

TWO WORDS IN ART HISTORY

II. *ROCOCO*

"The jumble called *rococo* is, in general, detestable. A parrot seems to have invented the word, and the thing is worthy of his tawdriness and his incoherence."¹ These words of Leigh Hunt, written in 1855 after a visit to an exhibition of French art at Gore House, reflect both the disgust of the majority of nineteenth-century art critics at Rococo art and their bewilderment over this curious French word which Stendahl in 1829 had already called "un mot bas".

Vulgar though the word may originally have been, it had already been given official recognition by 1842 when it was included in the supplement to the 1835 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, where two meanings are distinguished :

Il se dit trivialement du genre d'ornements, de style et de dessin, qui appartient à l'école du règne de Louis XV et du commencement de Louis XVI.

Il se dit, en général, de tout qui est vieux et hors de mode, dans les arts, la littérature, le costume, les manières, etc.

Which of these two meanings was the earlier is now hardly possible to determine, and both may indeed have arisen simultaneously as the word appears to have been coined, as will be shown, in the late 1790's when the Rococo style was already outmoded.

The first known occurrence of the word in a literary source is to be found in two passages in Stendahl's *Promenades dans Rome* (1829), both of which refer to Bernini's sculptures in St Peter's, the first in a section dated 24 Nov. 1827 and the second 25 March 1828 :

(i) Le *rococo*, mis à la mode par le Bernin, est surtout exécrable dans le genre colossal.

(ii) Me permettra-t-on un mot bas ? Le Bernin fut le père de ce mauvais goût désigné dans les ateliers sous le nom un peu vulgaire de *rococo*. Le genre *perruque* triompha en France sous Louis XV et Louis XVI.

Somewhat later V. Hugo, describing the town of Nancy in *Le Rhin* (1842), writes (*Lettre xxix*, 1839) : "La place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville est une des places *rococo* les plus jolies, les plus gaies et les plus complètes, que j'ai vues. . . La partie inférieure des édifices Pompadour est nue, morose et lugubre. Le *rococo* a de vilains pieds. . . . Cette ville est toute dans le style Louis XV." One curious fact already emerges from these quotations. While V. Hugo confines the term *rococo* to the style variously called Louis Quinze or Pompadour, Stendahl uses it of Italian art and of a period a century earlier than

¹ Leigh Hunt, *The Old Court Suburb* (London, 1855), iv, 79.

Louis XV. Lacking the term *baroque*, some art critics of the early nineteenth century, both French and German, extended *rococo* to embrace the whole of that phase of post-Renaissance art which began in Italy about 1600 and which spread to other European countries, where it flourished until the neo-classical revival after 1750. It was indeed not until the Baroque style had been distinguished and analysed by the German art critics and historians in the second half of the nineteenth century that *rococo* was again restricted to the meaning originally given to it in the Académie dictionary and a distinction made between it and *baroque*.

It is in the 1830's that the first examples are found in French literature of the second meaning, "old-fashioned, out-moded", and it is in this sense that Th. Gautier used it of a play performed at the Théâtre-Français in the section on Daniel Jovard in his satirical sketches, *Les Jeunes-France* (1833) :

C'est plus que faux-toupet, c'est empire, c'est perruque, c'est rococo, c'est pompadour ; il faut être momie ou fossile pour trouver du plaisir à de pareilles billevesées.

Some years later E. Sue writes :

Se marier ! mais c'est trop rococo ! Allons, mon garçon, commence par le commencement ; c'est rococo en diable, mais tu as l'encolure classique.²

Of these early examples of the word in French literature in the first half of the nineteenth century only the second quotation from Stendahl gives us a clue as to its origin ; it was, he tells us, a vulgar *atelier* word. That it was originally colloquial is apparent from its form ; it belongs along with *aristo*, *mécano*, *avaro*, *coco*, *socialo*, etc., to that group of words, formed with the element -o, which are proliferating in modern colloquial French and for which it seems likely that *aristo*, abbreviated from *aristocrat*, was the prototype.³ If this is so, *rococo* cannot have come into existence earlier than the 1790's. There is indeed some evidence, not completely reliable but not to be entirely disregarded, that it was in this period that the word was born. In his *Louis David, son école et son temps* (1855) E. J. Delécluze, who began his career in David's *atelier*, but having little success abandoned painting for journalism, relates (p. 82, footnote) :

Les expressions *Pompadour*, *rococo*, à peu près admises aujourd'hui dans la conversation pour désigner le goût à la mode pendant le règne de Louis XV, ont été employées pour la première fois par Maurice Quai en 1796-97. Alors ces locutions (on pourrait dire cet argot) n'étaient usitées et comprises que dans les ateliers de peinture.

Maurice Quai, who was one of the most promising of David's pupils and who died in 1804 at the early age of twenty-five, was the leader of a group, calling themselves *les primitifs*, who enthused for early Greek art, for Homer, the Bible and Ossian, and demonstrated their enthusiasm by wearing Greek

² Quoted from Larousse, *Dictionnaire universel du 19^e siècle*.

