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Goethe and the Nobility as Characterisation and Presentation of Self

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Abstract

Goethe had a complex and evolving relationship with the nobility, for reasons which can in part be inferred from his biography. This thesis, however, is primarily concerned with examination of relevant texts, and is largely confined to the years before the journey to Italy in 1786. The first three chapters cover the period before his arrival in Weimar. This is followed by an account of the relevant works from the first Weimar decade (1775-1786), with some biographical detail. The main weight has fallen on *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung*, a text which is still sometimes undervalued, and has a rather limited bibliography. It is naturally a more direct reflection of his social attitudes than the three major plays associated with the decade, which however have been given separate, more cursory treatments in the three final chapters. General themes include the emergence of Goethe from immature, or at least inherited, stereotypes of the nobility, first towards an attempted alliance between it and the 'Genie' of the Sturm und Drang, and then to a more detailed critique made possible by personal experience. The final phase (final, that is, within the limited time frame) was the formation and development of an internal ideal of nobility with an increasingly tenuous relationship with social and political reality. Goethe's picture of nobility as performance and presentation of self is considered, and its links, for the non-noble author, with theatre and theatrical role performance. Other recurring themes include court manners and their value, both inherently and as an analogue of the heightening which for Goethe was essential to art, court life as a paradigm of social life in general, and the related subject of flight from society.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature

A. M. Jackson

Introduction

This thesis will investigate aspects of the young Goethe's views and assumptions on the nobility, and on the interface between it and a lower social group which was rising in self-confidence and coming to challenge the nobility in certain limited areas. It began as a study of the nobility in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (hereafter *WML*), and in particular of its relationship with theatre, self-presentation and self-development. The discovery of a classic of Goethe scholarship,¹ now almost forty years old but on precisely this topic, soon led to a change of plan, and to an investigation of how far these themes can be traced in Goethe's earlier works. The original concept, however, still partly explains the overall approach.

One obvious difficulty is the extraordinary diversity of the early works, and their apparent inconsistency if viewed as a totality. The nobility can be characterised both by inauthentic semblance and performance, as opposed to bourgeois reality and authenticity (seeming as opposed to being), and at the same time can by implication be set before us as models for upward ethical striving. Again, Goethe sometimes presents us with idealised, or at least entirely positive individual members of the *Adel*, but refuses to endorse it as a whole. This applies most obviously to *Werther* and *WMTS*. Elsewhere, however, nobility as such seems to be celebrated, sometimes with an equivocation between social and morally approbative senses of the word 'noble'. In particular, on the interpretation of 'Das Göttliche' given below (Chapter 5), we are offered as role models 'noble ones', who seem to be partly a moralistic thought experiment, but partly also social reality. Imitation of them will enable us to rise ethically, the enlarged perspective given by this will in turn enable us to form and refine a higher ideal for our further aspiration, and so on indefinitely.

Any society characterised by an aristocratic ruling class is likely to produce middle-class artists and intellectuals in a complex relationship with it. The normal unstable compound of respect, deference and resentment may be further complicated by elements of social aspiration, even of identification. Certain superiorities will tend to be attributed to the nobility, which will reinforce social and political subordination, but which are also available to us in part for emulation, although only on certain conditions. One condition is

¹ Dieter Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft und französische Revolution bei Goethe: Adliges und bürgerliches Wertesystem im Urteil der Weimarer Klassik* (Kronberg/Ts: Athenäum, 1977). As the title suggests, Borchmeyer's texts postdate the Revolution. The only work in common with what follows is *Torquato Tasso*, allowing for the overlap between *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* (hereafter *WMTS*) and *WML*.

naturally that members of the nobility do not themselves fall away from these standards, and in Goethe's case anxieties about this are expressed sometimes by powerful elements of satire, sometimes more directly by *Fürstenermahnung*. Another condition is that these virtues should be publicly performed, rather than restricted to the privacy of an inner circle. This is one of the links between nobility and theatre, and both flight from society and the performance or otherwise of social duties by those in socially elevated situations will emerge as themes in what follows.

