the case in Hochzeit, but there is probably another reason which has been mentioned above: Meyer wants to portray his heroes as superior beings, and he does this not only by means of his perhaps idealized descriptions of Ezzelin, Dante, Jenatsch and others, but also by contrasting their grand bearing, gestures and appearance with the animal-like characteristics of the common crowd. We find this contrast between the hero and the common man in a crowd scene in Jenatsch which occurs when it is wildly rumored that a martyred Catholic priest is reading mass in a near-by church:

Vor ihnen(Jenatsch and Waser) drängte sich Kopf

an Kopf die knieende, murrende Menge, Weiber, Krüppel, Alte. Längs der Wände schoben sich dürftige Männergestalten, mit den langen, mageren Hälsen vorwärts lauschend...(p. 38).

Meyer describes Jenatsch, of course, as an athletic, tall, broad-shouldered man, a superior type.

The acoustical element in Meyer's descriptive technique has been mentioned in connection with crowd description above and will be treated here as another manifestation of the Swiss writer's striving for the grand style. Justification for discussing Meyer's description of sound in this chapter is found in several facts, e.g.: acoustical descriptions are sometimes used in the works being considered in this paper to produce opera-like scenes,<sup>1</sup> and, moreover, these descriptions are used consciously, as are Meyer's descriptions of color, light and gesture, to produce the unusual, striking effect which is a characteristic of the grand style.

Often description of sound in Meyer is used to take the place of a visual description when an auditory one can be more effective. This descriptive technique is analogous to Meyer's description of gesture which often supplants conversation, e.g., Hans determines from the gestures of Tracy and three other knights that they intend to murder Becket. This use of an auditory description when a visual one seems more logical, and vice versa, is probably explained by Meyer's fondness for the unusual and by a conscious attempt to introduce variety into his



descriptions.

The striving to avoid a dull description by introducing "sound effects" is illustrated in this description from Jenatsch of a train of riders, seen from Lucretia's viewpoint:

Es bewegte sich...ein langer, unterbrochener Zug, und ferner, verwirrter Lärm drang in einzelnen Tönen zu ihr herüber. Sprengende Reitergruppen liessen sich erraten, und leises Schellengeklingel der Lasttiere wurde vom Winde herübergeweht (p. 247). (Italics mine.)

In the description above we find both visual and acoustical sense data. In the description below Meyer is more daring and describes a scene altogether in auditory terms. This scene is taken from Jürg Jenatsch and occurs when Waser, made angry and curious after being refused a room in an inn, watches it from a concealed vantage point:

Aus dem Stalle der Herberge erscholl von Zeit zu Zeit das Wiehern eines Pferdes.... Das Brausen der Wildbäche aus der Tiefe war, vom Nebel gedämpft, dem Ohr kaum vernehmbar.... Jetzt löste sich von dem fernen Rauschen ein leiser, heller Ton ab, ein Geklingel, das nun verwehte--und nun nach einer Pause deutlicher emporstieg. Wieder verklang es und hub von neuem wieder an, diesmal näher und lauter, als kröche es die Bergwand herauf, den Windungen eines Pfades folgend....Jetzt...schlug der Ton von Menschenstimmen an sein Ohr (p. 22).

This is probably one of Meyer's best descriptions, one which at first is absolutely static in auditory terms which at first is absolutely static in auditory terms and then subtly describes a train of riders in motion, with the aid of the als clause, without having the observer see any part of the scene he describes. Typically, Meyer wants to create a mysterious atmosphere, and to do so

he has the scene take place at night, and has it described by an observer who overcomes the obvious limitations imposed by darkness with an active imagination. Moreover, there is a realism in this scene which we don't feel in many of Meyer's more conventional descriptions. One explanation for the greater realism of scenes described acoustically is this: Meyer's visual descriptions often have a symbolic or at least associative significance and the purely sensory data is usually scanty and quite vague, e.g., Becket's pale face, Jenatsch's flaming eyes; sound impressions, on the other hand, are usually used decoratively by Meyer to give a scene an added quality of realism.<sup>1</sup>

When Jenatsch is captured in Venice Duke Rohan happens to be watching from the balcony of his palace. Jenatsch's gondola is at quite a distance from the duke and the moonlight is uncertain, so that he is unable to see exactly what is transpiring. What he hears, however, leaves no room for doubt that Jenatsch is being attacked:

Er [Rohan] glaubte einen Augenblick im unsicheren Mondlicht eine grosse Gestalt mit gezogenem Degen auf dem Vorderteile des umzingelten Nachens zu erblicken, sie schien aus Ufer springen zu wollen-- da verwirrte sich die Gruppe zum undeutlichen Handgemenge. Leises Waffenger#usch erreichte das Ohr des Herzogs... (p. 120).

To digress briefly from the acoustical, it is interesting to note that all three of the previous descriptions are seen through the eyes of a Meyer figure (Lucretia, Waser and the Duke) rather than being described directly by

Meyer; this is typical of the Swiss author and will be discussed in greater detail below.

When Jenatsch and his men come to Rohan to inform him, in effect, that he has been betrayed, Meyer describes the dramatic entrance in an acoustical rather than visual manner:

Als Wertmüller die Türe des Vorsaales aufriss, ertönte von unten her Gemurmel zahlreicher Stimmen und schleifendes Geräusch treppansteigender Füße. Man vernahm Sporengeklirr und gedämpften Wortwechsel (pp. 208-209).

When, in Plautus im Nonnenkloster, Gertrud falls under the weight of the genuine cross, Meyer doesn't describe a look of consternation and amazement on the faces of the crowd, rather, "Ein Seufzer stieg aus der Brust von Tausenden" (p. 160).

Another use of acoustical effects in Meyer's descriptive technique occurs in the opera-like scenes mentioned several times before. One such scene, whose wild music and violent action reminds at least one critic of opera, occurs in Hochzeit before the Vicedomini palace. A one-time monk, Serapion, and a disheveled woman constitute the central figures of the scene, while the "chorus" consists of "das niederste und schlimmste Volk." The background description is suggestive of opera though it seems unlikely that Meyer envisaged the scene with that in mind:

Eine alle erdenklichen Widersprüche und schneidenden Misstöne durcheinanderwerfende Musik, die einem rasenden Zanke der Verdammten in der Hölle glich, brach sich Bahn durch die betäubte und ergötzte Menge (p. 377).



Another scene which brings opera to mind occurs in Der Heilige when Becket, become an ascetic, is followed by a tattered train of downtrodden Saxons who act as a rather mournful choir. As the Norman nobles await the entrance of the king, "da vernahm man aus der Ferne einen wunderlichen Klang. Es war eine fromme, einfältige Litanei, die sich im Burghofe langsam näherte, von tausend inbrünstigen Stimmen halb kriegerisch, halb klagsam gesungen" (p. 373). Later, when he has been insulted by the Normans who once feared him, Becket goes to a window and stretches his arms out over the Saxon throng:

Da stieg aus der Tiefe des Hofes ein lautes  
Getöse auf, gemischt aus Geschrei des Weinens  
und der Freude, so dass man den Jubel vom  
Jammer nicht unterschieden und trennen konnte (p. 374).

Acoustical elements appear most often in Meyer's descriptions used to evoke a "mood" appropriate to a particular setting or situation. For instance, in Jenatsch the hero of the novel has an interview with Duke Rohan in a green, cool, luxuriant garden. The Duke and his entourage are described with considerable emphasis on the richness of their fabrics, the nobility of their bearing, gesture and conversation, so that this scene might be called one of Meyer's most carefully worked descriptions. In this rich atmosphere, then, we find an appropriate acoustical element--"die melancholische Weise eines Volksliedes, die ein italienischer Junge in schüchterner Entfernung auf seiner Mandoline spielte" (p. 50).

In Der Heilige we also find acoustical effects which aid in producing peculiar mood and the atmosphere of a scene. When the news of Becket's murder is noised abroad his Saxon followers throng to the cathedral where he met his death, and, as Hans moans, "'Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa,'" their lamentations ring in his ears:

Jetzt erhoben sich aus der dunkeln Tiefe des Schiffes zerreissende Klage töne, das Wehgeschrei wuchs und wuchs, und die Kirche füllte sich mit armen sächsischen Volke...(pp. 420-421).

There are a few scenes in the works by Meyer considered in this paper which gain much of their effectiveness by means of an acoustical background of absolute silence. This is the case in Meyer's exquisite pictorial description of Gnade's body in the Moorish chapel. The mood of the scene is created by the pure, graceful Moorish architecture, the single stream of light pouring in the window, and by the unearthly beauty of Gnade's corpse. Since in this atmosphere any sound would be out of place we read that "lautlose Stille herrschte" (Heilige, p. 344).

The first sentence of Dante's story of the unfrocked monk describes an acoustical effect which helps set the mood of an important scene. Astorre's brother and his brother's fiancée, Diana, are making their bridal trip on the Brenta from a convent to the near-by city of Padua. The festive atmosphere of the scene is produced by mention of the beautiful weather and richly decorated bark in which Diana sits, "auf einem purpurnen Polster...." This scene is very like the garden description of Duke

Rohan mentioned above, and the accompanying musical element of the description is also similar:

Wo sich der Gang der Brenta in einem schlanken Bogen der Stadt Padua nähert...glitt an einem himmlischen Sommertage unter gedämpfem Flötenschall eine bekränzte, von festlich gekleideten überfüllte Barke auf dem schnellen, aber ruhigen Wasser (Hochzeit, p. 286).

In the next paragraph we find more acoustical description: "Die Bootsknechte begleiteten die sanfte Musik mit einem halblauten Gesange" (p. 287).

Acoustical description is primarily responsible for the creation of atmosphere in another scene in the same Novelle. Astorre's father is on the point of death; Ezzelin, Diana and the monk await solemnly, hushed, the coming of the priest who is to give the old sinner extreme unction, and in the background "ein Chor preludierte gedämpft, und das leise Schüttern eines Glückchens wurde hörbar" (p. 303).

Thus, in this scene, as in others discussed previously, it is obvious that the mention of sound, or lack of it, is not accidental, not mere ornament, but a conscious striving for effect. The acoustical effect remains in the background, but it is nonetheless important in creating a peculiar mood.