³ The suggestion, sometimes met with, that *rococo* was formed on the analogy of the Italian *barocco* is untenable, as the Italian word was not used for an art-style in the eighteenth century and the Italian form of the word does not occur in French sources from this period.

costume, letting their beards grow (hence their popular name, *les barbus*) and calling each other by Greek sobriquets, Quai's being Agamemnon. In the appendix to his book on David, Delécluze republished an article, "Les Barbus d'à présent et les Barbus de 1800", which first appeared in 1832 in vol. xii of *Le Livre de Cent-un*, and he there relates that when David exhibited his *Sabines* in 1799 his pupils, led by Quai, revolted against him, declaring that the master had been corrupted by modern influences. "David", writes Delécluze (p. 421), "fut déclaré, par ses élèves hérétiques, *Vanloo, Pompadour et Rococo*; car il est bon que l'on sache que ces sobriquets, nés dans les ateliers de peinture, ont plus de vingt-cinq ans de date." Delécluze recalls that on another occasion he discussed Homer and Sophocles with Quai and had the misfortune to let the name Euripides escape his lips, at which Agamemnon-Quai rose to his feet in anger and shouted in contemptuous tones: "Euripide? Vanloo! Pompadour! Rococo! C'est comme M. de Voltaire!"⁴ Delécluze's *mémoires* may not be entirely reliable and he sometimes reports verbatim long conversations which took place on occasions when he was not present, but although it may be doubted whether it was in fact Maurice Quai who first used the word *rococo*, the evidence is sufficiently circumstantial to accept the statement, which is supported by Stendahl, that the word was coined in *ateliers* of Paris as a term of contempt for an art style which the avant-gardistes of the 1790's regarded as absurd and outmoded.

This dating of the word has, however, not passed unchallenged. We may disregard as being entirely unsupported by documentary evidence the statement in the *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (under *rococo*) that the term was coined in French in 1700 to denote a particular kind of ornamentation, also known as *rocaille*. Equally without foundation is the suggestion contained in several German art-histories from the end of the nineteenth century (e.g. Dohme and Springer) that the word was first used by French émigrés in Germany. It is highly unlikely that they would have coined a word which was used as a vulgarism in contempt of the way of life which they represented and which is not recorded in German sources before 1835, long after most of them had returned to their native country. More attention must, however, be paid to the assertion in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (under *rococo*) that Cochin at Paris boasted of having "couvert le partisan du rococo d'une assez bonne dose de ridicule". No date or reference is given. C. N. Cochin was a well-known art critic who attacked the prevailing art styles of his day and pleaded for a return to purer classical forms in several articles published in the 1750's in the *Mercure de France*, especially in the "Supplication aux orfèvres" (1754), in which the word *baroque* occurs but not *rococo*. The quotation in the Italian encyclopedia appears, however, to be a garbled version of a sentence from the *Mémoires inédits de Charles Nicolas Cochin sur le Comte de Caylus, Bouchardon, les Slodtz*, published by Charles Henry in 1880. What Cochin actually wrote, but did not publish,

⁴ E. J. Delécluze, . op. cit, p. 428.

was (p. 142): "J'y aiday comme la mouche du coche. J'écrivis dans le *Mercur* contre les folies anciennes et les couvris d'une assés bonne dose de ridicule." He had indeed ridiculed the adherents of the Rococo, but he did not use the word.⁵

One of the characteristic elements of the Rococo style was the encrustation of furniture and *objets d'art* with *rocaille* (rock-work) and *coquillage* (shell-work) in imitation of the grottoes of the Rococo gardens, and lexicographers are in general agreement that the word *rococo* originated as a capricious adaptation of *rocaille*. Indeed, many years before *rococo* made its appearance *rocaille* was used in French as the common denominator of the Louis XV style. J. F. Blondel, writing when the vogue of the Rococo was on the decline, states in his *Cours d'architecture* (vol. III, 1772), avant-propos, p. lviii: "Il-y-a plusieurs années qu'il semblait que notre siècle était celui des *Rocailles*; aujourd'hui, sans trop savoir pourquoi, il en est autrement." Writers in the nineteenth century frequently use *rocaille* and *rococo* as synonyms, sometimes employing both words in the same sentence. V. Hugo, who as we have seen describes the *rococo* architecture of Nancy in *Le Rhin*, uses *rocaille* in his account of Mainz and Frankfurt: "Frankfort et Mayence sont des cités gothiques déjà plongées dans la renaissance, et même par beaucoup de côtés, dans le style rocaille et chinois."⁶ and of the interior decoration of a room F. Soulié (1800-1847) writes: "Ils mirent toute la rocaille et tout le rococo de la chambre neuve bien au-dessous de la commode et du secrétaire d'acajou de la femme du notaire."⁷ In their *Les maîtresses de Louis XV* (1860), II, 110, the brothers Goncourt, who were by their voluminous works on the period of Louis XV in part responsible for that revival of interest in the Rococo which took place in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, describe Mme de Pompadour as "une patronne du luxe et de la rocaille . . . la marraine et la reine du *Rococo*". That *rocaille* formed the starting-point for *rococo* cannot be doubted, but I suggest that it was more precisely from the two first syllables of *rocailles* et *coquillages* together with the colloquial element of -o that *rococo* was formed. The two words *rocailles* and *coquillages* are frequently found together in the literature of the period. For example, in *Gil Blas* (1715), iv, 9, a grotto is described with "un avant-corps de logis, bâti de rocailles et coquillages", and in an article in the *Mercur de France* (March 1734) on a suite of engravings by Meissonier and others it is said: "Ce sont des Fontaines, des Cascades, des Ruines, des Rocailles et Coquillages, des morceaux d'Architecture qui font des effets bizarres et pittoresques."⁸

⁵ The same article on *Rococo* in the Italian encyclopedia also contains a garbled version of passage (2) from Stendhal, cited above.

⁶ *Le Rhin* (1842), lettre xxiii (1839).

⁷ Quoted from Larousse, op. cit.

⁸ In the ninth edition (1875) of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in an article (xxvi, 304) on book-plates of the Queen Anne and early Georgian periods the two words are linked together: "The introduction of the scallop-shell as an almost constant element of ornamentation gives already a foretaste of the *Rocaille-Coquille*. . . . This "*Rococo*" style affects the book-plate as universally as all other decorative effects".

