

Impressum

Michael Hase: What is postmodernism,
or: What's the Effing Fox up to

Length: 6,425 words = 37,703 characters

e: info@rochdalewriters.org.uk - (attn Michael Hase)

Snail mail: Prof. Dr. Michael Hase
Department of German Literature
University of Hase-und-Igel
Bhuxtehude
Germany

© 2001 Michael Hase

Date: 2001

Mk1.3

The story referred to in this article is:
Klaus Bung: The Hedgehog and the Fox

Publication history:

'The Hedgehog and the Fox',
in: THE WORLD OF ENGLISH, Peking, No 161, Aug 2001, p26-33

'The Hedgehog and the Fox',
in: PPHOO, Calcutta, Jan 2002, p 106-111

'The Hedgehog and the Fox',
Rochdale Writers, #07

^EDITOR'S NOTE

Klaus Bung's fable 'The Hedgehog and the Fox', which he claims is not set in his native Berlin, and was inspired neither by a biblical prophet nor by Tolstoy nor by the Hitopadesh, pokes fun at postmodernism, a topic which has been hotly debated among Calcutta intellectuals ever since the visit here of Jacques Derrida. Many contradictory explanations are being aired, some of which, to my mind, are typical examples of disinformation. During my last visit to France I tried to squeeze out a clear opinion from the French counterparts. I failed to do so. I thought it would be useful for our readers to get a straightforward account of postmodernism if they were to appreciate a parody of it and therefore (after several failed attempts with experts on postmodernism) invited my friend, Prof. Dr. Hase, to write some notes on postmodernism and on Klaus Bung's story.

Signed: Pradip Choudhuri (Editor, Pphoo Magazine, Calcutta)

Michael Hase: What is Postmodernism, or: What's the Effing Fox up to

16 August 2001

My dear Friend Pradip,

I know nothing about postmodernism and that, as most postmodernists will readily agree, uniquely qualifies me to write about it. For I will do anything to get my name into the newspapers and to earn a rupee or two. If the postmodernists are not happy with what I am doing, I can only reply that I have learnt from them that there is no such thing as the truth, that there are only narratives and that those purporting to tell the truth, like an anatomy textbook, are in no way superior to a fairytale, a pornographic story, or an act of perjury. I have seen their writings on the philosophy of science, on physics, on mathematical psychology, on chaos theory, and feel I am in good company if I write about something I do not understand and which is not meant to be understood but only to be admired.

My only other excuse may be that ignorance is bliss, and if I can give you a few names and dates, the titles of a few books and a few internet addresses, you and your readers may be slightly better off than they were before, may have a few more missiles than before to throw at each other. Don't throw them at me. I have admitted my ignorance and malevolence and everything I write is a blatant lie. That includes this sentence. I am hiding behind a pseudonym: My name is Hase (hare) and I know nothing.

Postmodernism is a kind of philosophical (or anti-philosophical movement) that has been strongly influenced by the work of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) (as his Hindi name indicates, his ancestors were Indian and he came from the 'nether' regions. Hence his enthusiastic fight for the rights of ooper man (superman)). Its most prominent exponents are French but many of them have obtained much influence in American universities, in many quite different faculties (philosophy, sociology, literature, history, etc), and acrimonious disputes are fought between supporters and opponents of these ideas. English academics tend to be more sceptical about these ideas, and oppose them. I personally cannot see postmodernism as a unified philosophy but rather as an assembly of disparate ideas arising in different disciplines and having little in common, except that they tend to go against common sense, and are therefore difficult to explain to common sense people, who think I must be joking if I say that (certain) postmodernists deny that there is such a thing as truth (there are only opinions, and all are of equal value) and that there can be serious and sane academics who try to propound such views.