Several critics have pointed out Meyer's fondness for placing antithetical elements in opposition to each other in his fiction--Christianity and paganism,



Gothic and classical art, the ethical and the aesthetic, Germanic and Romance culture--elements which he often embodies in his characters.<sup>1</sup> Thus in Plautus im Nonnenkloster Poggio typifies the Italian Renaissance, with his love for beauty and wit, and Gertrud the German Reformation. In Hochzeit, Germano, with his blunt honesty, represents the typical German man while Ezzelin represents a shrewd, powerful ruthless Italian type. The contrast between Becket, the spiritual, sentimentalisch type and King Henry, the physical, naiv type produces the principal conflict of the Novella. In short, after close examination of the four works by Meyer which are treated in this paper, it becomes obvious that antithetical elements such as those just mentioned are consciously contrasted and emphasized in a manner which reveals itself in the descriptive technique of the Swiss poet. In fact, some descriptions which will be discussed below aim so obviously to contrast opposites that consideration of them in any other frame of reference would amount to oblique criticism. Moreover, since the contrast between Germanic and Romance culture very often involves richly described scenes of the type several times mentioned above, this subject is considered in the chapter on the grand style and will conclude it.

Often in Meyer's works broad contrasts are the key to characterization. We see this in the contrast between the ascetic, rather frail, fein Becket and the hearty,

blue-eyed Henry, and also in the description of the large-limbed, statuesque Diana, and small, vivacious Antiope. These contrasts serve primarily, however, as a means of characterization, and will be considered in that light. Here the purpose of our discussion is to show Meyer's consciousness of the cultural and physical differences between races (using the term in its less strict sense), in particular, between the northern, Germanic, and the southern, Romance civilization and people. It is not difficult to see how Meyer came to be so aware of the differences between the two cultures, as he must have been. He lived in Switzerland where not only geography but also language would obviously lead to such an awareness which, in the artistic personality, was heightened and made still more alive to the Teutonic-Mediterranean distinction. Another important cause for this awareness was doubtless Meyer's Italian experience discussed above, an experience which meant much to many German writers and which perhaps also led to the culture contrast found in the works of some of these writers, e.g., Heinrich and Thomas Mann.

Meyer was attracted by the language and artistic ideals of both the Romance and Germanic cultures, and to such an extent that his decision to become wholly a German artist, a decision brought about by the Franco-Prussian war, is treated by Maync as a turning point in the author's life and artistic career.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Meyer's political sympathies

probably also contributed to his consciousness of the contrast between the two cultures. In the textual references below we will see not only how he treated this contrast descriptively but also what was his conception of the cultures he depicted and their representatives.

In the novel Jürg Jenatsch Meyer treats principally the contrast between Italian and Germanic culture and racial characteristics (the term "race" again used loosely). He does this by emphasizing the pronounced differences, as he conceived them, between Italian and German architecture, social usages and physical types. For instance, there is a striking contrast between Fausch's quiet, luxurious taproom in Venice and the bustling, rudely furnished one in Thusis. The atmosphere of the one is suggestive of Italian elegance and love of beauty while that of the other has in it the simplicity and rude strength which Meyer apparently saw in the German character and culture:

Das schmale Gemach lag jetzt im Halbdunkel, nur durch ein hochgelegenes Rundfenster über der Tür drang ein rötlicher, von goldenen Stäubchen durchspielter Sonnenstrahl in seine Tiefe und blitzte in den aufgereihten, fein geschliffenen Kelchen und funkelte in dem Purpurweine... (p. 85). (Italics mine.)

Now, to use Ruskin's words (in The Stones of Venice), let us leave this "great peacefulness of light" and "pass farther towards the north, until we see the orient colours change gradually into a vast belt of rainy green." The scene is a tavern in Thusis:



Wild und laut ging es diesen Abend in der ehrbaren Herberge zum schwarzen Adler zu. Das behäbige Haus schenkte sein Getränk, den dunkeln, ...nach Landessitte in zwei verschiedenen Stuben aus, die rechts und links von dem gepflasterten Flur sich gegenüberlagen. Der eine Raum, die eigentliche Schenke mit den rohen Bänken und Tischen aus Tannenholz, war von lärmenden Marktleuten, Viehhändlern, Sennen und Jägern... überfüllt....Die jugendliche Schenkin...hatte mehr zu tun, als ihr lieb war, um die bauchigen Steinkrüge wieder und wieder zu füllen...(p. 161). (Italics mine.)

Certainly in this latter description we find the Gothic "wildness of thought, and roughness of work," (to quote Ruskin again) that is of the North. In this setting we find also one of Meyer's German "types," the host of the tavern:

Zwischen beiden Räumen schritt...der feste Wirt, Ammann Müller, in unerschütterlicher gelassener Gutmütigkeit hin und her. Eben füllte seine breite, viereckige Gestalt wieder die Tür der Schenke (p. 161).

Compare his square German figure with Meyer's conception of the Italian or Mediterranean type in this sketch of Serbelloni:

Der andre [Serbelloni], ein hagerer, vornehmer Sechziger, beobachtete ihn gelassen. Die Haltung dieses Edelmannes war aus italienischer Urbanität und spanischer Grandezza gemischt....Seine Mutter, die eine Mendoza war, hatte ihm mit ihrem Blute-- neben dem rötlichen Haar und der hellen Hautfarbe-- einen Zug von spanischer Hochfahrt und Unnahbarkeit gegeben...(Jenatsch, p. 235). (Italics mine.)

We learn elsewhere that Serbelloni has also inherited an "imposante Adlernase" (p. 235).

These descriptions show that Meyer was consciously describing not an individual, but a type, and in doing so

he was characterizing a whole race. To Meyer, apparently, "Gutmütigkeit" is as German as "Urbanität" is Italian, and this same contrast occurs all through the novel. Both types are described together when Jürg sees Waser, a Swiss, conversing with an important Venetian official, Grimani:

Als die Gondel im Canal grande vor den Marmorstufen des herzoglichen Palastes neben einer andern, zur Abfahrt bereiten anlegte, zeigten sich auf der Schwelle des schön gewölbten Tores zwei Männergestalten in Staatstracht, die sich in ausdrucksvoller Silhouette vom hellen Hintergrunde der glänzend erleuchteten Halle abhoben. Die eine zeigte den feinen Bau und die ruhige, geschmeidige Bewegung des vornehmen Venetianers, die andre, von behaglicher Fülle und deutsch ehrbarem Ansehen, weigerte sich mit etwas kleinstädtischer Höflichkeit, den Vortritt zu nehmen (p. 111).

Thus, Meyer pictures the German type as "ehrbare," the Italian "vornehm," a contrast which obviously applies to character as well as to exterior appearance. Later in the novel Grimani's Italian elegance is re-emphasized when he appears as a "feine bleiche Mann" (p. 129). The recurring quality of Feinheit which seems to be an essential characteristic of the aristocratic Italian is mentioned in a description of Count Travers, "ein noch jugendlicher Mann mit scharf ausgeprägten italienischen Zügen und fester Feinheit des Ausdrucks..." (Jenatsch, p. 166).

In Der Heilige the Germanic and Romance racial types are contrasted by Bertran de Born who seems to be as aware of cultural and physical differences between southern France and Germany as is Meyer. Hans is aware of the contrast

too. Note how he characterizes the figures he describes: by their gestures, eyes and speech: "Es waren Südfranzosen von gelenken Gliedern, feurigen Augen und geflügelter Rede..." (p. 391). In this description and others below we see Meyer doesn't confine his contrast of racial or national types to their background and physical appearance; their manner of speech is also an important characterizing motif.

The more tempestuous quality of the Mediterranean type, suggested above by the words, "feurigen Augen," is re-emphasized when our attention is brought to bear on Bertran de Born's "brennenden Augen und flatternden Haaren"(p. 392).

The same characteristics which Hans notices in the Frenchmen are mentioned in Born's hate-filled speech to his admirers--gesture, eyes and manner of speech--and both men are aware of the fact that they are characterizing an entire racial type, especially the minstrel, who says:

"Hasset ihr sie doch auch im stillen, ihr Provenzalen und Aquitanier, Kinder der Sonne, diese Leute des Nordens mit den gepanzerten Gliedern und steifen Gebärden, mit der herrischen Sprache und begehrlischen Augen!" (p. 392).

Born's words, "Kinder der Sonne," bring to mind Ruskin's description (in The Stones of Venice) of southern Europe with its "ceaseless sunshine" and "cloudless sky," while the remark about "gepanzerten Gliedern" reminds one immediately of Meyer's very German character in Die



Hochzeit des Mönchs whose name, significantly, is Germano.

Plautus im Nonnenkloster is a study in the Germanic-Romance contrast. The narrator of the story, a cultured, witty, urban man of the Renaissance, is very conscious of the racial contrast between himself and Hans and Gertrud, and he informs his small audience at one point, referring to Gertrud, that, "Nicht diese Worte brauchte die blonde Germanin, sondern einfachere, ja derbe und plumpe, welche sich aber aus einer barbarischen in unsere gebildete toskanische Sprache nicht übersetzen liessen, ohne burisch und grotesk zu werden..." (p. 140).

The descriptions of the main characters of this tale, as we might expect, also point up the northern-southern, possibly Gothic-Renaissance contrast. Poggio, the narrator, has a "scharf geschnittener, greiser Kopf," later mentioned as a "geistreichen [Kopf]," and has "beredten Lippen" (p. 130). In Hans, a Rhaetian, there is a mixture of northern and southern blood, though he is predominantly a German type and is described accordingly:

Dem kräftigen Jüngling, der übrigens in Gebärde und Rede--es mochte ein Tropfen romanischen Blutes in dem seinigen fließen--viel natürlichen Anstand hatte, rollten Tränen über das sonneverbrannte Gesicht (p. 135).

Gertrud, the young girl whom Hans loves, also has the powerful body of the German type, plus another German characteristic--blond hair. Poggio describes her as, "kräftig gebildet,...die Kapuze der weissen Kutte über

eine Last von blonden Flechten und einen starken, luftbedürftigen Nacken zurückgeworfen" (p. 139).