If any further proof were needed that *rococo* was a vogue word in Paris of the 1830's it would be provided by Mrs Frances Trollope's colourful account in her *Paris and the Parisians in 1835* of the old-fashioned adherents of the manners and style of the *ancien régime* and of their opponents known from the Bohemianism of their dress by the sobriquet, *les décousus*. This passage, which contains the first known record of *rococo* in an English text, is worth quoting in full :⁹

This new-born word is "*rococo*", and appears to me to be applied by the young and innovating to everything which bears the stamp of the taste, principles, or feelings of time past. That part of the French population to whom the epithet of *rococo* is thus applied, may be understood to contain all varieties of old-fashionism, from the gentle advocate for laced coats and diamond sword-knots, up to the high-minded venerable loyalist, who only loves his rightful king the better because he has no means left to requite his love. Such is the interpretation of *rococo* in the mouth of a doctrinaire : but if a republican speaks it, he means that it should include also every gradation of orderly obedience, even to the powers that be ; and, in fact, whatever else may be considered as essentially connected either with law or gospel.

After an account of the *décousu* Mrs Trollope continues :

Were the whole population to be classed under two great divisions, I doubt if they could be more expressively designated than by these two appellations, the *décousu* and the *rococo*. I have already stated who it is that form the *rococo* class : the *décousu* division may be considered as embracing the whole of the ultra-romantic school of authors, be they novelists, dramatists, or poets : all shades of republicans, from the avowed eulogists of the "spirited Robespierre" to the gentler disciples of Lamennais ; most of the schoolboys, and all of the *poissardes* of Paris.

Mrs Trollope here uses the word *rococo* in an extended sense, but other English travellers to the Continent report specifically on *rococo* art. In her *The Idler in France* (1841) Lady Blessington, describing La Tour-Magne at Nîmes, writes (I, 21) : "the whole offering a curious mixture of military and *rococo* taste", and in his *Little Travels* (1844) Thackeray says in a description of Antwerp Cathedral : "Within—except where the *rococo* architects have introduced their ornaments (here the fiddle is out of tune again)—the cathedral is noble."¹⁰ Without reference to the visual arts and in the more general sense, "old-fashioned", Lady Lytton uses the word in her novel, *Cheveley* (1839) : "[He] had even been sufficiently 'rococo' to assert boldly that he did not think Victor Hugo so great a genius as Racine" (I. xii. 278), and in his *Portrait of a Lady* (1881) Henry James says of Miss Osmond that, "the bloom of her juvenility had a touch of the *rococo*" (p. 35). English usage adds no new shade of meaning to that in French and German, but it may be noted that certain writers, probably influenced in this respect by more the German art critics than the current French usage,

⁹ Frances Trollope, *Paris and the Parisians in 1835* (London, 1836), pp. 15-16.

¹⁰ W. M. Thackeray, *Works* (London, 1900), VI, 27.

which preferred the designation "Louis Quinze" to "Rococo", employ the term in a sense in which *baroque* would now be used. Referring to the florid rhetoric of the Elizabethan drama J. A. Symonds in 1884 describes a passage in Greene as illustrating "the rococo of the English Renaissance which Marlowe made fashionable",¹¹ and in 1887 in Walter Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* we read (p. 150): "That *rococo* seventeenth-century imitation of the true Renaissance called out in Carl a boundless enthusiasm."

It was the German art critics and historians who analysed the concept of the Rococo in the first half of the nineteenth century, some regarding it generally as an expression of the *Zeitgeist*, others concentrating more on its formal characteristics, but in all their accounts there is a certain lack of precision because at this time the concept of a Baroque style and a Baroque period had not yet been evolved. It was not until the second half of the century, following on the few pages on the Baroque style in Jacob Burckhardt's *Cicerone* and Wilhelm Luebke's *Geschichte der Architectur*, both published in 1855, that it became possible to distinguish the two phases of post-Renaissance art now known as Baroque and Rococo and delimit the periods in which they flourished. Before we consider the further evolution of the term *Rococo* in art history, we may examine its use in nineteenth-century German literature in the sense, "old-fashioned, out-moded, characteristic of the *ancien régime*". Here a significant difference between French and German usage at once emerges. While the French writers of the 1830's could look back on the follies and extravagancies of the *ancien régime* with a certain patronising condescension but without rancour, since the spirit of the Rococo had for them once and for all been exorcised and was now a thing of the past, the German Romantics and the *Jungdeutschen* could feel no such certainty. The Karlsbad decrees of 1819, confirmed by the Reichstag of 1832, which extinguished the liberty of the press, prohibited the *Burschenschaften* and the holding of political meetings, and transferred the control of universities to state officials, together with such acts of petty tyranny as the expulsion of seven professors from Göttingen in 1837, left them in no doubt that the ghost of "Prinz Rokoko" had not yet been laid. To them *Rokoko* as expressing all that was characteristic of princely absolutism was an emotive and pejorative slogan, a polemical *Schlagwort* in the fight against tyranny in which they were still engaged. The word has then in German literature of this time an urgency and actuality which is lacking in French writings of this period. This polemical note is already struck in F. von Sallet's poem *Rococo*, written about 1835, which describes in twenty-three stanzas a day in the life of a marquis, filled with trivialities, and concludes with a diatribe against the dolled-up caricature of the past which was still present in the land:

¹¹ J. A. Symonds, *Shakespeare's Predecessors* (London, 1884), xiv, 563.