This is, I presume, the reason why the Editor of Esquire liked the postmodernists being targeted in the absurd story of the Hedgehog and the Fox when he wrote to Klaus Bung: 'It was fun to watch you ridicule postmodernism (rightly deserved, too). Good luck...' Such stories are better than essays, for if a system is designed to be invincible by reason, a priori unaccountable to reason, even in its absurdity, then it must be attacked by ridicule.

^THE MOST PROMINENT NAMES IN POSTMODERNISM:

- Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) (keyword: deconstruction, a meticulous approach to analysing literature and the social context in which it was created [my very rough definition]): I take him seriously.
- Jacques Lacan (1901-1981): psychoanalysis: I strongly distrust him.
- Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998): philosophy, sociology: I strongly distrust him.
- Michel Foucault (1926-1984): social sciences: power in society: I distrust him.
- Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007): I strongly distrust him: for me what he does is intellectual anarchism, and this is what Hérissonne does to Renard, who, being rational in his approach and expecting rational and predictable responses, is quite defenceless against her. However, Baudrillard has some very clever ideas, worth considering and then to be taken with a pinch of salt, i.e. in moderation (not in excess as Baudrillard does).
- Stanley Fish (1938-....), American Professor of Literary Criticism: I distrust his excesses. Keyword: 'interpretive communities': Truth is what a group of people (interpretive community) agrees upon, a matter of opinion of a group of people; there is no point in an outsider trying to produce evidence that an opinion is wrong. There are no wrong opinions. There is no truth.

Many little essays on individual postmodernist 'philosophers' can be found on the Internet. Their names are listed below. They will to some extent support what I am writing here or enrich the picture, especially if you think that what I am writing here about postmodernist opinions is absolutely incredible and must be a joke.

Many postmodernists are right-wing (anti-Marxist).

The story of the Fox seems directed especially against the absurd doctrines of Lyotard, Baudrillard and Fish. Doctrines which claim that

- there are no valid doctrines (grand récits), the best that can be had is detail.
(I comment on the preceding statement: This statement in itself is a hugely general doctrine, and it claims to be true)
- there is no truth but only opinion
- no opinion is better or worse than any other, e.g. the opinion that the earth is flat is no worse than the opinion that the earth is a globe
- there is no reality; reality is a product of our brains; there is no difference between proper perception and hallucination
- science does not try to find truth, cannot find truth, but only supports the opinions of the organisations which pay the researchers
- there is no difference between a scientific text and a fairy tale or a novel; the only difference is their difference in style; some people prefer to read one style, other people prefer another; these are just different kinds of narratives
- there is no difference between ideology and science. (There used to be, and for me still is, a basic distinction between things which can be proved to be true or untrue (science) and things which cannot possibly be proved to be true or good (ideology). Ideology are statements about e.g. religion or politics (Marxism, Fascism), statements about good and bad, e.g. it is bad to kill, it is good to save lives; and commands (normative ideology): e.g. You must obey your parents. Go home now. Get fucked!

Ideological statements cannot be proved; they are neither true nor false. Scientific statements are either true or false, even though it is often difficult to know which is the case.

Postmodernists deny this distinction between science and ideology; for them everything is ideology. Nothing can be proved, nothing can be agreed upon, communication is impossible.

I know that scientists often make mistakes, that they sometimes deceive and commit fraud, but I do not accept that therefore there is no such thing as scientific truth.

Even the Vedantists, who say that the visible world is only an illusion or that it is only the creation of the mind (as in some of the texts beloved by Ramana Maharshi) do so only in comparison with a higher level truth, an absolute truth, for which we search. They do not deny that truth, of a different kind and by

different means, can also be found at the relative, the material, level.

Some postmodernists typically engage themselves in disciplines which they do not understand (e.g. history or physics). They joyfully parade the errors or deceptions which inevitably occur in the search for truth in those disciplines. They then draw conclusions which nobody would draw who was seriously engaged in the search for truth in that discipline.

Even the statement 'There is no truth' can only be meaningful if it is made on the understanding that at least this statement is true. It is therefore self-contradictory and need not be taken seriously.