We find this same German type, for Fausch (in Jenatsch), Hans the Bowman and Herr Rollo (in Heilige), and Hans von Splügen (in Plautus), are all variations on the same Teutonic theme, in Die Hochzeit des Mönchs. Considering the character's name, which is Germano, it seems obvious that Meyer intends to embody in him all that is German--honesty, strength, good-humor, a certain rudeness, and frankness. Manner of speech is almost as important as actual description in characterizing Germano, "ein Kriegsmann von treuherzigem Aussehen..., der einen Ringelpanzer und einen lang herabhängenden Schnurrbart trug," and who speaks to Dante, "sein Italienisch mit einem leichten deutschen Akzent aussprechend" (p. 282), because it indicates that even in Cangrande's polished, very sophisticated circle of courtiers the German hasn't lost the good (and bad) qualities which are his by virtue of his race.

Except for Diana, most of the other characters--Dante, Ezzelin (or Cangrande, who is the fictional model for another fictional character), Ascanio--are variations of the Romance type. Diana has something of both cultures in her, as Dante points out in his story:

Ihre Mutter war eine Deutsche gewesen, ja eine Stauferin, wie einige behaupteten, freilich nur dem Blute, nicht dem Gesetze nach. Deutschland und Welschland hatten zusammen als gute Schwestern diese grosse Gestalt gebaut (pp. 290-291).

Diana's size is in itself unimportant; what is important

is that here again we find proof of Meyer's consciousness of the contrast between the northern and southern cultures and types.

In summation, we find that in the four works by Meyer considered in this paper considerable emphasis is placed on the contrast between the Germanic and Romance cultures and people. The contrast is expressed not only in descriptions of representatives of these cultures, but also in descriptions of their social and architectural background, e.g., the taprooms in Thusis and Venice (in Jenatsch). Meyer's conception of the two types now seems rather conventional, that is, the German type is always outspoken, frank, loyal and honest, while the French or Italian character is always intelligent, aristocratic, and elegant. Nonetheless, the contrast, considered in its literary form, is one of the most interesting aspects of Meyer's art.

## II

### Mannerism and Affectation in Meyer's Descriptive Technique

In the preceding chapter it has been hinted that Meyer's descriptive technique is not above some adverse criticism, and, since most of what is bad in Meyer's descriptions can be explained and discussed in a single frame of reference, this criticism will appear in a single,



shorter chapter. There is another reason for lumping together here most of the evidence which tends to show Meyer's descriptive technique in an unfavorable light: mannerism, as it refers to a descriptive technique, designates some sort of recurring peculiarity or eccentricity of literary expression, which, if done consciously, as it almost certainly was done in Meyer's case, becomes affectation. In the chapter above on the grand style we saw that Meyer was apparently striving consciously for a grand effect with his descriptions of magnificent gesture, elegant background and noble features. Occasionally this conscious effort, perhaps overstrained, leads to exaggeration and pose. As one critic puts it, "sometimes Meyer's manner becomes mere mannerism."<sup>1</sup> Even a contemporary of Meyer, Gottfried Keller, made several remarks in letters to friends to the effect that Meyer's style was inclined to be affected and filled with mannerisms. Arthur Burkhard believes that in these remarks Keller hit upon one of the chief defects of Meyer's art and says, "With its insistence on nobility, sublimity, luxuriant grandeur, manifest in the repeated occurrence of epithets like edel, erhaben, happig, his [Meyer's] Poesie is Kunstpoesie, his Kunst, Luxuskunst."<sup>2</sup> Thus, this chapter is really a logical extension of the preceding one and aims to show how the grand style, carried too far and employed with too little restraint, is, in effect, the chief cause of most of the

adverse criticism which has been leveled at Meyer's descriptive technique.

One of Meyer's less charitable critics (Baumgarten) believes that the author's inclination to have scenes described from the viewpoint of a spectator in the story and to describe scenes in a plastisch manner grew into mannerism when these two techniques became an all too conscious theory of art. In fact, Baumgarten believes it is an artistic mistake to try to express in one form of art, e.g., literature, what can be expressed only in another, such as painting or sculpture.<sup>1</sup> He condemns the Swiss writer's art because it tries to go beyond its own boundaries and to use effects borrowed from other art forms to produce a sensational or exotic effect. This occurs, Baumgarten believes, when Meyer describes Ezzelin in the pose of Michelangelo's Moses (Hochzeit, pp. 299, 318).<sup>2</sup> The critic does not believe, moreover, that Meyer even had the ability to visualize scenes, and says, "sensory plasticity was not so much of Meyer's nature as born of his yearning [for it]. This yearning led him to overstrain his innate talent and led him to an imitation of pictorial art which was in bad taste." This critic becomes almost savage as he continues to condemn Meyer's descriptive technique: "Meyer's Bildhaftigkeit is a substitute for his lack of poetic power: the mask for a countenance without expression. Keller visualizes his faces, Meyer describes various artistic

impressions....Keller's images come from abundance, Meyer's images from [artistic] poverty." Baumgarten sees Meyer as an aesthete who knew only the surface of life and thus depicted only the surface in his pictorial descriptions of static scenes and enigmatic characters. The Swiss writer, he believes, knew only the surface of life because he had "never experienced passion and never saw it in life. Only in museums had he seen heroes in pictures....He knew only the exterior appearance of the great. He could only portray heroic allure, not monumental passion: gesture instead of life, a museum-recollection instead of experience....Instead of the object he gave a picture."<sup>1</sup>

Baumgarten's criticism has been quoted above at some length because it helps to show that Meyer's pictorial descriptive technique is striking rather than modest--this is a characteristic of the grand style--and that one either likes it very much or detests it.

Much of what Baumgarten says in regard to Meyer's unexciting, passionless existence is supported by one of the poet's biographers, Maync, and it also seems likely that recollections of works of art seen in München, Paris and in Italy exercised an influence on the Swiss author's descriptions, which often make reference to a work of art, e.g., Poggio's examination of a piece of sculpture by an old master (Plautus, p. 139). It is also true that Meyer had a fondness for having a spectator,



often in hiding, or watching from a position which restricts his field of vision, describe the scenes of a story. In Jenatsch many scenes are described from the viewpoint of Waser, Fausch, Wertmüller, Lucretia or Jürg himself. In Der Heilige all the scenes within the story proper (i.e., not in the frame) are described by Hans, who, very often, is in hiding or is eavesdropping. To say, however, that Meyer's tendency to describe in a graphic manner was due to his "lack of poetic power," seems to this writer to be an exaggeration. It seems far more likely that the pictorial, plastisch descriptive technique, rather than being a sort of artistic substitute for imagination and the ability to visualize a scene, which Meyer certainly had, was consciously developed to meet the artistic requirements of the grand style. Whether or not Meyer's pictorial scenes, which have already been discussed, are described in bad taste is a question of the individual judgment. To be more definite: in the scenes described in a pictorial manner which are found in the four works treated in this paper I found no description which seemed to me to be in bad taste; in fact, these longer, more "ambitious" descriptions are, I think, examples of Meyer's art at its best and most typical. In these descriptions one finds only one artistic element which might be considered objectionable; that is the perhaps excessive use of alliteration.

Although it appears that Baumgarten has exaggerated

in his criticism of Meyer's Bildhaftigkeit, it is certainly true that there is mannerism in Meyer's descriptive technique. It is more often found, however, in brief descriptions, particularly of the head, face, facial features and eyes, whose purpose is to reveal a fleeting emotion or state of mind, rather than in the longer, obviously more carefully written descriptions mentioned above. Meyer seems to want to avoid at all costs simply telling the reader outright the emotions of his figures. Thus, he describes their external features in a manner which indicates their inner state. He uses this method so frequently that it apparently becomes an artistic habit, a formula; thus the mannerism in Meyer's works.

One of the most obvious formulas for expressing emotion used by Meyer is description of the eyes when such description has no real relation to the appearance of the fictional personality involved. For instance, in Jenatsch Pompejus Planta plots the death of the novel's hero, whom he detests, and at a particular bitter outburst, "fuhr ein Blitz des Hasses aus den Augen des Freiherrn [Planta]" (p. 27). When Lucretia sees Jenatsch, the man who murdered her father, "ihre ganze Seele trat in die erschrockenen Augen..." (p. 116). When Duke Rohan's troops march out of Chur, Baron Lecques is still enraged by Jenatsch's betrayal of the duke, his superior, and "das jugendliche Feuer seiner Augen sprühte Funken des Hasses..." (p. 216). The association of fire with the

eyes, which is very characteristic of Meyer, recurs in this mention of Jenatsch who is angered by slow negotiation procedures: "Ein unheimliches Feuer fuhr aus den Augen des Bündners..." (p. 239). This is probably typical of Meyer at his worst; he heightens, or tries to heighten, the heroic qualities of his superior figures not by more profound psychological analysis, but by having "uncanny fire" spew from their eyes.

Another descriptive convention for expressing extreme anger is the rolling of eyes, a literary convention which one can't imagine finding in the works of prominent English and French contemporary writers and which doubtless had long since gone out of fashion in German literature also. Nonetheless in Meyer's work we find this artistic anachronism used several times. When, in Der Heilige, King Henry flies into a rage because he has just learned Becket has again defied him, he walks back and forth, "mit rollenden Augen" (p. 409). In Hochzeit, Cangrande's pedantic ceremonial master, Burcardo, resents Dante's use of his name in the story of the unfrocked monk and reveals his anger, formula-like, when "er runzelte die Brauen und rollte die Augen" (p. 322).

The use of a description, sometimes a very vague one, of the head, face or facial features whose purpose is to reveal a fleeting emotion or state of mind is also very common in Meyer. Such descriptions are not necessarily bad. As we have seen, Meyer almost always reveals character



and emotion by exterior descriptions, a method which requires considerable imagination and a certain subtlety in order to avoid too frequent repetition of the same description. The sketches which appear here, on the other hand, are poor for a variety of reasons usually involving the fact that they are extremely vague and really have little relation to the physical appearance of that which is described.

There are many more examples of the mannerism discussed above in Jenatsch than in Hochzeit, Heilige and Plautus together. Outside of the fact that Jenatsch is longer than the other three works together, this is probably explained by Meyer's lack of experience in using his own external method of characterization in the novel, which appeared in 1876. He used it more successfully in Der Heilige (1880), Plautus im Nonnenkloster (1882), and Die Hochzeit des Mönchs (1884); as we will see, most of the quotations below come from Jenatsch, which is a point in Meyer's favor.