If we ask what virtues Goethe attributes to the nobility, some at least can be specified. They include a learned tropism towards decision-making and action, as opposed to the over-elaborate bourgeois consciousnesses of Werther and Wilhelm Meister; a willingness to facilitate the projects of others (helpfulness, *bienfaisance*, *Wohltätigkeit*, on which see below, pp.112-13); in exceptional cases a capacity for ethical leadership and creativity (Iphigenie); performance of the vital political role of mediation between prince and *Volk* (Egmont); and more generally a higher standard of formal manners, which permit freer and less self-conscious social behaviour, but which can also be admired for their own sake, both as virtuosic display of skill and as aesthetic spectacle. But no list can be exhaustive. The aristocracy was 'essentialist' (Pierre Bourdieu), that is, it had an essence which would escape from being contained in any definition.² On the other hand formally indefinable qualities can be evoked by rhetorical means which will also be discussed below.

Because the subject is so varied, the treatment of individual works is separate and chronological, and because it is so large, the departure for Italy (1786) has been taken as an approximate endpoint. The term 'the young Goethe' is normally applied to the period before his removal to Weimar (1775-6), but Italy was a far more decisive dividing line, in his works as in his life. In the words of Georg Simmel, 'the young Goethe died in Rome.'³

The Germany into which Goethe was born was socially and economically backward in comparison with much of western Europe, especially England, France and parts of the Netherlands.⁴ This 'developmental slope', as Wehler called it, also had cultural aspects.

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984), p.16.

³ Georg Simmel, *Goethe* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1913), p.242.

⁴ On the 'Entwicklungsgefälle zwischen West- und Mitteleuropa', Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol.1: *Vom Feudalismus bis zur Modernisierung der Reformära 1700-1815* (Munich: Beck, 1987), i.55-7.

The nobility, in particular, was largely French in its culture,⁵ a phenomenon which contemporaries thought of as being universal in Europe, but one which certainly applied much more to Germany than to Britain. Both Goethe's master, Carl August, and the duke's mother, the dowager duchess Anna Amalia, were typical products of an education into French classicism.⁶ This French influence extended far beyond literature and was part of a 'hegemonic cultural style'.⁷ The young Goethe could assume, as a matter of course, that a foreign traveller in search of 'Germanness' would not find it at a German court (below, pp.36-7).

The nobility had in some areas almost unrestricted powers, and was also less open to access from below than that of France and England. What might be called 'unenlightened' attitudes, such as a strong aversion to *mésalliance*, were also much more general. The gulf between nobleman and commoner was broader, and not bridged by such compromises as the English 'gentleman' or the French 'honnête homme'. The blinkered rigidity of the German nobility was a contemporary international stereotype. Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), with its German baronial family, autocratic and pedantically obsessed with its own status and the quarterings of its coat of arms, is only the best-known instance. Goethe was impatiently rejecting the cliché as early as 1772 (below, pp.35-6), but some contemporaries, at least, regarded the nobility as exemplifying German underdevelopment. On the other hand, precisely because it was a ruling class, the German nobility did not suffer from the comparative loss of respect of its French counterpart, and could avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of the 'glänzenden Funktionslosigkeit eines bloßen Hofadels' and a 'Steckenbleiben in der Enge des Interessenhorizontes eines bloßen Landjunkertums'.⁸

In the early 1770s, then, we find an awareness of national backwardness, feelings of *Ressentiment* towards France, a compensating anglophilia and a validation of Germanness, promoted in part by Goethe's twin mentors, Möser and Herder. As the most prominent exemplars of everything French, and as typifications of political unenlightenment, the nobility might seem open to radical criticism, but in fact this was still rare. The Sturm und

⁵ For general accounts of the German nobility at this period, see Rudolf Vierhaus, *Germany in the Age of Absolutism*, trans. Jonathan B. Knudsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.33-43; and Wehler, pp.140-58.

⁶ Fritz Martini, 'Ebenbild, Gegenbild. "Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung" und Goethe in Weimar 1775 bis 1786', *GJb*, 93 (1976), 60-83, here at p.68.

⁷ Wehler, p.146.