¹² On this period see A. Anger, "Deutsche Rokokodichtung", *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, XXXVI (1962), 437-478 and 614-648. This is an account of research on 18th c. German Rococo poetry, but the article contains many references to the early use of the word in German literature of the 19th c. I am indebted to it for some of the examples quoted here. My summary of F. Th. Vischer's concept of the Rococo and to a lesser extent Menzel's differs from Anger's.

Schnörkelpuppe, blöde, steife !
 Gott sei dank ! du bist zerbrochen.
 Aus dir ist der freie, reife
 Mensch, als Schmetterling, gekrochen.

Abgeschmackte Niedlichkeiten,
 Drein der ganze Kerl verschnitzelt,
 Waren Inhalt jenen Zeiten,
 Die das Heil'ge frech bewitzelt.

Rococo, du vielgeschäftig
 Aufgefrischte Frätze, weiche !
 Décousu, schlicht, wahr und kräftig
 Ist der Mann, der selbst sich gleiche.¹³

More bitter and critical in its tone is Gaudy's poem *Rococo* (1836), the fifth stanza of which refers specifically to the reactionary spirit of the re-embodied Rococo :

Das Siegel Salomonis sprang. Der Zeit
 Unsaubrer Geist steigt aus der Flasche Mündung.
 Von Reich zu Reich mit Blitzes Schnelligkeit
 Führt ihn—wenn auch : halt an ! der Censor schreit—
 Der Eisenbahnen teuflische Erfindung :
 Dampfschiffe ziehn vom Don zum Orinocco—
 Gehemmt hat Josua der Sonne Lauf,
 Wer aber hält den mächtigen Zeitgeist auf ?
 So seufzt Rococo.¹⁴

Similarly in a poem with the title *Rococo's Glaubensbekenntnis* (1841) in his ironically named *Unpolitische Lieder* Hoffmann von Fallersleben takes up arms against the censorship, the privileges of the nobility and their extravagances. Satirical verse was not the only medium used by the liberals and the *Jungdeutschen* to attack the restored Rococo. In 1842 Heinrich Laube published his *Rokoko oder die alten Herren*, a satirical comedy depicting the manners of the Louis XV period and veiling in this way his attack on conditions in contemporary Germany. In the last scene the Marquis de Brissac addressing Victor and Melanie, who are engaged to be married, says : "Ich fürchte, Kinder, ihr werdet sehr gute Eheleute ; ihr seid nicht mehr von unserem Rokokoschlage."¹⁵

Eichendorff's attitude to the Rococo spirit is ambivalent. Born in 1788 of an aristocratic family, he looks back to the Rococo of his youth with a certain nostalgia but with a realisation that this unnatural way of life was doomed. In his *Salonpoesie der Frauen* (1847) he writes :¹⁶ "Wer möchte wohl aus der überreichen Rumpelkammer unserer Roccocoliteratur (*sic*), z.B. die Romane der Laroche, heute, noch anders als im literarhistorischen

¹³ F. von Sallet, *Gesammelte Gedichte* (1843), pp. 340-3.

¹⁴ F. von Gaudy, *Poetische und prosaische Werke* (1853), I, 17.

¹⁵ Laube also frequently uses the word *Rokoko*, but without political polemic, in his *Burgtheater* (1868), in which he attacks the reactionary management of the German and Austrian court-theatres.

¹⁶ J. von Eichendorff, *Sämliche Werke* (ed. Kosch-Sauer), VIII, i, 70.

Interesse lesen ? ” ; and in *Erlebtes* (1839), describing a visit to the castle where he had been brought up : “ Nur der nach dem Garten hin gelegene Flügel, künstliche umschnörkelt und durch steinerne Blumenguirlanden mit einander verbunden, sah noch sehr vornehm aus, wie eine Residenz des Prinzen Rokoko.”¹⁷ Still sentimental, but also with a tinge of satire, is the description of life in a Rococo château in *Deutsches Adelsleben am Schluss des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* :¹⁸ “ Durch die offenen Fenster schien die Morgensonne heiter durch’s ganze Haus über die vergilbten Familienbilder und die Messingbeschläge der alten Möbel, die jetzt als Rococco (*sic*) wieder für jung gelten würden ”¹⁹ ; and in the description of the French garden of the château : “. . . und auf diesen Plätzen promenirte der alte Gottsched als Prinz Rococco (*sic*) mit seinem Gefolge. . . Aber dem feierlichen Professor trat schon auf den Fersen die bekannte literarische Rebellion gegen das französische Regime . . . Rousseau, Diderot, Lessing, jeder in seiner Art, vindicirten der Natur wieder ihr angeborenes Recht.” The account ends with the satirical poem *Prinz Rokoko*, the first two verses of which run :

Prinz Rokoko, hast dir Gassen
Abgezirkelt fein von Bäumen
Und die Bäume scheren lassen,
Dass sie nicht vom Wald mehr träumen.

Wo sonst nur gemein Gefieder
Liess sein bäurisch Lied erschallen,
Muss ein Papagei jetzt bieder
Vivat Prinz Rokoko ! lallen.

Rather unexpectedly Heine’s use of the word lacks the polemical political overtones of his contemporaries. It is used satirically, but not with a political point, in the lines in *Bimini* describing the ugly old Carib, Señora Juanita, with her extravagant Pompadour headdress :

Rokoko-anthropophagisch,
Karaibisch-Pompadour,
Hebet sich der Haarwulstkopffputz,
Der gespielt ist mit unzähl’gen

Vögelein, die, gross wie Käfer,
Durch des prächtigen Gefieders
Farbenschmelz wie Blumen aussehen,
Die formiert aus Edelsteinen.