If these postmodernists had seriously studied the disciplines on which they base their criticism and if they were participating in its search for truth, they would better understand its methodology, improve it where necessary, and they would not reach the absurd conclusions which they reach out of sheer ignorance of the specific discipline which they pretend to contribute to, conclusions which merely expose their own incompetence and ignorance.

Their behaviour can only be understood as the irrational scramble for power, jobs, money, prestige, promotion, admiration and media attention.

Generally I have sympathy with many of the statements made by the postmodernists whom I distrust. But I do not agree with their idiotic (exaggerated) conclusions.

However, the absurdity of the situation is that I cannot prove them wrong if I adhere to their own theories. Arguments and evidence are, in their eyes, irrelevant. Whatever arguments I advance, they will be declared to be just an opinion. They will not even consider them. Arguments are irrelevant. No speaker can be held to account for what he says. Perjury is impossible. Progress towards agreement on the basis of truth is **absolutely** impossible.

(Therefore, if I may anticipate one conclusion: their books and papers are not worth reading and their opinions are not worth discussing. Treat the authors as insane.)

If I show such a person a piece of paper with a cross and say 'This is a cross', he will say 'No, this is a circle. It is only your opinion that this is a cross; in our opinion it is a circle and both opinions are equally valid.'

That is the reason why Renard is defenceless against Hérissonne.

The only thing to do is to ridicule these people, which is what Klaus Bung does in his story. And why does Baudrillard spend a lot of money to send his son to university for five years to

become a medical doctor, if what they teach at medical school are only opinions which are no better than those of a street-sweeper in Paris or a witch doctor in Africa?

These people are just playing a game with the general public and are getting paid for it through their publications, professorial salaries, etc. And, like certain established religions, they have set up the rules of the game in such a way that they cannot be exposed. (I am thinking of religions who preach that belief is a virtue and doubt and inquiry are sins.)

Honest people, like you and me, are emotionally incapable of participating in such a game. We would fear the ridicule of our friends. But if we play the game ruthlessly enough, if we are thoroughly dishonest, we can succeed.

I could go, take a sledgehammer, and hit Baudrillard in the mouth and knock out all his teeth. If he complains, I will say: 'I did not hit you in the face, that is only your opinion.'

Baudrillard wrote an infamous article in which he claimed that the Gulf War of 1991 (Kuwait, Iraq, USA) did not take place and that it did not matter whether it did or not. ('The reality gulf', in: The Guardian, London, 11 January 1991, p 25). All the war preparations were nothing but a media circus. We could not tell the library pictures on television from recordings of real events. Nobody could be sure whether the actual war had started. There there was no war. There were only television pictures, which bore no relation to reality. He did not mean this as a joke, he was serious about it. His arguments have been analysed by Christopher Norris in his book: 'What's wrong with postmodernism'.

I admit that it is difficult for us to distinguish truth and falsity in media presentations. But that does not mean that, in the majority of cases, no such distinction exists, that with sufficient effort, certain individuals could not find out the truth on certain things.

That, however, does not justify the claim that there is no such thing as the truth (a startling claim that can win you a professorship because of its novelty, but a false claim).

If you generalise from your observations in a more moderate fashion and state merely that people are often misled by the media and by people in authority and that, when it comes to people's thoughts and motives, it is difficult or even impossible for an outsider to determine the truth, and that there are cases where even I do not know what motivates ME, then this is nothing but common sense. It has been known not only since the time of Plato and the Greek sophists but is illustrated in the pages of the Mahabharata, in countless ancient Indian stories and in Vedanta philosophy, and there is therefore no point in showing off with it and pretending that it is a great modern discovery.

Some postmodernists, e.g. Lyotard, have argued that in debate it is fair that you throw anything at your partner at random, it does not matter whether it is true but only what impression it makes, what responses it causes, whether you can fluster your partner, and whether you can get away with it (which does not depend on its truth or falsity).