⁸ Rudolf Vierhaus, *Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert. Politische Verfassung, soziales Gefüge, geistige Bewegungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), p.45, in part following de Tocqueville.

Drang was not normally politically radical. Nevertheless, whatever virtues might inhere in individual members of the *Adel*, and however essential it might be to the constitution of the *Reich*, there were grounds for looking to its development, its opening out to new ideas, as a political priority. Hence that contemporary stereotype, both in literature and to some extent in reality, the ‘honest man at court’, the minister, often not himself of noble rank, who would guide the feet of his princely master into the paths of Enlightenment (below, pp.91-2). Goethe’s introduction to this role came in Weimar. It was not his introduction to the nobility, nor even to the life of courts, but self-evidently Weimar enabled him to go beyond casual observation into a more profound personal engagement.

The first three chapters below consider selected works from the earliest period, with *Werther* naturally receiving the most extended treatment. An attempt has been made at the end of Chapter 3 to summarise the conclusions which can be drawn up to that point. Goethe’s relationship with the nobility was changing over time, from an immature hostility arising from exclusion, to a search for an ideal, sometimes identified in anti-bourgeois, sometimes in anti-social, Sturm und Drang terms. Should the ‘Genie’ regard the nobleman as an enemy, or at a deeper level as a potential ally? The fantasy lifestyles, first of the *Anakreontik* and later of the Sturm und Drang *Kraftkerl*, are relevant here.

In the fourth chapter, with the removal to Weimar, it becomes necessary to consider the biographical aspect, however briefly and selectively. As is clear from *DuW*, Goethe had been familiar with individual members of the nobility from early childhood. A degree of casual acquaintance, in a few cases friendship, continued at Leipzig, Strasbourg and Wetzlar. His travels with the Stolbergs in May 1775 had introduced him to court life at Darmstadt and Karlsruhe, where he later felt he had acquitted himself tolerably, despite the burden of his companions’ eccentricities, from which, he implied, he had distanced himself even at the time.⁹ It was one thing, however, to make brief, celebrity court appearances in the role of literary ‘Genie’, and quite another to attempt to adopt the lifestyle and daily routine of an individual court, in other words, to become that profoundly ambiguous figure, a courtier. On the one hand courtiers had been for centuries the object of a *Hofkritik* in which they were vilified to a degree difficult to parallel with any other group in society.¹⁰ On the other hand the individual courtier had long been seen as a ‘Weltmensch’, a man of the world, who embodied an ideal of personal development not available, even as an

⁹ *DuW*, HA 10:128, 130-1.

¹⁰ Helmuth Kiesel, *‘Bei Hof, Bei Höll’: Untersuchungen zur literarischen Hofkritik von Sebastian Brant bis Friedrich Schiller* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979).

aspiration, to most of the middle classes.¹¹ How far Goethe's own views conformed to the latter position will need to be considered, but the gulf between the two illustrates the radical nature of his apparent change of adherence.

Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach was a small duchy in Thüringen, a backward region in which the duchy gave at least one visitor the impression of being even less prosperous than its neighbours.¹² The character of court life during Carl August's long minority had been established by his mother, who as regent had governed ably, but without resolving the financial unsoundness created by her spendthrift father-in-law, Ernst August (reigned, 1729-1748). A recent fire in May 1774 had destroyed the Residenz, giving the court 'an air of good-humoured improvisation',¹³ which it retained until after 1800 (the new, existing palace was not completed until 1803). Its personnel was modest, and expenditure was actually decreased by retrenchment during Goethe's period as finance minister from 1782.¹⁴

Accounts of the German courts of the *Kleinstaaterei* too often depend on the cliché that they were absurd duodecimo versions of Versailles. In fact they varied considerably, and a typology has been attempted by Volker Bauer.¹⁵ The ceremonial court, where etiquette was highly formalised, sometimes deliberately on the French or Spanish model, is only one of his types, and one whose expense led to its decline in the second half of the century. Another is the 'Museum', sometimes ruled over by a dowager, and compensating for other shortcomings by the acquisition and display of cultural capital. Of these Weimar, especially after the arrival of Goethe and Herder in 1775-6, was the outstanding, but not

¹¹ For an early example, see Vierhaus, *Germany in the Age of Absolutism*, p.36, quoting Johann von Rist, writing in 1663.