We have already noticed how Meyer tries to heighten the heroic atmosphere which surrounds his superior characters by having fire or lightning spurt from their eyes. He uses other descriptive methods which are designed to make his figures appear to be supermen, methods which result in sometimes incredible descriptions. For instance, this description of Jenatsch from Waser's point of view: "Er [Waser] fühlte sich ein wenig gedrückt

neben der athletischen Gestalt des Bündners, von dessen braunem, bärtigem Haupte ein Feuerschein wilder Kraft ausging" (pp. 32-33). The familiar flame motif reappears used as an external revelation of Jenatsch's anger, and is again seen from Waser's viewpoint: "Jetzt fuhr eine düstere Flamme über das Antlitz des Bündners" (p. 43). A short time later, Lucia, Jürg's wife, finds him in a better mood when she gazes at "Jürgs übermütiges Angesicht, aus dem eine wilde Freude sprühte" (p. 59). Jürg's is doubtless one of the most expressive faces in literature; Duke Rohan notices at one point that, "ein unheimliches Wetterleuchten flog durch die Züge des Bündners..." (p. 174). Later, when Jenatsch learns of the death of the Duke Waser notices that "...es ging wie ein grauer Todesschatten über sein Antlitz" (p. 263).

In Der Heilige Becket, who is another of Meyer's superior men, is always described in a manner which suggests his superiority, and occasionally the result is an exaggerated, incredible, even meaningless description. This occurs when King Henry asks Becket, now become a religious fanatic, "'Wem habe ich dich abgetreten?'" As the archbishop silently points to heaven, "ein überirdisches Licht umglänzte...seine Stirn" (p. 377). The same overstrained striving to express the supernatural can be detected in this description, which being a simile, is at least more credible: "Das Antlitz des Herrn Thomas... leuchtete wie das eines Engels..." (p. 404).

Dante, who narrates the story of the unfrocked monk, is also a superior character and the Swiss writer suggests this when he introduces him, a "gravitätischer Mann, dessen grosse Züge und lange Gewänder aus einer andern Welt zu sein schienen" (Hochzeit, p. 280). But again Meyer exaggerates in trying to suggest Dante's moral and intellectual superiority, when, at a point early in the story, he writes, "eine himmlische Verklärung erleuchtete seine (Dante's) strengen Züge" (p. 284).

In summation of this short chapter little remains to be said which was not mentioned by way of introduction, and these general observations will conclude the chapter.

As we have seen, that which is most objectionable in Meyer's descriptions--exaggeration, artificiality, affectation--comes from his striving for the grand style, which, at least in Meyer's conception of it, requires that the figures of a story be treated in an exterior manner. As Corrodi points out: "We see [Meyer's] characters in a concentrated light, see them move as plastic figures, hear them speak; everything which can be perceived by the senses is reported....What goes on in them, however, what moves them in their innermost being we must guess."<sup>1</sup> This exterior method of characterization can lead to mannerism, as it does in these four works of Meyer, but it is a mannerism more closely related to character delineation than to description. The descriptions which the Swiss poet consciously means to be decorative



and pictorial, as for instance the description of Duke Rohan's party standing before a cathedral in Venice, or the description of Gnade's corpse, and which have nothing to do with revelation of emotion or character, as do the brief sketches discussed above, are charming, impressive examples of Meyer's best work.

### III

#### Meyer's External Treatment of his Fictional Characters

It has been mentioned several times previously that Meyer prefers to reveal his characters' state of mind by means of exterior description rather than by the more direct and conventional method of divulging their thoughts to the reader. Meyer prefers "to describe involved mental occurrences without direct psychological statement..., to let the reader deduct them from indications of the external attitude..."<sup>1</sup> That is, he characterizes his figures by means of mimicry, gesture and movement, in the manner of a painter or sculptor.<sup>2</sup> And, as one critic points out, this external method of characterization is particularly well-suited to Meyer's work because of the Swiss writer's fondness for dealing with the obscure figures of history whose enigmatic character is preserved, even heightened, by preventing the reader from knowing their innermost

thoughts. For instance, the characterization of Meyer's most mysterious and contradictory figure, Thomas Becket, owes much of its effectiveness to Meyer's external approach.<sup>1</sup> In the portrayal of Becket we find a "strong illumination of the exterior figure and mysterious darkness over the inner life."<sup>2</sup> In regard to Becket's inscrutable character, apparently intentionally made so by the author, it is interesting to note that Hans the Bowman implicitly condemns Meyer's method of characterization in an aside to the Canon. This is obviously a piece of irony on Meyer's part. Hans says:

Habt Ihr das aus Byzanz gekommene Bild gesehen, das die Mönche in Allerheiligen zu Schaffhausen als ihren besten Schatz hüten? Es ist ein toter Salvator mit eingesunkenen Augen und geschlossenen Lidern; aber betrachtet man ihn länger, so ändert er durch eine List der Zeichnung und Verteilung der Schatten die Miene und sieht Euch mit offenen Schmerzensaugen traurig an. Eine unehrliche Kunst, Herr! Denn der Maler soll nicht zweideutig, sondern klar seine Striche ziehen (p. 353).

It can be argued that the revelation of the psychology of fictional characters merely through description of their features and gestures is impossible, and that what Meyer really does is to disguise psychological analysis as sensory description.<sup>3</sup> The first argument may or may not be true; the Swiss writer's method of characterization at any rate is not limited exclusively to description. The second argument, as we will see, is definitely true, and in the following pages, which will be devoted to a consideration of Meyer's external

characterization and other related elements of his descriptive technique, much emphasis will be placed on the distinction between purely decorative descriptive matter and that which has associative or even symbolic significance.

As we will see below, Meyer's description of characters, even important ones, is essentially vague and unconcerned with incidental details. What is important in his descriptions of fictional personalities is not what can be seen with the eyes, but the significance of that which lies beyond the realm of the purely sensory.<sup>1</sup> In fact, this statement of Burkhard might be considered a summation of Meyer's descriptive technique as it is related to characterization: "...with Meyer...face and heart are identical. The features are the index of character."<sup>2</sup> In the paragraphs below, then, it will be shown that the Swiss poet's method of character revelation is one based on the exterior, surface description of his figures, description which is subtly mixed with psychological analysis.

This description of Pompejus Planta, seen through Waser's eyes, bears out what has just been said. The single phrase, "in seinen Zügen," externalizes this revelation of emotion: "Die stolze kräftige Lebenslust war geschwunden, und in seinen [Planta's] Zügen kämpften heisser Groll und tiefer Jammer" (Jenatsch, p. 27).

When Waser tells Jenatsch of Planta's intention to have him murdered, the Protestant preacher who is to become



a popular hero becomes cold, reserved and distant, as he often does. Meyer doesn't state this emotional change directly, however; he has Waser see it: "Arme Lucretia!" hörte Waser ihn aus tiefster Seele seufzen, dann wurde sein Ausdruck immer rätselhafter, verschlossener, und härtete sich zur Undurchdringlichkeit" (pp. 43-44). This same change in Jenatsch's state of mind occurs when, in Venice, he is going by gondola to Duke Rohan's palace with Wertmüller, the Duke's aide. Again Meyer doesn't take a conventional, direct approach; he has Wertmüller see the change:

Das braune Antlitz des in der Gondel Zurückgelehnten [Jenatsch], das er [Wertmüller] im Laufe dieses Tages immer belebt und bewegt gesehen hatte von den verschiedensten Ausserungen eines feurigen Temperamentes und geschmeidigen Geistes, es war wie erstorben und erkaltet zu metallener Härte. Unverwandt staunte es vor sich hin...und erschien fremdartig verzogen und drohend in seiner Erstarrung (p. 110).

One of the best examples of Meyer's revelation of emotion through description of gesture and facial expression occurs in Der Heilige just after King Henry has made an angry statement to the effect that no one has courage enough to get rid of Becket for him. There is an immediate reaction on the part of four knights, the same four who later murder the archbishop, and this physical reaction, seen from Hans' viewpoint, takes the place of direct statement:

Noch seh' ich, wie Herr Hug sich die Lippe

benagte, wie Herr Rinald seine weichen Langhaare um die Finger schlang und zerriss, während Herrn Richard der Zorn dunkelrot in die Stirne stieg, und der witzige Mund des Herrn Wilhelm Tracy, der sonst voller Gelächter war, sich zum bittersten Hohne verzog (pp. 409-410).

When one of Meyer's figures becomes troubled or worried, the effect in descriptive terms is almost always the same. The character draws his (or her) eyebrows together or furrows appear in the forehead. In fact this description occurs so often that it could be treated as a mannerism were it not for the fact that in normal reading this particular "formula" for expressing emotion is not noticeable and is thus not artistically objectionable.

In the inn at Thusis (in Jenatsch) a young waitress is pestered on all sides for service and thus she, "zog immer finsterer die Brauen zusammen" (p. 161). Jenatsch is worried by the withdrawal of Duke Rohan's troops from the border and appears in the inn "mit zusammengezogenen Brauen..." (p. 167). In Der Heilige King Henry is both angry and worried when Becket returns the seal of state to him, thus signifying he will no longer act as chancellor, and the ruler "runzelte argwöhnisch die Stirn..." (p. 377). In a later meeting with Becket, Henry's emotion is described in the same manner:

"Wohin drängst du mich, Thomas?" begann er.  
 "Ich soll meine Normannen erzürnen?...Willst du mich verderben?!"...Er runzelte die Stirn, als mühe er sich nachzudenken...(p. 404).

Herr Rollo, who learns with regret that Hans the Bowman plans to leave the service of the king, reveals his state of mind just as the king does: "Wie, du gehst, Bogner? Der König wird dich missen!" warf er hin und runzelte die Stirn" (p. 426). In Plautus im Nonnenkloster Poggio notices "tiefe Furchen in Gertrudens junge Stirne ziehen....," when she laments the fact that she is bound by oath to become a nun (p. 143). In Hochzeit Antiope's demented mother insults Diana whose inner emotion, which leads to her striking Antiope, is likewise externalized in this description:

Durch die rohe Verhöhnung ihres Leibes und ihrer Seele aufgebracht, tief empört, zog sie die Brauen zusammen und ballte die Hände (p. 341).