Postmodernism is bad enough in academic circles and in intellectual debate, but it is disastrous if it is practised in personal relationships. It is quite destructive, and if both partners practise it against each other, no more communication and no civilised lifestyle is possible. That's why Renard cannot practise it against Hérissonne, but she can do so against him. One person must agree not to retaliate in kind.

And that seems to be the topic of 'The Hedgehog and the Fox'. The absurdity of the story appears artificial and meaningless if one does not know that such things are seriously proposed in academia.

^USEFUL BOOKS ON POSTMODERNISM

- Sarup, Madan, 1993: 'An introductory guide to post-structuralism and postmodernism.' Second edition, 206 pp. Harvester-Wheatsheaf, New York and London (A sympathetic introduction by a Marxist, but not lacking in criticism.)
- Norris, Christopher, 1992: 'Uncritical theory. Postmodernism, intellectuals and the Gulf War'. 218 pp. Lawrence and Wishart, London (Thorough criticism of the philosophical foundations of postmodernism. Attacks Baudrillard's claim that the Gulf War never happened. Explains how Derrida's program of deconstruction distinguishes itself from the follies of postmodernism. Critical chapters on Stanley Fish, Lyotard, the dangers of postmodernism in politics.)
- Norris, Christopher, 1996: 'Reclaiming the truth. Contribution to a critique of cultural relativism'. 256 pp. Lawrence and Wishart, London (Thorough criticism of the philosophical foundations of postmodernism. On truth and reality and defending these ideals against postmodernist attacks. Chapter on Marxism as opposed to postmodernism.)
- Norris, Christopher, 1990: 'What's wrong with postmodernism. Critical theory and the ends of philosophy'. 287 pp. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, USA (Thorough criticism of the philosophical foundations of postmodernism. Strong attack on Jean Baudrillard and Stanley Fish. Defence of Derrida against ill-informed anti-postmodernists who, Norris says, have not taken the trouble of reading him thoroughly. Unlike the 'bad postmodernists', Derrida does believe in truth and tries to prove his opinions by meticulous analysis of the evidence.)

Sokal, Alan, and Jean Bricmont, 1999: 'Intellectual impostures. Postmodern philosophers' abuse of science.' 276 pp. Profile Books, London (A professor of physics and a professor of mathematics analyse the 'work' of Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Bruno Latour, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Paul Virilio, and show that several of them are trying to make their work difficult to understand and to appear profound by using meaningless mathematical formulae, quoting scientific terms and theories which they do not understand, deliberate attempts to throw dust into the eyes of their readers (similar to Hérisonne). The book gives excellent and crystal clear expositions of the scientific theories which have been abused.)

Liotard, Jean-François, 1979: 'La condition postmoderne' (The postmodern condition). 111 pp. Les Edition de Minuit, Paris. (English translation: The postmodern condition. Manchester University Press, Manchester, UK, 1984) (A good way to get to know the basic ideas of Lyotard in a short book. Some of his observations are correct, e.g. about the failures of great philosophical systems of the past, Marxism, philosophy has never yet produced any reliable truth, nor has religion, but his conclusions [there is no truth, or: money decides which is the truth in a society] are exaggerated and silly.)

Fish, Stanley, 1980: 'Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities.' 394 pp., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., USA. (A collection of essays, the most fundamental of which is the one from which the book has its title. If one reads it sympathetically, the essay states nothing which common sense does not tell us, namely that we interpret what other people say (and write) partly by the context in which they speak and partly because of what we expect from them and that we filter it through our prejudices, e.g. often we do not listen properly. My conclusion from this would be that we should listen carefully, not jump to conclusions, and be aware of the likelihood of misunderstandings and do everything in our power to avoid misunderstandings and to correct them, and to forgive other people who have misunderstood us. Stanley Fish foolishly, but profitably for his career and publicity, concludes that no text (and no utterance) has a meaning of its own, no interpretation is better than any other interpretation and there is no point in trying to support one's interpretation of a text by analysis of the text, or reference to comments made by the author, or anything else. No more debate about the interpretation of a text is possible or necessary. Any reader can decide, without any restraints through the text or anything else, what a text means 'for him'. That is called 'reader empowerment'. French intellectual Roland Barthes (1915-1980) also propounded some such ideas.)