¹² Details of the social background have been taken from N. Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, vol.1: *The Poetry of Desire (1749-1790)* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Hans Eberhardt, *Goethes Umwelt: Forschungen zur gesellschaftlichen Struktur Thüringens* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1951), here at pp.10-15; and for the peasantry, Rosalinde Gothe, 'Adel und Bauern in Thüringen – Konstellationen und Entwicklungen im 18. Jahrhundert', *Genealogie in der DDR*, Heft 1, *Protokollband des III. Genealogentreffens Friedrichroda, 8.-9.4.1989* (Erfurt: AG Genealogie Thüringen, 1989), 34-43; id., 'Goethe, Karl August und Merck. Zur Frage der Reformansätze im Agrarbereich', *GJb*, 100 (1983), 203-18; and W. Daniel Wilson, *Das Goethe-Tabu: Protest und Menschenrechte im klassischen Weimar* (Munich: DTV, 1999), pp.76-116.

¹³ Boyle, *Goethe*, i.233.

¹⁴ For the personnel of the court, see *ibid.*, pp.238-9.

¹⁵ Volker Bauer, *Die höfische Gesellschaft in Deutschland von der Mitte des 17. bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts: Versuch einer Typologie* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993).

unique example.¹⁶ Here poverty enforced a certain informality, to which the temperaments of its literary stars also contributed.¹⁷

Rural society in Thüringen was dominated by a peasantry which comprised almost two-thirds of the population and held about 80 per cent of the land,¹⁸ the remainder being divided more or less equally between cameral estates (*Kammergüter*) and feudal estates (*Rittergüter*), either of the *Landadel* or of a nobility more associated with the court. At the end of the century there were 55 of these *Rittergüter* in the Weimar duchy, although nobility was in fact no longer a necessary condition of tenure, and by 1818 only a minority had noble owners. They varied greatly in size, but most were quite small.¹⁹ There are several references to the poverty of the local nobility,²⁰ and Goethe did not find them an attractive subject. In practice the nobility meant for him the members of the court, visitors to it, and observations made during formal visits to courts elsewhere in Germany. Later his horizons were further widened by summer vacations in spas such as Carlsbad.

There were of course strong, practical career reasons for the choice of Weimar. Boyle surveyed the alternatives at length and stressed its rationality as a career move,²¹ but even the most obvious questions about the subsequent relationship with the court turn out to have paradoxical answers, if any. Did Goethe want to learn, specifically from Charlotte von Stein, to undergo a kind of *Lehrzeit*, entered into at age twenty-six, and leading to entry into an otherwise closed circle? Could nobility be learned, and if so did Goethe succeed in learning it? Or was his aim rather to teach, to modify a court in the direction of a personal ideal?

Apart from practicalities, there were other, less fully conscious motives involved in the choice. Part of Goethe's private mental image of the nobility was certainly one of adulthood, and is connected with a tendency to think of himself as emerging from a cocoon of protracted adolescence and thereby achieving contact with objective reality. The difference between the *Stände* corresponded to this gap between immaturity and maturity, a theme which is important in *WMTS* and *WML*, as it had been in *Werther*. In a letter to his

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.73-7.

¹⁷ The anecdotes are of course numerous. Goethe's rolling on the floor in front of the dowager duchess is well attested, Grumach, i.402-3. Wieland reputedly once threw a book at her head, Karl Eduard Vehse, *Der Hof zu Weimar privat: Von Herzog Wilhelm bis zur Goethezeit* [c.1855] (repr., Cologne: Anaconda, 2011), pp.148-9.

¹⁸ Wilson, *Das Goethe-Tabu*, p.76; Eberhardt, *Goethes Umwelt*, p.39.

¹⁹ Goethe, 'Adel und Bauern in Thüringen', p.35.

²⁰ Eberhardt, *Goethes Umwelt*, pp.25, 30, 58.