As well as revealing fleeting emotions, Meyer's descriptions also have the important purpose of revealing a fictional personality's character. This fact should be obvious in many descriptions which occur above, and those which appear in the following paragraphs are simply additional proof of Burkhard's statement that, "...with Meyer...face and heart are identical. The features are the index of character."<sup>1</sup> The descriptions below which I have chosen to prove this statement are characterized by the fact that in them there is scarcely any purely sensory data and very little that is merely decorative or ornamental.



In Der Heilige, the hearty, stalwart character of the Bowman, a German type ( thus, frank, honest, but unpolished), is suggested by his "festen, eckigen Züge," a description which brings Fausch to mind, from Jürg Jenatsch. One of the most striking examples of Meyer's revelation of character by means of exterior description occurs in Plautus im Nonnenkloster, in the portrayal of one of the very few vulgar female characters in Meyer, Brigittchen von Trogen. Poggio's description of the abbess is far from flattering, and it is certain that here Meyer means to reveal her animal--like vulgarity and cunning by suggesting the resemblance of her face to that of a pig. All this is related in the first person, of course by Poggio:

... ich wurde in meinem Gedankengang plötzlich und unangenehm unterbrochen durch einen kreischenden Zuruf der Hanswurstin [Brigitt] in der weissen Kutte mit dem hochgeröteten Gesichte, ...dem kaum entdeckbaren Stülpnäschen und dem davon durch einen ungeheuern Zwischenraum getrennten bestialischen Munde (Plautus, p. 138).

Meyer's delineation of Diana in Die Hochzeit des Mönches is a much more subtle revelation of character. Diana's personality is two--sided; she is capable of deep, powerful emotions, as we see at the end of the story, and yet she has a submissive, tractable temperament as long as she believes she is being treated justly. This side of her character is suggested in the description below:

Diana folgte und kniete sich auf der andern Seite des Sessels nieder mit hangenden Armen und gefalteten Händen, das Haupt auf die Lehne legend, so dass nur der Knoten ihres blonden Haares wie ein lebloser Gegenstand sichtbar blieb (p. 297).  
(Italics mine.)

Doubtless one of the most typical and important keys to character and emotion in Meyer is description of the eyes. In fact, one might say that Meyer never mentions his figures' eyes without some purpose of character delineation or revelation of emotion entirely apart from any decorative intent. In fact, such description occurs so frequently in the four works treated in this paper, especially in Jenatsch, that it becomes a formula for the expression of emotion. This is apparent, however, only after careful examination of Meyer's works and is, generally speaking, neither conspicuous nor objectionable in the normal course of reading. Moreover, Meyer's description of the eyes of his characters is, as has been stated, an important and usually effective method of revelation of emotion. Hence, this topic is not discussed in chapter two of this paper.

Meyer's description of eyes is so important a part of his descriptive technique that practically all of his characters' eyes are mentioned, either as a kind of broad-brush characterization or as is appropriate to express emotion. Often, even minor characters' eyes are described, and such description is, in fact, one of Meyer's favorite methods for characterizing peripheral characters.

In Jürg Jenatsch two relatively unimportant figures are Lukas, Lucretia's faithful servant, and an unnamed Spanish captain who first appears at the fortress of Fuentes and who later captures Jenatsch. Lukas, an irascible old man, has "blitzenden Augen" (p. 5). The captain is a lean, villainous type and has "hohlen misstrauischen Augen" (p. 48). Pompejus Planta, a more important figure, has "unheimlich

blitzenden Augen" (p. 27). Here, of course, mention of the eyes is intended to reveal an emotion —insane anger —not to aid in characterization. The reverse is true of a reference to Duke Rohan's "mildes, durchdringendes Auge" (p. 51), obviously a description which reflects his calm, moderate temperament and his power to read character, a power which incidentally fails him in regard to Jenatsch. Grimani's "ruhigen, dunkeln Augen" (p. 132) are certainly in keeping with his calm temperament and Italian ancestry, and this, in Meyer's work, does not occur by accident. Lucretia's "dunkeln Augen" (p. 6), which are mentioned several times, support her serious turn of mind and doubtless also her beauty. The acuteness and cold quality of the northern type is suggested in Wertmüller's "gescheiten grauen Augen" (p. 103), and one may discern as well in this description a hint of the Germanic-Romance contrast which was discussed at some length previously. The reader who is familiar with Meyer's descriptive methods finds an intimation of Pankraz's energetic temperament in his "klug blitzenden Augen" (p. 272). One of the most important motifs in the characterization of Jenatsch is the description of his "brennenden Augen" (p. 240). Fire, as we have seen in other descriptions, is often associated with the popular hero, e.g., "ein unheimliches Feuer fuhr aus den Augen des Bündners...(p. 239), and it is suggestive, obviously, of his almost superhuman energy and strength and also has a hint in it of something diabolic.



In Der Heilige Hans' hearty good-nature is expressed in his "funkelnden Augen" (p. 290, 424) as well as in his "festen, eckigen Züge" (p. 290). His appealing normality and simplicity is emphasized by the fact that his eyes twinkle, and do not "flash" as do those of Jenatsch, a superior man. Becket's ascetic introverted character is suggested in this description which has in it hardly any genuine sensory data, showing how little Meyer was interested in purely decorative elements in most of his character sketches. This is seen from Hans' viewpoint who also relates it:

Da ich den wundersamen Herrn [Becket] seit manchen Jahres Frist nicht mehr gesehen hatte, so erschrak ich über die widernatürliche Schmalheit seines Antlitzes und seine tiefen, schmerzlichen Augen, deren Blick mehr nach immer als nach aussen gerichtet schien (pp. 396, 397).

King Henry, the naiv type, extroverted, superior physically though inferior mentally to Becket, his opposite, has "blauen unbeschatteten Augen" which "brannten wie zwei Flammen" (p. 308). Again we find the association of fire with a hero, a superior man, which was mentioned in connection with a still more powerful, energetic figure, Jürg Jenatsch.

It has been mentioned several times before that nothing is superfluous, nothing without some significance in Meyer's descriptions, even in ~~un~~important ones which deal with comparatively insignificant characters. Thus, Hilde, the daughter of Hans' former employer in London and the woman he wanted (at one time) to marry, has "tief liegenden

blauen Augen" (p. 427), "tiefliegend" because she is very seriously ill, "blau" probably because she is a Saxon, for, as has been pointed out, Meyer was very aware of racial characteristics and contrasts, apparently taking advantage of every opportunity to put them into literary form. Hilde's eyes are described once more as "strahlend" when she dies (p.428).

In Plautus im Nonnenkloster it is not surprising that Cosimo de Medici, a patron of the arts and Renaissance man has "klugen Augen" (p. 130) nor are we surprised to see that Gertrud, a German, northern type, has "blauen Augen" ( p. 159).

Dante, probably the most interesting figure in Die Hochzeit des Mönchs, has "schwermütigen Augen" (p. 282), a description which in its vagueness and immense suggestive power is very typical of Meyer, and also brings to mind Dante's unhappiness due to his exile from Florence, In the same story, Astorre's "warmen braunen Augen" (p. 298) indicate that he has essentially a very affectionate, perhaps passionate temperament. This subtle hint that the unfrocked monk will be an easy prey to love is strengthened when Ascanio makes this statement to him: "behälst deine munteren braunen Augen, die -- bei der Fackel der Aurora! -- leuchten und sprühen, seit du das Kloster verlassen hast, überall offen..." (p. 313). And when he falls in love with Antiope, Dante relates, "seine Augen sind voller Sonne..." (p. 346).

Thus, in this discussion of Meyer's technique in regard to the description of eyes what should be most obvious obvious is that the Swiss author seldom, if ever, describes without some definite purpose whether it be characterization or expression of emotion or physical state.

This discussion of the importance of apparently insignificant detail brings us to another aspect of Meyer's descriptive technique, one which is closely related to the description of eyes, the precise description of parts of the human anatomy, such as the pupils of the eye, corners of the mouth, the brow etc., with the purpose of characterization or revelation of state of mind.

One description in Jürg Jenatsch shows particularly well how Meyer's characters reveal their inner thoughts and emotions in certain facial features, and **it** also shows Meyer's fondness for localizing interest in certain parts of the face. The scene occurs after Jenatsch's betrayal of Duke Rohan, when the latter is riding out of Chur followed by the French elements of his command. The dignitaries of the city are standing in a respectful, sorrowful groups to one side, among them the mayor of Chur, who played a part in the plot against the **Duke**, and who reveals in this description his shame for having done so:

In der Mitte der Ratsherren fiel der Amtsbürgermeister Meyer als wahrhaft imposante Erscheinung ins Auge. Nie hatte eine bürgermeisterliche Kette mit ihrer grossen runden Schaumünze bequemer gelegen und selbstzufriedener geleuchtet als die auf seiner breiten Brust ruhende; nie hatten ein seidener Strumpf und ein Rosettenschuh knapper und schöner gessessen als heute an seinem wohlgebildeten, feierlich vorgesetzten Beine. Bei näherer Betrachtung jedoch verriet die Befangenheit des gewöhnlich gesunden... Gesichts' und der bängliche Ausdruck der irrenden Augensterne einen geheimen Widerspruch seines Innern mit der magistralen Sicherheit seiner vollkommenen Haltung (pp. 225-226). (Italics mine.)

A similar description, whose purpose is apparently to heighten the air of mystery around the almost superhuman figure of Jenatsch, occurs in a boat trip to Rohan's palace



in Venice. The viewpoint is that of Wertmüller who watches Jürg closely for some indication of his thoughts:

Noch einmal suchte er [Wertmüller] auf dem tiefbeschatteten Gesichte vor ihm zu lesen, aber die Gondel bog eben in eine schmale finstere Lagune ein, und nur zwei glühende Augensterne blickten ihm, wie die eines Löwen, aus der Nacht entgegen (p. 111).

There are several other variations of this descriptive technique, all concerned with the facial features. For instance Waser, in a jovial mood, has "lachenden Augenwinkeln" (p. 30), and the witty Poggio, in Plautus has "lächelnden Mundwinkel," and our attention is also drawn to "die Heiterkeit der Stirn" (p. 130). Dante considers the brow an important indication of character and intelligence, and in the courtiers who surround Cangrande "er entdeckte...neben mancher flachen einige bedeutende Stirnen" (Hochzeit, p. 282). When the author of The Divine Comedy thinks with lowered head about his exiled condition and the fact that he has no home of his own, we see his melancholy state of mind reflected in his features:

Viele junge und scharfe Augen hafteten auf dem Florentiner. Dieser verhüllte sich schweigend das Haupt. Was in ihm vorging, weiss niemand. Als er es wieder erhob, war seine Stirn vergrämter, sein Mund bitterer and seine Nase länger" (Hochzeit, p. 336).