Elsewhere in Heine the word *rokoko* means little more than “ old-fashioned ”. Of the spirits of the dead, who according to Swedenborg continued their previous activities in the after-life, he writes in *Nachwort zum Romanzero* (1851) :²⁰ “ sie blieben stationär, waren veraltet, rokoko, was sich mitunter

¹⁷ Kosch-Sauer, X, 381.

¹⁸ Quoted from *Aus dem literarischen Nachlass Eichendorffs* (Paderborn, 1866), pp. 269 and 272-3.

¹⁹ There was in the 1840’s a revival of the Rococo style in furniture ; see the quotation from Nagler’s *Künstlerlexikon*, below.

²⁰ Heine, *Werke* (ed. Elster), I, 488.

sehr lächerlich ausnahm"; and in *Die Februarrevolution* under the date 14 March 1848:²¹ "Halten Sie es der Mühe wert, meine heutigen Mitteilungen in die heimische Mundart zu übertragen, so unterdrücken Sie gefälligst alle jene Schnörkelein und Verbrämungen, welche noch an die aristokratische Rokokozeit des deutschen Schrifttums erinnern. Die Herrschaft der Schönschreiberei hat ein Ende, wie so manch andere. . ."

Indeed, by 1848 the political polemic against the spirit of the Rococo ceased. Certain constitutional liberties had been gained and some of the more oppressive measures against personal freedom had been abrogated. *Rokoko* ceased to be a political *Schlagwort* and is now used either with a certain patronising superiority of the out-moded ways of the *ancien régime* or simply in the more general sense, "out-of-date". Thus, for example, Karl Gutzkow, one of the *Jungdeutschen*, writes in *Die Ritter vom Geist* (1852): "Auch ihm war der Glaube der absoluten Monarchie ebenso rokoko wie das konstitutionelle Wesen der Neuzeit platt und unromantisch."²² And similarly in comedies of the Austrian Nestroy: "Derlei Rinaldini-Trödel²³ ist rokoko" (*Der Schützling*, Act 3, Sc. vi, first performed 1847), and "das ist altgriechische Philosophie, die in zweitausend Jahren noch nicht rokoko worden ist" (*Kampl*, Act 1, Sc. ii, first performed 1852).

In the popular German art-histories from the first half of the nineteenth century the three terms, *Renaissance*, *Barock* and *Rokoko*, so familiar to us today, are missing, although all three, taken over from French, were used in German works of reference and articles in learned journals from about 1840.²⁴ Typical of the popular art-histories is Fr. Kugler's *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (1842). Kugler divided the history of art since classical times into *romanisch*, *germanisch* (by which he meant Gothic) and *modern*, indiscriminately including in this final period everything from fifteenth-century Italian art to the close of the eighteenth century. It was Jacob Burckhardt who established the term *Renaissance* in German, first of all in his revision of Kugler (1848) and later in his *Cicerone* (1855) and *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860). In considering the concept Rococo as it was understood by the art-historians in the first half of the nineteenth century, it is important to bear in mind that they understood by Renaissance that revival of letters which took place in France during the reign of Francis I with Marot and the Pléiade and which was accompanied by a parallel movement in the fine arts, which was not simply a revival of classical styles and was therefore often called by the Germans "die sogenannte Renaissance".²⁵ The Rococo was regarded by these nineteenth-century German

²¹ Heine, op. cit., VII, 382.

²² Karl Gutzkow, *Die Ritter vom Geist* (1852), VIII, 277.

²³ *Rinaldo Rinaldini* was the title of a "Räuberroman" written in 1798 by Carl Vulpius, Goethe's brother-in-law.

²⁴ On *Barock* in German see C. T. Carr, "Two Words in Art History: I. *Baroque*", *FMLS*, I (1965), 175-190.

²⁵ Burckhardt himself, later to become the high priest of the Italian Renaissance, opens his article on the Renaissance in the ninth edition (1848) of Brockhaus' *Konversationslexikon* with the words: "*Renaissance*: Wiedergeburt der Kunst, wird besonders

critics as the final corrupt and decadent phase of this French Renaissance, some confining the term to the style of Louis Quinze and others dating its beginning from the early seventeenth century, the seeds of which were already to be found in the work of Michelangelo. The confusion is made worse by the fact that some, e.g. F. Th. Vischer, used the term in both senses and by Burckhardt's attempt to identify Rococo features even in Roman art at the time of Diocletian and in late Gothic art. As already stated, the word *Rokoko* appears in German works of reference and art journals about 1840. In the article on Meissonier in G. K. Nagler's *Neues Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon* (1840) it is stated (Vol. IX, p. 9): "Auch in neuester Zeit scheinen Meissonier und Consorten wider in die Mode kommen zu wollen, denn unsere Kunst-Industrie gefällt sich in modernen Erzeugnissen des Rococo-Styls, aber man betrachtet sie bisher nur als Curiositäten einer ausschweifenden Erfindung", and in F. Th. Vischer's *Kritische Gänge*, I (1841), p. 163: "Wir malen Götter und Madonnen, Heroen und Bauern, so wir griechisch, byzantinisch, maurisch, gotisch, florentinisch, à la renaissance, Rokoko bauen, und nur in keinem Stil, der unser wäre." It may be noted that Italian Renaissance architecture is here called "florentinisch" and that Rokoko follows immediately on "à la renaissance", that is the French Renaissance. In the same year as Vischer's *Kritische Gänge* F. Kugler, author of the popular art-history referred to above, reported in the art journal *Das Kunstblatt* on a journey he had made in the Rhinelands, and of the Residenz in Würzburg he says briefly: "Rokokoarchitektur, Rokokostil".²⁸ None of these writers explains what he means by *Rokoko*, but we find, again in *Das Kunstblatt* (No. 19, 1842), an anonymous article "Was ist Renaissance?", in which French art-history is divided into four periods: (i) Moyen-âge, (ii) Renaissance, (iii) Rococo, (iv) Pompadour. It is typical of the confusion over the term Rococo that it is here detached from the period to which it originally applied, that of Louis XV, and used of that which we should now call Baroque.