²¹ Boyle, *Goethe*, i.239-51.

mother he defended his decision: ‘Bey der lebhaften Einbildung und Ahndung menschlicher Dinge, wäre ich [in Frankfurt] doch immer unbekannt mit der Welt, und in einer ewigen Kindheit geblieben [...]’.²² In a letter to Lavater in the same year (1781), he has a compressed image of emergence from scales and from fog, which must in part be a fog of excessive subjectivity.²³

Of the texts produced during the Weimar decade, ‘Das Göttliche’ has been considered in a separate chapter in order to bring out its clear, though muted, social content, but the main emphasis has fallen on the two principal works. The prose *Iphigenie* and *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* have limited bibliographies, and this has prompted a more detailed treatment, especially of the latter, which is naturally more direct in its social reference. It will be assumed here that *WMTS* is very highly organised, with themes and image patterns sometimes distinct from those of *WML*. The final three chapters concern the prose *Iphigenie* and the other two classic dramas normally associated with the decade, although *Egmont* was begun before Weimar and *Torquato Tasso* is transitional, and points forward to the next phase.

The overall theme is the transformation of a social ideal of nobility from largely literary, youthful origins, especially in theatre, above all in French classicism, into one based in part on reality, and in part on imaginary rivals (the Sturm und Drang). The ideal would acquire social depth from Weimar, both positively and negatively, and would then begin to evolve into an imaginary construction with a critical relationship to social reality (*WML*). At least two more phases were still to come, marked by the two remaining novels, but these, and indeed the final form of *WML* itself, are beyond the time span under consideration.

In so far as the subject is sociological, its treatment is heavily indebted to Norbert Elias, and less so to Erving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu. Anyone considering the psychological implications of the relationship between the *Stände* must also incur a debt to Kurt Eissler,²⁴ although the immense richness of his material is equalled only by the speculative nature of its Freudianism, which has caused difficulties in integrating his work into mainstream

²² To Catharina Elisabeth Goethe, 11.8.1781, HaBr, i.369. Cf. his reference to himself as ‘ein Mensch den sie [die Götter] nach und nach der Kindheit entreisen’, to Frau von Stein, 9.12.1781, WA 4.5:233.

²³ ‘vom Geiste fallen mir täglich Schuppen und Nebel’, to Lavater, 18.3.1781, WA 4.5:88. ‘Schuppen’ falling from the eyes are from Acts 9:18 (the conversion of Saul); and for the mist, cf. the ‘Zaubernebel’ which covers the land in *Lila*, and is caused by the heroine’s retreat into a delusive narcissism, version 2, Act 5, FA 1.5:61. Both mist and scales re-appear in the *It. Reise* diary, 30.9.1786, FA 1.15.1:686.

²⁴ K. R. Eissler, *Goethe: A Psychoanalytic Study 1775-1786*, 2 vols. (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1963).

Goethe studies. Within these studies my principal acknowledgment is to works forming part of a trend towards the social in the late 1970s and 1980s, typified by Hans Reiss, Hans Rudolf Vaget and above all, by the early work of Dieter Borchmeyer.

As Borchmeyer remarked,²⁵ what he calls ‘Literatursoziologie’ tends to go in and out of fashion, and it can hardly now be said to have been fashionable for some time. The student in this area is often left to choose between a modern secondary literature which is comparatively uninterested in the social aspects of the texts, and Marxist scholarship, which is often relevant, but whose premises are difficult to apply, especially to Weimar. This has led to a partial dependence on older works, which, it must be said, have neither been refuted nor superseded by more ample treatments, and which are still regularly cited. Among the virtues of Borchmeyer’s *Höfische Gesellschaft* is the highlighting of Christian Garve, a ‘popular philosopher’ whose most influential work dates from the 1790s, beyond the time limit of this thesis, but who sometimes almost seems to be inadvertently expounding Goethe’s general viewpoint, in a way which the young Goethe seldom did himself.²⁶ More importantly, Borchmeyer placed a very welcome stress on Goethe’s search for balance, what he called his ‘Streben nach Vermittlung’,²⁷ which is especially characteristic of his treatment of social themes.