This description is very typical of Meyer because he refuses to reveal Dante's thoughts directly to the reader. "Was in ihm vorging, weiss niemand," he writes.

In Der Heilige also, Meyer refuses to invade the mind of his characters. Thus, instead of a direct revelation, Hans reports, "In diesem Augenblicke zeigte sich die senkrechte,

tiefe Staatsfalte zwischen den feinen Brauen des Kanzlers" (p. 327).

It has been pointed out previously that Meyer has a fondness for the use of an observer, often a figure whose field of vision is limited in some way.<sup>1</sup> It is probable that Meyer employs this technique in order to permit the observer to interpret what he describes, thus avoiding a more direct statement of the observed character's emotion or temperament. This method of description is, thus, in keeping with Meyer's external, surface treatment of his characters which is the subject of this chapter. As a result of this tendency to have a scene described through another character's eyes we find that the four works by Meyer discussed in this paper are rich in scenes which are watched from a place of hiding, for instance, Waser spies on Robustelli and Pompejus Planta in Jürg Jenatsch (pp. 26-27) as the two plot the murder of the novel's central character. In the same work Wertmüller and Jenatsch watch from behind a drapery as Lucretia pleads her case before Duke Rohen:

Unwillkürlich dem Gefühle des ihn Zurückziehenden gehorchend, wich er [Wertmüller] mit Jenatsch hinter die Draperie des Einganges zurück und blieb dort stehen als ein verborgener, aber aufmerksamer Zeuge auch des Geringsten, was im Saale vorging (p. 113).

All of the story of Becket and King Henry is, of course, described from the point of view of an observer, Hans the Bowman, and, in order for the story as he tells it to be complete, Meyer is forced to have Hans spy on other

characters, or at least to watch them from a distance. Hans is always at the right place at the right moment to describe the important scenes of the Novelle, and while his never-failing presence at such moments perhaps verges on the incredible--e.g., Hans is present at all the decisive meetings between Becket and the king, is present when Richard meets the ex-chancellor in France, present when Becket is murdered and when the plans are laid for his murder by the four knights, present when King Henry discovers Gnade's castle, present when she is killed and sees both the King's and Becket's reactions to the event--Meyer never fails to have Hans explain why it was he was at a particular place at a particular time. Thus Meyer's treatment of his fictional personalities in this work is almost completely external because no revelation of character, state of mind or changing emotion comes directly to the reader. Everything is seen, and generally is interpreted by Hans, the story's narrator. At one point he spies on Becket who is on his way to Gnade's Moorish castle (p. 325), and later he spies on a meeting between the chancellor and his daughter from behind an ivy-covered wall. What is important is not his eavesdropping, but the fact that all we learn of the two figures he is watching is his own impression and interpretation of the sensory data presented him. In this description one can also discern Meyer's fondness for a rich, picturesque setting:



Nach einer Weile trat Herr Thomas, Gnade an der Hand haltend, durch die hohe Bogentür und liess sich mit ihr auf einer weiss schimmernden Marmorbank nieder neben einer rot geäderten Schale, über welcher emporschiessende Wasserstrahlen sich in der Luft kreuzten. Und aus solcher Nähe blickte ich in die besorgte, aber nicht argwöhnische Miene des Herrn und in Gnades rätselhaftes Gesichtchen, dass ich plötzlich den Kopf zurückbog, obgleich die Mauer, durch die ich auslugte, aussen von Eppich übersponnen war (p. 334).

This description is quoted at length because it demonstrates particularly well the fact that description of Meyer's figures (in contrast to background description) is a literary device whose purpose is to reveal something of their temperament or state of mind, and not a decorative element of his art. It is difficult to believe that Hans can be close enough to Becket to see that his face bears an expression of worry but not suspicion without being himself seen, and we discover, thus, that this is a revelation of emotion disguised as sensory description.

The field of vision of the observer-figures in Meyer is not always limited because they are watching from a hiding place. Several scenes are described by observers whose viewpoint is restricted deliberately by Meyer to create a kind of frame-effect which gives descriptions treated in this manner a suggestion of three dimensions. The reader's consciousness of a near-by object--a door, wall, statue, etc.--which cuts off from the observer part of the scene being described, gives him a feeling of distance and perspective which is not found

in descriptions which deal with persons or objects all of which are at approximately the same distance from the observer. There can be little doubt that Meyer was consciously striving for such an effect, for this same type of description occurs several times in the four works discussed. For instance, when Richard, King Henry's son, meets Becket in France to try to bring about a reconciliation between him and the king, such a "framing" effect is implied in Hans' description of the scene:

Ich setzte mich unter den Bogen einer durch ein Bündel feiner Marmorstäbe geteilten Fensteröffnung auf die breite Steinplatte und warf hie und da einen forschenden Blick ins Grüne zu den zwei Herren hinüber (Heilige, pp. 398-399).

In Jürg Jenatsch a description of Duke Rohan's cortège in Venice is obviously intended to evoke a pictorial sense of distance and perspective. The observers in this scene are Jenatsch and Fausch, and their field of vision is restricted here by the doorway:

--Inzwischen hatte er [Fausch] leise die Tür etwas geöffnet und sein grosses Gesicht lauschend an die Spalte gelegt. "Sieh, sieh," fuhr er fort, "drüben setzen sich die Bettler schon in Bewegung und bilden in rührenden Gruppen auf beiden Seiten Spalier. Der Herzog ist im Anzuge."

Mit diesen Worten stiess er beide Flügel weit auf. Der dunkle Steinrahmen der Tür umschloss ein Bild voll Farbenglanz, Leben und Sonne (p. 90).

We find this "frame" effect also in Die Hochzeit des Mönchs when Ezzelin and Ascanio watch the crowd below from a palace window:

In einer Morgenstunde...lauschte der Tyrann mit seinem Neffen durch ein kleines Rundbogenfenster seines Stadtturmes auf den anliegenden Platz hinunter, den eine aufgeregte Menge füllte, murmelnd und tosend wie die wechselnde Meereswoge (p. 363).

Here there is an intimation of distance but the observer's field of vision doesn't seem to be limited seriously.

Meyer's purpose in pointedly mentioning the window (for as we have come to see, it is certain he had a purpose) is probably to suggest the contrast between the lofty power and elegant surroundings of Ezzelin and the vulgarity and commonness of the masses.

Meyer's use of an observer who both describes and interprets the gestures and physical appearance of other figures brings us to another aspect of his descriptive technique, one which is closely related to what has been discussed above, that is, the interpretation of one character's features, bearing, etc., in terms of temperament or emotion, by another character. Meyer himself said, "I describe characters in as much as it is possible only as they appear to the other characters."<sup>1</sup> That is, Meyer portrays his figures, at least in part, by reporting the manner in which other figures react to them and by having one fictional personality interpret the gestures and fleeting facial expressions of another. Thus, as one might suppose, this sort of interpretation occurs frequently in the Swiss poet's work because he prefers indirect revelation to the more conventional and simpler method of characterization which is based largely on



the author's narrative.

In the descriptions which will be discussed below there is a mixture of pure sensory data and psychological analysis which is, in a manner of speaking, disguised as pure sensory data or subtly interpolated into it. One can simply accept this as a part of Meyer's technique, as it is, or condemn it as does Baumgarten in his critical work, Das Werk Conrad Ferdinand Meyers, to which reference has been made previously. Baumgarten's statement in regard to this technique, that, "behind the stylistic disguise in pictures there is not even always a real analysis which discloses the souls of the characters, but very often only a systematic enumeration of typical character-traits and of results of psychological processes,"<sup>1</sup> has much truth in it, but then few critics would argue that Meyer's literary strength lies in psychological analysis. Since this paper deals with Meyer's descriptive technique and not his talent as a psychologist, the topic of characterization, whether bad or good, will be discussed only as it is related to description.

Since the translation of sensory data--gesture, bearing, and facial expression--into psychological terms is such an important aspect of Meyer's method of characterization, he establishes the fact several times in his works that his characters are adept at reading the faces of other fictional figures.<sup>2</sup> Fausch, for instance, is a shrewd observer of the men around him, and he discovers

Jenatsch's state of mind simply by looking at him:

Fausch hatte gerade diesen Gast [Jenatsch] heute am wenigsten erwartet, auch entging ihm der mit den übermütigen Worten auf der Schwelle im Widerspruch stehende Ausdruck des Kummers und der Abspannung auf dem kühnen Gesichte nicht (p. 85).

Grimani also has Fausch's talent as we see in his interview with Duke Rohan:

Verzeiht, teurer Herr, meine vielleicht schwarzichtige Sorge für Euch," sagte Grimani, der den verborgenen Kummer des Herzogs in seiner erkälteten Miene las (Jenatsch, p. 135).

And in the same novel Pankraz says to Waser, "Ich lese auf Eurem Gesicht, dass Ihr wie ich in Sorge seid um den Obersten" (p. 272). In Der Heilige Hans reads Becket's state of mind from his eyes:

...seine [Becket's] dunkeln Augen richteten sich auf den König und schienen zu sagen: 'grausamer Mann, du hast mich meines Kindes beraubt und verlangst, dass ich mich um die deinigen bekümmere!' (p. 350).

Thus, Meyer's method of characterization, which often requires that one character reveal the state of mind of another by interpretation of his physical, exterior appearance, is placed on a firm, valid basis through Meyer's establishment of the fact that his figures have the ability to make such interpretations accurately.

In Jürg Jenatsch, Wertmüller, from whose point of view this description is seen, reveals Lucretia's state of mind merely by analysing her bearing, posture and features. This is no simple description, but a subtle blending of the factual, surface, sensory data--with a revelation of



emotion:

Andächtig kniete sie [Lucretia], das Antlitz zum Gekreuzigten erhoben, mit gefalteten Händen auf den Stufen des Hochaltars. Nicht Zweifel, nicht Trostbedürfnis, nicht Sehnsucht schien sie hergeführt zu haben. Keine innere Aufregung, keine unstete Leidenschaft bewegte die hochgewachsene Gestalt. Feste Ruhe lag in den schönen, noch jugendweichen Zügen (p. 80).