A closer analysis of the concept Rococo was made in the 1840's by F. Th. Vischer in his *Asthetik* (1847-51) and by Jacob Burckhardt in various articles contributed between 1842 and 1848 to art journals and to Brockhaus' *Konversationslexikon*, but the method of approach of these two is different. Vischer regards what he calls Rococo art as one of the manifestations of the spirit of monarchical absolutism and sees parallels between it and the manners and thought of the time, while Burckhardt as an art-historian analyses its formal features and attempts to isolate its fundamental characteristics without reference to the non-visual arts, but both coincide in one respect, in Frankreich derjenige Stil in Architektur und Ornamentik genannt, welcher seit Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts, allmählig den gotischen verdrängte". The lengthy article contains only a passing reference to Italian art. Even after Burckhardt's epoch-making *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* the older concept of the Renaissance still survives in Sanders' *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (1863): "Wiedergeburt, bes. in der franz. Kunstgeschichte der Anfang des 16. Jhds. (unter Franz I) und der damals herrschende Geschmack".

²⁸ Quoted from A. Philippi, *Der Begriff der Renaissance* (Leipzig, 1912), p. 129.

in the abrupt substitution of the term *Barock* for *Rokoko* after Burckhardt himself had analysed the Baroque style and distinguished a Baroque period in *Der Cicerone*.

It was Vischer who introduced and established the term *Rokoko* in German "Geistesgeschichte", but his attitude to it displays that uncertainty over the concept which is characteristic of the period. In one passage (II, § 373) of the *Asthetik* he describes the manners and dress of the *Grand Siècle* and continues: "Die herben Ecken, das objektiv Markige verschwindet; süß, zierlich, rosig, mit Bewusstsein der Wirkungen ihrer tänzerischen Grazie sehen die galanten Herrn unter ihren Perücken hervor. . . . Die Formen gehen nun in den bekannten Charakter des Rokoko über." In this passage he is clearly identifying Rococo with the style of Louis Quinze, but in other parts of his work he refers the term to a much earlier period that which we would now call Baroque, and indeed traces its origins back to Michelangelo.²⁷ Some excerpts from the *Asthetik* will serve to illustrate this:

- II (1847), § 473: Sie [the Italians] sind es hauptsächlich, die dem restaurirten Katholizismus dienten, den Rokoko einführten.
- III (1851), § 595: Diese Erscheinungen [features of Michelangelo's work], so wie den reinen Rokoko, der durch Bernini und Borromini . . . im siebzehnten Jahrhundert aus diesen Ansätzen sich entwickelt, hat die eigentliche Kunstgeschichte näher zu schildern. . . . Die gewaltsamen Formen aber, die von Michel Angelo ausgehen und den Rokoko einleiten . . . charakterisieren genau jene allgemeine wilde Entfesselung der Leidenschaften und fallen ganz mit dem Ausgeschwungenen, Luftigen, Weiten, Bewegten der übrigen Culturformen zusammen.

On his death in 1887 Vischer left behind notes for a second edition of his *Asthetik* in which the word *Barocco* was to be substituted in place of *Rokoko* in the passages quoted above and in others. A revised edition of the *Asthetik* was published by Robert Vischer in 1922, and this change was in fact made whenever the reference is to Italian Baroque, the term *Rokoko* being retained for French art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Jacob Burckhardt contributed to the ninth edition (1848) of Brockhaus' *Konversationslexikon* an article on "Rococostil", which begins by confining the concept to the eighteenth century and then seeks to find in Rococo a general principle applicable to other periods:

Rococostil: Ausartung des classischen Bau- und Verzierungsstiles im achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Die richtige Erklärung des Rococostils wäre wohl die, dass derselbe immer entsteht, wenn die innere Bedeutung der Formen vergessen ist, diese aber dennoch nur des Effektes willen und zwar mit Misverstand angewendet werden. . . . Die Kunst geht darin zu Ende. In diesem Sinne gäbe es auch einen römischen Rococostil, z.B. in den Bauten Diocletians.

The Rococo of the eighteenth century, he concludes, originated in Italy,

²⁷ I cannot therefore agree with Anger's statement that Vischer understood by *Rokoko* the art of the period following the *Grand Siècle*.