In general my feeling is (similar formulation in Sokal): Many of the postmodernist assertions can be taken in two ways: radically

or with common sense. If they are applied radically (their words taken literally), then they are impressive, startling but blatantly wrong; if they are interpreted with common sense, then there is nothing new about them and they are not worth debating or reading about, and their authors do not deserve professorships.

Many postmodernists, however, do insist that their views are taken literally (and so does Hérissonne), in spite of their absurdity, and it is therefore proper that they are attacked vigorously, and they deserve to be called charlatans.

Example: Certain postmodernists claim that communication between human beings is absolutely impossible, and will throw this in your face whenever it suits them. This is a very novel statement, startling, but it is blatantly untrue; for when I send you in these notes the titles of books about postmodernism, then the chances are that I will have communicated the titles successfully.

If, however, we interpret the sentence 'Communication is impossible' moderately, as something said in anger after a marital row, and we take it to mean that communication through words is often very difficult and that misunderstandings are frequent, then there is nothing new about it. (Two months ago a police woman in the East End of London was told on her crackling radio set that a burglar in her area had escaped with 'a fax and a phone.' What she heard was different. Two minutes later she saw a man with a 'saxophone' coming out of a pub and arrested him. OK, communication is difficult but not impossible.

^SOME LINGUISTIC NOTES ON THE STORY

^"turned on by the goto command"

'Renard could be turned on only by the goto command which is very rare these days.' This requires an explanation.

to turn on the light; to turn on the radio: this is easy.

This turns me on (of music, of a person, etc) = I like it, I find it attractive, I find it exciting, even: I find it sexually exciting.

Concerning Renard, the word has all these meanings at the same time, the technical one and the sexual one: that makes it strange and funny.

The goto command (goto: written as one word!): this is a command in one of the early popular programming languages, called BASIC (all capitals!; this is an acronym) which tells the program to jump forward or especially backward several lines. It permitted programmers to write very chaotic and badly structured programs. Later on better programming languages like PASCAL came along and

using the goto command became a sign of very bad programming style. That's why the story says that it occurs very rarely. But when it occurs, because it is so rare, and so perverse, it turns Renard on. This is really quite a postmodernist joke, typical of men and of modern people fascinated with technology, very unnatural (but often found in the computer freak community), to be turned on not by a beautiful woman but by a perverse programming command.

Webster's Dictionary says: : ****BASIC**** noun [Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code] (1964): a simplified language for programming a computer

^"And that is really saying a lot"

"Renard agreed that our postmodernist world, must be imaginary, or even virtual."

There is some subtle irony and a lot of nonsense in the way the phrase "And that is really saying a lot" is used.

Firstly, the reader will observe that the breathless sentence preceding 'that is really saying a lot' is the longest sentence of the story, 158 words long. So Renard is quite literally 'saying a lot', he is so eager to agree with all the nonsense that has been proposed to him.

But the phrase also refers specifically to the assertion 'that our postmodernist world, must be imaginary, or even virtual'.

I will first show you how that phrase is used in normal English.

I searched for the phrase 'that is really saying a lot' on the Internet and found 163 occurrences.