This description of Duke Rohan, seen through Jürg's eyes, is in one respect, its extreme vagueness, very typical of Meyer's art:

Neben den erwarteten Spuren der schweren Krankheit befremdete ihn [Jürg] darin ein tief eingegrabener Zug verschwiegenden, hoffnungslosen Grams, der peinlich hervortrat, wenn der Herzog seinen lautereren, strahlenden Blick zeitweise senkte (p. 170).

This is a subtle description, indeed hardly a description at all, strictly speaking, because it includes very little sensory data. There is nothing really factual in it; to be sure it is suggestive, an impression, but in concrete terms we have learned nothing about Duke Rohan's physical appearance. This is not to say the description is poor; it is merely typical of Meyer's descriptive treatment of characters (though in his description of background, and sometimes of his figures too, he is considerably more specific). This is an example par excellence of interpretation of physical appearance of one fictional personality by another, for in this case virtually no sensory detail escapes conversion into revelation of state of mind and physical state.

One might make the same statements about this description, if we may call it that, of Jenatsch seen



through Lucretia's eyes:

Lucretia richtete den Blick mit zweifelnder Frage auf das von der Flamme beleuchtete altbekannte Antlitz und las darin die höchste Spannung der Tatkraft und einen tödlichen Ernst (p. 191).

Here too no sensory data has survived the conversion into revelation of temperament and state of mind. Of genuine physical description there is none, and yet Jenatsch's "tödlichen Ernst" is something seen and is not expressed directly. In descriptions of this sort the reader unconsciously or consciously proceeds from that which is essentially abstract to a personal visualization of the sensory data which must have called forth the observer's impression.

The quality of vagueness which, as we have seen, characterizes the description of one fictional person by another in Meyer's work, is found in these two descriptions for which the comments in the previous paragraphs also hold true. In both cases physical appearance has been translated by the observer into personal impressions which are expressed in psychological terms, rather than in pictorial, sensory terms. In this description of Jenatsch from Waser's viewpoint there is only one factual detail, the mention of Jenatsch's complexion:

Waser konnte seinen Blick von der Erscheinung des Jugendfreundes nicht verwenden. Er hing gebannt an dem starren Ausdrucke des metallbraunen Angesichts. Auf den grossen Zügen lag gleichgültiger Trotz, der nach Himmel und Hölle, nach Tod und Gericht nichts mehr fragte (p. 260).

Hans' description of Becket shortly before the latter is

murdered contains no sensory detail at all and is all suggestion and impression:

Der Bischof [Becket] hatte sich...in seinem Stuhl emporgerichtet, und ich wunderte mich über die Erhabenheit seiner Gestalt, aus welcher jede Schwäche gewichen schien (Heilige, p. 415).

In the introductory paragraphs of this chapter it was emphasized that one should be careful to distinguish between that which is purely decorative and ornamental in Meyer's descriptions, and that which has associative or symbolic significance. As we have seen in the discussion of description and interpretation of one character by another, Meyer's descriptions of fictional personalities very rarely have significance only in the frame of reference of sensory data, e.g., "flashing eyes" and "magnificent gestures" are descriptive phrases which have a certain graphic quality, but what is more important, they are phrases which suggest the appearance and character of the heroic type. This is typical of Meyer's work, and, as a critic points out, "Things and persons in his [Meyer's] works are sharply envisaged, but we feel that they are always meant to signify something beyond themselves."<sup>1</sup> This entire chapter is based essentially on the proposition that Meyer's descriptions of his figures are much more than the enumeration of sensory details, that they are, in fact, a method of characterization and a method to express such ideas as the contrast between the Germanic and Romance type and temperament. In further support of this proposition we will, in the following



paragraphs, briefly examine Meyer's character descriptions as they are related to symbolism.

One critic theorizes that Becket, with his pale, meek face, and King Henry, with his blazing eyes, are contrasted as moon to sun. This theory is supported by the fact that Becket was known in Cordova as *Prinze Mondschein* because of the pallor and meek expression of his face, and this brief description seen from Hans' viewpoint also suggests that Meyer intended to associate the chancellor with the moon:

In den blassen, träumenden Zügen lag eine selige Güte, und das Antlitz schimmerte wie Mond und Sterne (Heilige, p. 327).

King Henry's association with the sun is vaguely hinted when we first see him, his eyes blazing "like two flames" (p. 308). Having assumed that Henry and Becket are, as it were, the sun and the moon, this critic explains the symbolic significance of the association, stating that, "the sun is masculine, the moon feminine; the sun is passion and heart, the moon mind and head."<sup>1</sup>

There are other examples of the use of symbolism in Meyer's work, examples which illustrate this use more directly and satisfactorily than the one above which lacks documentation in Der Heilige itself. That is, while the symbolic significance of the sun and moon might well be "passion and heart" and "mind and head," it is not certain that Meyer had this in mind when he wrote the work. The question of whether Meyer intended



such symbolism would be considered unimportant and irrelevant by some schools of criticism, but since it has been shown that Meyer was a very careful, very self-conscious artist, this paper limits itself to interpretation of that which Meyer almost certainly intended to be significant, considering this alone to be an undertaking of sufficiently broad scope.

Both examples of Meyer's use of symbolism in relation to description of his figures occur in Der Heilige, and both concern the personality of Becket. The symbolism is used in both descriptions to express the physical and mental transformation in Becket in concrete, external form. The first example occurs just after King Henry has asked his chancellor to become the archbishop of Canterbury. Becket, who feels that his worldly, aristocratic, expensive tastes are little suited to this religious office, replies in this manner:

Der Kanzler blieb ruhig, aber in allmählichem Erblaffen wich jede Farbe aus seinem Antlitz. Er lehnte sich in seinen Sessel zurück. Dann wendete er, den Anblick des Königs vermeidend, seine dunkeln Augen seitwärts zu mir [Hans]. Mit zwei Fingern seiner lässig herabhängenden Rechten hob er eine Falte seines Purpurgewandes langsam in die Höhe, so dass die zurückgebogenen Schnäbel seiner köstlichen Schuhe sichtbar wurden (p. 366).

Here Becket's expensive shoes symbolize his stylish life up to this point, for, as we learn from Hans' narrative, Becket set fashions at court which the Normans were quick to copy (p. 314).

The other use of symbolism occurs after Becket has become the ascetic leader of the Saxon malcontents. His austere mode of life is symbolized by his hair garment, and we find here that rather than "küstlichen Schuhe," he wears sandals, another external indication of his inner change. The point of view is, of course, that of Hans:

Er, den ich nie anders hatte zu Hofe kommen sehen, als im kostbarsten Aufzuge und mit dem edelsten Geleite, trug ein grobes, härenes Gewand, und die Zehen seines nackten, auf Sandalen wandelnden Fusses glänzten unter der dunkeln Wolle hervor wie ein Stück Elfenbein (p. 373).

From an examination of Meyer's character descriptions quoted in this paper it becomes obvious that the Swiss author never deluges his readers in sensory details, preferring, apparently, to describe his figures simply, in broad strokes.<sup>1</sup> He does not, unlike many authors, write paragraph after paragraph describing the physical appearance of his major figures; rather, he concentrates on their outstanding, most prominent physical characteristics, possibly in the belief that this makes visualization less difficult for the reader and places less strain on his imaginative powers. Very often the elements of a character description are presented one at a time over many pages of narrative, also with the intent, one critic believes, of making it easier for the reader to assimilate sensory details and to form a concrete image of the figure described.<sup>2</sup> This method of gradual descriptive revelation will be the topic of the following paragraphs.



Meyer's initial description of Waser in Jenatsch is dispersed through the first twenty-four pages of the novel. When he first appears we are told he walks "jugendlich elastisch" and looks around him "mit schnellen klugen Blicken..." (p. 4). Later he is mentioned as "der junge Reisende" (p. 5), and still later his "lebhaftes Auge" (p. 10) and "heiter kluge junge Gesicht" (p. 24) are mentioned.

The description of Jenatsch is similarly scattered over several pages. His moral and physical qualities-- his "kräftigen Kehle" and "breite Brust" (p. 32), his "athletischen Gestalt" and "braunem, bartigem Haupte" (p. 33), his "grosse Gestalt," "gewaltiger Statur," and "herrischem Blick" (p. 84)--are mentioned one at a time, and taken together form the image of a superior man, a potential hero. The description illustrates Meyer's concentration on the outstanding characteristics of his figures, in this case, size and strength, which was mentioned before.

In Duke Rohan's first appearance we learn very little about him in sensory terms, for the mention of his "mildes, durchdringendes Auge" (Jenatsch, p. 51) is more an indication of his character than of his physical appearance. It is only forty pages later that we find him described more fully:

Leicht zu erkennen an seinem vornehmen, hageren Wuchs und der würdevollen, aber anmutigen Haltung war der mit calvinistischer Schlichtheit in dunkle Stoffe gekleidete Herzog (p. 90).

And on the following page we find more specific indications



of his striking physical appearance, his "blasse Antlitz," "scharfgezeichneten Züge," and "der Ausdruck langgeübter Selbstbeherrschung und schmerzlicher Milde" (p. 91).

The descriptions of Hans and Canon Burkhard in Der Heilige are rather short and vague, but here too Meyer avoids presenting at one time all the sensory data connected with them. Our conception of Hans' appearance must be based solely on the mention at the beginning of the story of his "feste Gestalt" and "grauer Bart" (p. 281), until, nine pages later, our scanty information is very slightly augmented when we learn Hans has "festen, eckigen Züge" and "funkelnden Augen" (p. 290). In this description Meyer emphasizes Hans' hearty, upright, German characteristics, and, in a sheerly descriptive frame of reference, Hans is not an individual, but a type. His brothers in Meyer's works are Fausch and Waser in Jenatsch, Germano in Hochzeit, and Hans von Splügen (who is, however, of a much lower intellectual calibre) in Plautus.