reached its zenith in France, and ended with the revival of purer classical forms in the last quarter of the century. This wider definition, which regards Rococo as a recurring phenomenon, found whenever classical art declines into rhetoric and artificiality, coincides closely with that of *Barock* given by Nietzsche in *Menschliches-Allzumenschliches* (1878), and it was the term *Barock*, not *Rokoko*, which was later to be applied to periods in art-history other than that following the Renaissance.²⁸ Some years before this article was written Burckhardt had himself already applied this new word *Rokoko* to certain features of late Gothic art in "Über die vorgotischen Kirchen am Niederrhein" in Lersch's *Niederrheinisches Jahrbuch*, I (1843), and had also explained his concept of the Rococo more fully in *Die Kunstwerke der belgischen Städte* (1842). There he says that the so-called Renaissance in the North is characterised by the predominance of that decorative, phantastic element which is peculiar to the Germanic peoples but which had been held in restraint in the stricter forms of Gothic art. This element proliferates in elaborately convoluted plant and flower forms, and "im Anfang des sechzehnten Jahrhundert stürzt die abgelebte gotische Kunst vor dem Andrang dieses rein dekorativen Prinzips zusammen, indem dasselbe sich an die Antike anschliesst. . . Die Nachwelt hat dafür das Wort Rokoko aufgebracht." Before the journey in Italy in 1853, undertaken in preparation for the *Cicerone*, the word *Barock* as a technical term in art history does not occur in Burckhardt's published work, and even in the notes made in Italy for his book he still uses only *Rokoko* of various features of late Italian Renaissance art. Of Cellini's Perseus, for example, he notes: "Das Piedestal mit seinem wunderlichen Krimskrums bei den Ornamenten der Spät-Renaissance aufzuzählen. Der willkürlichen Lebendigkeit nach ist es schon ganz Rokoko."²⁹ It was in the *Cicerone* (1855) that Burckhardt wrote the brief but influential chapter on "Der Barockstyl", and from this time forward *Rokoko* disappears from his technical vocabulary, *Barock* taking its place. A few months after the appearance of the *Cicerone* Wilhelm Luebke, Burckhardt's friend and collaborator, issued his *Geschichte der Architektur*, for the last chapter of which he had the privilege of consulting Burckhardt's work in MS., a debt which he acknowledges in the second edition. In this chapter Renaissance architecture is divided into three periods: Frührenaissance, Hochrenaissance, and der Barockstyl, the last being dealt with cursorily in eight pages, but scanty though this treatment may be, the way is here prepared for that diligent discussion of the relation between Baroque and Rococo which was to occupy German art-historians and practising architects for the next thirty years. Luebke here distinguishes a late phase of the so-called Baroque Renaissance, "die unter dem Namen Rokoko verrufen ist", and which is "der Repräsentant jenes frivolen, üppigen Hoflebens, das von Frankreich aus die Sitten des vornehmen Standes vergiftete." Meanwhile, however, *Rokoko* in the older sense of the period

²⁸ On this see Carr, op. cit., pp. 188-9.

²⁹ Quoted from W. Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt*, Vol. III (1956), p. 467.

immediately following the Renaissance lives on. In A. Rosengarten's *Die architektonischen Stylarten* (1857) there is a chapter on "Der Rokokostyl der Renaissance", which is said to begin towards the end of the sixteenth century with Bernini and Borromini, and in his *Kulturgeschichte der neueren Zeit* (1870-1) Otto Henne-Am-Rhyn dates the beginning of the Rococo period in France from the death of Henri Quatre (I, 193): "Mit Heinrichs IV Tode endete in Frankreich das Zeitalter der Renaissance . . . und begann die charakter-, geschmack- und gesinnungslose, das Volk zu Gunsten der bevorrechteten Kreise und Stände ausbeutende Roccocco-Zeit (*sic!*)", and with reference to German fashions of dress in the seventeenth century and the inundation of the German language by French in this period we are told (II, 33): "Alle diese Erscheinungen begriff man unter dem sonderbaren, bis jetzt noch nicht erklärten Worte Roccocco (*sic*)."²⁰

The clarification of the concept Rococo in German art-history begins in the 1860's with G. Semper's *Der Stil* (1860-3) and A. Springer's *Bilder aus der neuen Kunstgeschichte* (1867). Both writers deal with the formal aspects of Rococo art but explain it from the general cultural conditions of the eighteenth century, thus combining the two methods of approach which we have already seen in Burckhardt and Vischer. Semper rather arbitrarily tries to trace the origins of Rococo not in Paris or Versailles but in Dresden, and he considers Meissen porcelain to be its most characteristic expression. To him the Dresden Zwinger, the building of which was started in 1711, that is before the reign of Louis XV, was the most perfect example of the Rococo style in architecture. This view of Semper's, which is now generally recognised to be wrong, was severely criticised by A. von Zahn in "Barock, Rokoko und Zopf" (*Zs. für bildende Kunst*, 1873). Baroque and Rococo are here recognised as two periods in art-history and identified with the styles of Louis XIV and Louis XV respectively, "Zopf" being equated with the style prevalent under Louis XVI. This over-simplification of the problem was in turn attacked by R. Dohme in "Studien zur Architekturgeschichte des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts" (*Zs. für bildende Kunst*, 1878), who declared that there was no Baroque in France and claimed that the term should be restricted to that Italian style of architecture which came to the fore during the Counter-reformation and influenced German but not French architecture; Rococo on the other hand develops in France in the early eighteenth century and it in turn spreads to Germany. Although there was no unanimity on this matter and the problem has not yet been finally solved, there is now agreement that Baroque and Rococo are two different styles, one following chronologically on the other, and this view is found in the encyclopaedias of the day. In the second edition (1885) of Meyer's *Konversationslexikon* the Baroque style is described as follows:

²⁰ In view of this, Anger's statement (*op. cit.*, p. 446) that Henne-Am-Rhyn "beschränkte den Rokokobegriff noch auf die nachbarocke Architektur und Dekorationkunst des 18. Jahrhunderts" seems untenable.

Man versteht unter Barockstil diejenige Ausbildung der Renaissance, die schon im 16. Jahrhundert unter dem Einfluss der letzten Werke Michelangelos beginnt, jedoch erst im 17. und 18. ihre Entwicklung erreicht hat, bis sie zur Zeit der Regentschaft für Ludwig XV vom Rokoko abgelöst wird.

It is in the art-histories of the 1880's that present-day usage is finally established, especially in the three-volumed work of Cornelius Gurlitt: *Geschichte des Barockstils in Italien* (1887), *Geschichte des Barockstils und des Rococo in Frankreich* (1888), *Geschichte des Barockstils und des Rococo in Deutschland* (1889), and in R. Dohme's *Geschichte der deutschen Kunst* (1887), the first volume of which on architecture has a chapter headed, "Barock, Rokoko und Klassizismus".