Example	Explanation
It is a sunny day and <u>that is really saying a lot</u> . The struggle through rainy days of animal care...	It is seldom sunny. Normally one cannot say 'it is sunny', so if one says 'it is sunny' that is an extraordinary claim.
Woah, dude! This is probably the best stunt game on the Game Boy Color! <u>Not that that's really saying a lot</u> ...but hey, I was impressed. Road Champs has tons of tricks, really cool graphics, and lots and lots of gameplay value! If you ever wanted to take the extreme fun of Dave Mirra or Tony Hawk with you, then this is the game to do it! ...	Implication: Most games on the Game Boy Color are not very good. If this particular game is 'the best stunt game on Game Boy Color', then that is NOT saying a lot, because this game does not have to be very good to be better than the others.
Let me start by saying I am Scorpio with my Moon in Gemini at midheaven. The way my planets are configured, Gemini plays just as much a part of my life as Scorpio. <u>That is really saying a lot</u> , since I am very Scorpio. Having planets in Scorpio tends to balance out the Gemini. Can you tell I have played around with astrology? ...	Implication: This man's character is very much like Scorpio. If Scorpio were weak in him, it would be easy for him to say the Gemini is important in his life; Gemini would not have to be strong to be important in his life. However, since Scorpio is already strong in him, Gemini must also be very strong to be equally strong. Therefore it is saying a lot if he says Gemini is equally strong.
Poem about a turkey (bird): Why don't they choose some other kind of bird. Ostriches are leaner and better for you I've heard. And I sincerely believe they are even uglier than me. And <u>that is really saying a lot</u> coming from a turkey. They are so ugly they must keep their head in the ground. They should be the bird of choice when November rolls around.	Implication: This turkey says that ostriches are even uglier than him. Since turkeys are considered very ugly, calling an ostrich uglier than a turkey is saying quite a lot, it is very strong words. If I said that Mrs Thatcher is uglier than Helena (the most beautiful woman in ancient Greece), that is NOT saying a lot, because it is not difficult to be uglier than beautiful Helena. Even if Mrs Thatcher were quite beautiful, she could still be uglier than Helena.

I hope that makes the normal situation clear.

Now to the story itself.

Renard agreed that his pain, like the rest of our postmodernist world, must be imaginary, or even virtual. And that is really saying a lot.

^VIRTUAL: IMAGINARY

In saying that there is no truth and no reality and that the world is a product of our mind, some postmodernists (and other, e.g. Indian, philosophers before them) say in effect that the world is 'imaginary', that it exists only in our imagination (and Renard only imagines that he is suffering). This is fine as far as it goes.

But the phrase 'or even virtual', is plain nonsense - as I will explain.

'virtual' is a very popular word in the computer world today and also in the 'postmodernist world'. It is, in a way, the opposite of 'real'. It means 'imitation', the same effect achieved in different ways. A virtual disk drive on a computer is something you cannot touch, but you make the hard disk behave as if the computer had several real floppy disk drives.

'Virtual reality' (on computers) are images which permit you to imagine that while looking at the screen you are surrounded by houses, etc.

'Virtual sex' is a relationship over the internet in which through words and images you are stimulated in a way which may have the same (or similar) effects as real sex.

A 'virtual book' may be a text which appears on the screen and which you can read as if it were a book, but you cannot touch it, you cannot take it into the park or into bed. It is not real, it is only virtual.

Many virtual things are transitory, more than in the classical world. They exist only on the computer screen and only for as long as the power is on. The moment you switch off the power of the computer, its virtual world ceases to exist. Similarly the aeroplane is a 'virtual bird', but the moment the engine fails, it ceases to be a bird and falls to the ground.

The English philosopher George Berkeley (1685-1753) said that even what we call 'the real world' exists only as long as there is a person perceiving it (similar to saying it exists only in the mind). But the whole world exists only because God is permanently there watching and perceiving it.

Edward Lear (1812-1888), I think, wrote the following limerick about that theory:

There was a young man who thought: 'God,
Must think it exceedingly odd,
When he finds that this tree
Continues to be
Though there's no-one around in the quad.'

Dear Sir,
Your astonishment's odd.
I am always around in the quad.
And that's why this tree
Continues to be,
Since observed by

Yours faithfully,

God

That much about the word 'virtual'.