Canon Burkhard is also described rather briefly, but again the sketch is split into two elements. We first see "die feine, ehrwürdige, in Marderpelz gehüllte Gestalt eines Chorherren" (p. 283) whose "feingeformte Haupt mit seinen wenigen schneeweissen Locken" (p. 286) is described a few pages farther on in the novella.

It has been shown above that Meyer tended in his descriptions to emphasize a certain outstanding physical characteristic of his figures, a characteristic or trait

which very often tells us much about the fictional personality's temperament, illustrating again that the Swiss poet's treatment of the psychology of his figures is predominantly external. The topic of the next few paragraphs, Meyer's use of the leitmotiv, is closely related to the fact, shown above, that his descriptive technique, especially as it applies to peripheral figures, emphasizes a particular human characteristic. The leitmotiv as Meyer uses it involves more than the repeated mention of a particular trait or physical characteristic, however. In the insistent or recurrent descriptive phrase such as "flashing eyes," there is always a significance beyond the purely sensory. That is, the repetition of the phrase "flashing eyes" associated with one character conveys not only an idea of his physical appearance but also an idea of his personality. Thus, Meyer's use of the leitmotiv in his descriptions is primarily another external method of characterization, a process of revelation of the inner man which doesn't require direct statement of psychological analysis.

In Jenatsch, Meyer's frequent mention of Lucretia's dark eyes, her leitmotiv, suggests her contradictory, enigmatic personality as well as her physical appearance and thus makes her peculiar emotional reaction to Jenatsch, her love and hate for him, seem more credible. Her dark eyes are mentioned when she first appears in the novel (p. 6), in a description of her as a very young girl (p. 11), and when she pleads to Duke Rohan for permission to return to



her native country (p. 114).

Similarly, Jenatsch's fiery eyes are mentioned several times in the novel (pp. 84, 85, 96, 136), but this is not his only leitmotiv. His superior physical strength and other heroic qualities are also suggested by his scarlet cloak or feathered hat (pp. 85, 164, 216).

In Der Heilige, Becket has two important leitmotivs, his pallid complexion (pp. 327, 352, 369, 399, 425) which earns him the appellation of "der Blasse" (p. 327), and his "sad smile" (p. 405) which appears even on his recumbent statue. Hans emphasizes the fact that Becket's smile was so characteristic of him in life that it was remembered after he was dead:

Ein sächsischer Steinmetz hatte ihn [Becket] abgebildet, auf seiner Gruft liegend, die Hände über der Brust gekreuzt, still lächelnd. Nicht des Mannes Kunst, aber die Ähnlichkeit des Bildes war gross; denn er hatte sich den Primas bei dessen Lebzeiten wohl eingeprägt und sich seines Antlitzes bemächtigt (p. 422).

In Plautus, Gertrud's leitmotivs are her blond hair and blue eyes, characteristics which both describe her and suggest the fact that she is a representative of the Germanic culture. Both Hans (p. 135) and Poggio mention her "blonden Flechten" (p. 139), and when the latter suggests she stumble while attempting to carry the huge cross, "da loderten ihre blauen Augen," he notes (p. 143).

Diana's leitmotiv in Hochzeit is likewise her blond hair which is mentioned in almost every scene in which she appears. When the boat of the bridal party overturns in the Brenta, the monk (Astorre) notices her and saves her



life when he sees in the water "eine Fülle blonden Haares" (p. 288). Her hair is also mentioned in the scene at Vicedomini's palace when Astorre reports to his father the death of his son and grandsons:

Diana...kniete sich auf der andern Seite des Sessels nieder..., das Haupt auf die Lehne legend, so dass nur der Knoten ihres blonden Haares wie ein lebloser Gegenstand sichtbar blieb (p. 297).

When Astorre finally agrees to marry Diana at his father's insistence, the dying man "ergriff mit tastender Hand den blonden Schopf Dianas..." (p. 304).

#### CONCLUSION

In this rather lengthy discussion of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's descriptive technique I have attempted to show, first, by means of frequent references to the Swiss poet's works, that he was a very careful, self-conscious artist. This, plus the fact that Meyer was striving for a grand style and had set for himself the artistic goal of revealing the character and emotions of his fictional personalities by exterior description, accounts for the extraordinary importance of setting and character description in his art. As I have pointed out, the Swiss writer's effort to depict his figures and settings in a grand manner led him to a descriptive technique which is sometimes characterized by affectation and mannerism, but, apparently, this is one of the risks in creating that which is striking and unusual. The principal fault of his peculiar art comes

of the fact that, in the portraying of the grand, elegant and heroic, he occasionally lapsed into the grandiose, pretentious and artificial. However, it is better, I believe, that Meyer should have attempted much, and failed in matters of relative unimportance, than to have attempted and accomplished less.

## N O T E S

## Chapter I The Grand Style

- p. 4 <sup>1</sup> See Arthur Burkhard, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer: The Style and the Man (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), pp. 17-19.
- <sup>2</sup> See Harry Maync, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer und sein Werk (Frauenfeld, Schweiz, 1925), pp. 6-8.
- <sup>3</sup> See Maync, pp. 34-36, 53-54, 93.
- p. 5 <sup>1</sup> See Maync, p. 94; Hans Corrodi, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer und sein Verhältnis zum Drama (Leipzig, 1923), p. 105.
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted by Maync, p. 94.
- <sup>3</sup> Burkhard, p. 24.
- <sup>4</sup> Heinrich Stickelberger, Die Kunstmittel in Conrad Ferdinand Meyers Novellen (Burgdorf, Schweiz, 1897), p. 41.
- <sup>5</sup> See my introduction, p. 1.
- p. 6 <sup>1</sup> Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, Conrad Ferdinand Meyers Werke, ed. Gustav Steiner (Basel, 1946), II. All references in this paper to Meyer's works come from this edition. Volume II contains Jürg Jenatsch and Der Heilige; Volume III (Novellen) contains Plautus im Nonnenkloster and Die Hochzeit des Mönchs. Future references to these four works are occasionally abbreviated Jenatsch,



Heilige, Plautus, and Hochzeit.

- p. 7 <sup>1</sup>Burkhard refers here (pp. 9-13) to Eduard Korrodi, C. F. Meyer-Studien (Leipzig, 1912), pp. 55-56.
- p. 10 <sup>1</sup>Burkhard, p. 41.
- <sup>2</sup>Quoted by Walter Silz, "Realism and Reality," University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures (Chapel Hill, North Car., 1954), p. 109.
- p. 12 <sup>1</sup>Burkhard, pp. 127-128.
- p. 13 <sup>1</sup>Friedrich Kummer, Deutsche Literaturgeschichte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts (Dresden, 1909), p. 486.
- p. 14 <sup>1</sup>See Franz Ferdinand Baumgarten, Das Werk Conrad Ferdinand Meyers (Zürich, 1948), p. 166.
- <sup>2</sup>Maync, p. 159.
- p. 15 <sup>1</sup>See Emil Ermatinger, Dichtung und Geistesleben der Deutschen Schweiz (München, 1933), p. 666.
- <sup>2</sup>See Maync, pp. 36, 51-52.
- <sup>3</sup>Quoted by Corrodi, p. 105; for Michelangelo's influence see Maync, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>Maync, p. 96.

p. 16 <sup>1</sup>See Maync, pp. 102-103.

<sup>2</sup>Corrodi, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Burkhard, p. 24.

p. 17 <sup>1</sup>See Burkhard, p. 84.

p. 20 <sup>1</sup>See Burkhard, p. 84.

p. 28 <sup>1</sup>Burkhard quotes Meyer, p. 103. In regard to the influence of Mérimée, Kleist and Ludwig see Maync, pp. 357-358; for the "epic technique" see Corrodi, p. 108.

p. 29 <sup>1</sup>See Burkhard, pp. 105, 202.

p. 34 <sup>1</sup>Baumgarten, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup>Stickelberger, p. 42.

p. 35 <sup>1</sup>Burkhard, p. 38.

p. 38 <sup>1</sup>Burkhard, p. 39.

p. 39 <sup>1</sup>See Silz, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup>See Corrodi, pp. 1-3.

<sup>3</sup>See Maync, p. 188.

- p. 40 <sup>1</sup>See Corrodi, pp. 118-120.
- p. 44 <sup>1</sup>Silz, p. 109.
- p. 47 <sup>1</sup>See Werner J. Fries, "Akustisches in der Beschreibungstechnik C. F. Meyers," Monatshefte, XXXXIV (1952), p. 188.
- p. 49 <sup>1</sup>See Fries, p. 188.
- p. 50 <sup>1</sup>See Fries, p. 188.
- p. 54 <sup>1</sup>See Stickelberger, pp. 28-30, and Maync, p. 188.
- p. 55 <sup>1</sup>Maync, pp. 48-49.

Chapter II Mannerism and Affectation in Meyer's Descriptive  
Technique

- p. 63 <sup>1</sup>Burkhard, p. 8.  
<sup>2</sup>Burkhard, p. 55.
- p. 64 <sup>1</sup>Baumgarten, pp. 158-165.  
<sup>2</sup>Baumgarten, pp. 165-166.
- p. 65 <sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>See Baumgarten, pp. 166-168, 180-181.



- p. 71 <sup>1</sup>Corrodi, p. 111.  
Chapter III Meyer's External Treatment of his Fictional Characters
- p. 72 <sup>1</sup>Fritz Lockemann, Gestalt und Wandlungen der deutschen Novelle (München, 1957), p. 206.
- <sup>2</sup>Corrodi, p. 105.
- p. 73 <sup>1</sup>Cf. Corrodi, pp. 109, 116.
- <sup>2</sup>Corrodi, p. 118.
- <sup>3</sup>See Baumgarten, pp. 175-176.
- p. 74 <sup>1</sup>See Fries, p. 187.
- <sup>2</sup>Burkhard, p. 111.
- p. 77 <sup>1</sup>Burkhard, p. 111.
- p. 85 <sup>1</sup>See Baumgarten, pp. 155-156.
- p. 89 <sup>1</sup>Quoted by Burkhard, p. 114.
- p. 90 <sup>1</sup>Baumgarten, p. 176.
- <sup>2</sup>Cf. Burkhard, p. 112.
- p. 94 <sup>1</sup>Silz, p. 109.
- p. 95 <sup>1</sup>Silz, p. 106.

p. 97 <sup>1</sup>See Burkhard, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>See Burkhard, p. 78.

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