As we have seen, Vischer and others had tried to explain Rococo art from the general cultural conditions of the eighteenth century, and it is not surprising that, as with *Barock*, attempts should be made to apply the term *Rokoko* to literature. In his *Literaturgeschichte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, the first volume of which, published in 1856, deals with French literature, Hermann Hettner, who began as an art-historian, still restricts *Rokoko* to the fine arts and to the period of Louis XV. It is to Hettner "die Zeit des ärgsten Verfalls", and in it "der Barockstil, aus der allmählichen Entartung der italienischen Renaissance entstanden, ist hier an seiner äussersten Grenze angelangt."²¹ Only one history of German literature in the nineteenth century, Wolfgang Menzel's *Deutsche Dichtung von der ältesten bis auf die neueste Zeit* (1859) operates with the concept and word *Rokoko*, and that in an arbitrary and untenable way.²² Menzel's principles of literary criticism were elementary. To all literary productions he applies the two criteria, patriotism and Christian morality, and condemns in vitriolic terms any German writer of the eighteenth century who allowed himself to be influenced in any way by the French. The eighth book of Menzel's history, headed "Die Herrschaft des französischen Geschmacks", begins with a chapter on "Die Rococozeit", in which the general characteristics of the period from about 1700 to Klopstock are described (vol. II, p. 452):

Was zwischen der zweiten schlesischen Schule und Klopstock liegt, kann man mit dem Rocococharakter bezeichnen. Das ist der leichte, tändelnde, galante, wollüstige und seelenlose Geschmack, wie er unter Ludwig XV in Frankreich herrschend wurde, nachdem man sich dort der heroischen Grandezza des *siècle de Louis XIV* entledigt hatte. Es war der Übergang von der Allongeperücke und von dem grossen spanischen Degen zu Puder und Zopf und zum kleinen dünnen Galanteriedegen, vom schweren Prunkbecher zur chinesischen Porzellanvase.

²¹ It has been asserted by V. Klemperer, "Der Begriff Rokoko", *Jahrbuch für Philologie*, I (1923), p. 448, that Hettner "als erster den neuen Begriff in die Geistesgeschichte einführt". It is to F. Th. Vischer that the honour belongs, if to anyone; Hettner contributes nothing new.

²² Menzel does not use the term in his *Die deutsche Literatur*, an entirely different work, first published in 1828 and re-issued in 1836.

This account, clearly derived from Vischer, takes over the concept of a Rococo period from art-history and applies it indiscriminately to German literature, forcing into it Wieland, who belongs chronologically to the time after Klopstock. At the same time the word *Rokoko* is to Menzel, as it was to the *Jungdeutschen*, although he was not one of them, a pejorative slogan with which to attack all those who succumbed to French influence. None are spared, except Frederick the Great and that for obvious reasons. His versifications, although regrettably in French, tower above the work of his contemporaries as does Byron's poetry in Menzel's own day. All others, Canitz, Neukirch and Gottsched among them, are roundly condemned; Leibniz's poems "gehören theils zur feierlichen Renaissance, theils schon zum frivolen Rococostil, besonders die französischen Gedichte", and the typical philosopher of the Rococo age is "der trockene und geistlose Wolff". A further chapter of this eighth book, headed "Die Rococoromane", deals with a motley collection which includes the "Robinsonaden", picaresque novels, and ends with Gellert's *Schwedische Gräfin*. In the ninth book we are told (vol. III, p. 1): "Die Unnatur der Renaissance- und Rococozeit, der classischen Affectationen wie der französischen Moden, des pedantischen Schwulstes wie der Boudoirphilosophie befremdete und beleidigte das germanische Nationalgefühl", and it was the Swiss writers, Bodmer and Breitinger, together with Klopstock and Lessing, influenced by the example of the English, to which Menzel does not object, who put an end to the Rococo age. It is obvious that to Menzel Rococo was not a literary concept at all; it is nothing more than an emotive *Schlagwort*.

Some sixty years were to elapse before serious attempts were made to introduce the term *Rokoko* into German literary history, but these need not be pursued here as they have already been ably and exhaustively dealt with by Anger.³³ It only remains to be said that any attempt to distinguish a Rococo period in German literature is doomed to failure. Rococo is only one of the many intellectual currents in the eighteenth century and is paralleled by others, such as the *Aufklärung*, which are more significant and more lasting. Rococo is the heir of the Baroque and employs arbitrarily many of its motives, the "Wein- und Liebesschwärmerei", the idealised dream world of a stylised Arcadia with its shepherds and shepherdesses, its fauns and nymphs, its grottoes and groves, and the world of the supernatural but without the metaphysical sanctions of the Baroque. All this is ironically distanced and treated in a sceptical and irreverent way; seen through the sober eyes of the *Aufklärung* the world is de-mythologised, and although the Rococo poet may relate *Märchen*, he no longer believes in them. But the Rococo does not suddenly come to an end at any point in the eighteenth century. Wieland lived on until 1813, Goethe's *Die Laune des Verliebten*, although written in 1768, was not published until 1806. There

³³ A. Anger, op. cit.

are Rococo motives in Novalis, who intended to complete Wieland's *Idris und Zenide*, in Eichendorff, and in Mörike, who translated Anacreon, and in more recent times in Otto Julius Bierbaum, Dehmel, Hofmannsthal, and Liliencron, whose poem *Die kleine Marquise* has the refrain :

Rococo, Rococo, Rococo-o ! Rococo, Rococo-o !

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