The phrase "imaginary, or even virtual" is nonsense because the word <even> implies that a virtual world is less real than an imaginary world. This is not the case. Often the opposite is true. A virtual disk drive is more real than an imaginary disk drive. The story here makes fun of the fashionable way in which many people use and abuse the word <virtual>.

^"She should know best. She always does."

'She should know best. She always does.' 'She should know best' = simply: 'She will know best, she does know best.' Sincerely stated by the Fox, he is convinced of her. 'She should know best' is a common expression and is often meant seriously and sincerely. E.g. Father says to his child: 'Mother knows best.'

But 'she always knows best' also means 'she is a know-all', an unpleasant person, assertive, always pretends to be right, does not accept criticism or being doubted, who says 'I know best and you don't' (i.e. the character of Hérissone). It is also very un-English to behave like this, Germans and French people are much more likely to behave like this or to tolerate such behaviour. In England it is simply ill-mannered to 'be too clever'. See Somerset Maugham's story 'Mr Know-All' which gives a very good description of this type, and also of Hérissone. In such cases 'She always knows best' means 'She thinks she knows best, and often she doesn't'.

When Renard says 'She always does' = 'She always does know best', he speaks out of conviction, pays her respects, but the reader is meant to take it as a criticism (the other meaning of the expression), namely 'She always behaves as if she knew best'.

^MAC-THE-KNIFE SONG

The English writer John Gay (1685-1732) wrote the libretto of a popular opera called 'The Beggars' Opera' (first staged in 1728), whose characters were beggars, gangsters, thieves, prostitutes - the London underworld of the time. It was a caricature of society and especially the corrupt politicians of the time, including a corrupt chief of the police. The music was by Johann Pepusch (1667-1752) and many of its tunes, all very simple, became pop songs at the time.

The German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) (text) and the German composer Kurt Weill (1900-1950) (music) produced a modern piece inspired by the Beggar's Opera called the Dreigroschen-Oper (the Threepenny Opera), (first performed in Berlin in 1928) because it was to be an opera not for and about the aristocracy but for poor people, who cannot afford to pay more than three pennies.

The Threepenny Opera opens with a street ballad about a notorious gangster chief and killer Macheath, (German 'Mackie Messer', in English 'Mac the Knife', based on Jack the Ripper). Macheath does not kill with his own hands, he has gangsters who do it for him, it is his gangsters who are caught and who go to prison. The ballad runs like this: Whereas a shark has dangerous teeth and everybody can see them in his face, Macheath has a knife but it is hidden and nobody can see it. When the shark kills a person, his fins are red with blood, but Macheath is wearing white gloves and his crimes cannot be seen on them. Wherever anybody is killed in London, Macheath is passing by somewhere in the vicinity. But he is dressed like a gentleman and nobody suspects him of these crimes. The ballad ends with the words:

It is impossible to prove anything against him,
It is impossible to get at him,
For a shark is not a shark,
If one cannot prove the fact.

This ballad became very famous in England and America because it was sung by Jazz trumpeter and singer Louis Armstrong (1901-1971).

^NAMES MENTIONED IN THE FOX STORY

The following names may require notes:

- Linnaeus (1707-1778), Swedish botanist, the first to devise a system for classifying species. I think he deals only with plants and not with animals, but Hérissonne throws anything printed, meaningful or meaningless, at Renard to confuse him and make him accept that she is not a hedgehog, i.e. to maintain her power over him.
- Alfred Brehm (1829-1884), German, published a very popular multi-volume work on the lives of animals (Tierleben) in 1876. The book is still in print today; perhaps radically revised.
- Gorgias (ca. 483-375 BC), Greek sophist (kind of philosopher) born in Sicily, lived in Athens. He is the protagonist of a dialogue by Greek philosopher Plato (ca. 427-347 BC) in which Gorgias argues, much like many postmodernists (and in keeping with reality, but not with morality), that it is more important to be strong than to have justice on one's side ('might wins over right') -- as was demonstrated, for example, during the Gulf War of 1990-1991, when Sadam Hussein attacked Kuwait not because he had the right to their territory but because he was stronger than them, and when the Americans attacked Sadam Hussein not because he was wrong (which he was, but the Americans would not have intervened against a strong country) but because he was weaker than them. That is the situation between Renard and Hérissonne. Hérissonne is stronger because she has no moral scruples; she uses her bristles and her books to hurt and defeat Renard even if she is wrong.
- Aristotle (384-322 BC), Greek philosopher, is quoted in the battle between Renard and Hérissonne because he was the classical authority on zoology (and many other things), even though he is out of date. In the Middle Ages people trusted Aristotle's books more than the evidence of their senses. For them Aristotle **was** the truth. Hérissonne beats Renard with a book which nobody today takes seriously any more. Absurd, especially since she does not believe in books of any kind.
- Salazar: Antonio di Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970) was dictator of Portugal for 36 years, from 1932 to 1968. He ruled in Portugal longer than Hitler did in Germany (1933-1945). It is therefore absurd for Hérissonne to proudly claim that she is wise by knowing how to survive under, and discover the lies of, dictators, as if this were a virtue, and ignoring the fact that Germany had an even more brutal dictatorship under Hitler. This is plain sarcasm. She can do with Renard whatever she likes. He is helpless.

- Renard, Hérissone: These are the normal French words for fox and female hedgehog. These names on the one hand indicate the type of animal in question, but, the words being French, English speakers will not see that immediately and take them as names rather than common nouns. Since Renard and Hérissone meet in France, which is half-way between Portugal and Germany, the choice of names or nicknames is not totally absurd.
- The last line of the story, 'And if they have not killed each other...', parodies the classical ending of many of Grimm's fairy-tales: 'And if they have not died, they are still alive today'. - The brothers Grimm were German, and collected and published German fairytales (folk stories). They became a children's classic not only in Germany but also in England, France, and many other countries. Jakob Grimm (1785-1863), Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859)

^DER HASE UND DER IGEL (THE HARE AND THE HEDGEHOG)

I must confess that I have a vested interest in this story, for my great-great-great-grandfather was a Buxtehude hare and had a contest with the great-great-great-grandfather of Hérissone, who was even then a Buxtehude hedgehog. The two had a race on the heath of Buxtehude and the hedgehog won, as one would expect even of a protomodernist hedgehog. Things have simply got worse since then, and postmodernist hedgehogs are even more ruthless. The story is absolutely true (like the gospel and the periodic two-times table), for it can be found in the Fairy Tales (gay stories) of the Brothers Grimm. They conclude wisely:

"At the seventy-fourth time, however, the hare could no longer reach the end. In the middle of the field he fell to the ground, blood streamed out of his mouth, and he lay dead on the spot. But the hedgehog took the louis-d'or which he had won and the bottle of brandy, called his wife out of the furrow, and both went home together in great delight, and if they are not dead, they are living there still.

This is how it happened that the hedgehog made the hare run races with him on the heath of Buxtehude till he died, and since that time no hare has ever had any fancy for running races with a Buxtehude hedgehog.

The moral of this story is, firstly, that no one, however great he may be, should permit himself to jest at any one beneath him, even if he be only a hedgehog. And, secondly, it teaches, that when a man marries, he should take a wife in his own position, who looks just as he himself looks. So whosoever is a hedgehog let him see to it that his wife is a hedgehog also, and so forth."

^"Hase"

For anyone who has not caught on yet, I should point out that my German name, Hase, means 'hare' and that, whereas lies in Germany have proverbially short legs (Lügen haben kurze Beine = Lies have

short legs), I have long legs because I manage to get away with them - or was it the other way round?.

^CONCLUSION

Since I do not exist and have been lying anyway, I cannot engage in any discussion of this silly topic and of my silly article. Everything I have stated is wrong anyway, and I herewith withdraw it unreservedly.

^eof