Two further debts should be mentioned, one of them to works even older than Borchmeyer’s. W. H. Bruford’s *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar and Germany in the Eighteenth Century* establish the importance for Goethe and his contemporaries of an ideal of self-development (what Bruford elsewhere called a ‘Selbstvervollkommnungs-ideal’),²⁸ which has clear implications for bourgeois attitudes towards the nobility. Also valuable is his comparison, in an article of 1933, of the nobleman with the dandy of Baudelaire, living out his life before a mirror. This was taken up approvingly by Borchmeyer (*Höfische Gesellschaft*, pp.50-52), and forms a link between nobility and theatre, enabling us for example to see the ‘schöne Seele’ as an essentially theatrical figure, giving a life-long performance in front of the mirror of her conscience.

²⁵ *Höfische Gesellschaft*, p.2.

²⁶ Borchmeyer refers elsewhere to Garve as ‘dem kompetentesten Beurteiler höfisch-aristokratischen Lebensstils am Ausgang des 18. Jahrhundert’, *Die Weimarer Klassik: eine Einführung*, 2 vols. (Königstein/Ts: Athenäum, 1980), i.75.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.6.

²⁸ See the bibliography, below. There is of course a very extensive later literature on *Bildung* and the *Bildungsbürgertum*. See Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, i.210-17.

The other debt is to the work of Professor W. Daniel Wilson. The determination to ‘demythologise’ Goethe has led to controversies not much to the present purpose, and has long threatened to become a new orthodoxy, but his corrective is important, especially since the older scholarship stands accused, with varying degrees of justification, of over-indulgence towards Goethe, and perhaps even more so towards Weimar.

For non-noble authors, but also for their readers, the nobility constituted an ‘other’, against which their own identity could be defined. This was especially true of the *Hofadel*. The *Bürgertum* saw itself as rooted in real life and in the Christian virtues in a particular Pietist and sentimental form. Nobility, and especially court life, was seen as foreign, theatrical, performative. But for Goethe this implied heightening would later come to have strong analogies with the antithesis between art and mere naturalism. Apart from its attributed intrinsic value, the nobility could also be enlisted as an ally in social criticisms which can only be called anti-bourgeois, and which connect works as diverse as *Götz*, *Götter Helden und Wieland*, *Stella*, and arguably *Werther* and the *Urfaust*.

Once in Weimar, Goethe’s instinct was to continue this self-location as a kind of official opposition, but now at least intermittently to the nobility itself. A new critique emerged, not only continuing a centuries-old tradition of *Fürstenermahnung*, but also permitting some surprisingly overt satire on the court. In the major works of this decade, however, the ideal is increasingly one of balance and an equitable distribution of ethical sympathy.

An important aspect of the social antithesis is manners. The tendency of the Sturm und Drang, influenced among others by Sterne, Goldsmith, and above all by Rousseau, was to deprecate manners as insincere. Manners are learned, performed behaviour, and interpose themselves between the impulses of our hearts and our actions. If these impulses are virtuous, manners are unnecessary; if not, they are an odious pretence. Moreover, since much of what was distinctive in noble manners was imported from France, patriotism perhaps required rejection of them on those grounds alone. Goethe’s most direct attack on this mindset is in *WML* (below, p.145), but earlier treatments are also of interest.

Much of the Hamlet topos, wherever it occurs in Goethe, depends on a related antithesis, between our real selves and the inauthentic ones we present to society. This image of the self still seems so ubiquitous in the west that it can only be examined from an external

perspective, for example the Japanese one adopted by Roland Barthes.²⁹ For Barthes western impoliteness, our instinctive feeling that courtesy is hypocrisy, rests on what he calls ‘a certain mythology of the “person”’, that is, of the self as composed of a social, false, factitiously polite exterior, and a true, authentic interior.

This has an obvious relevance to *Werther*. Werther has a heart, which is his real self. His social being, even to some extent his qualities of mind are performance. To be valued for them, as Werther is by the prince, is an insult, like being admired for one’s clothes. But for the non-noble author, the distinction between these two aspects of the self has social implications, certainly in any society characterised by even minimal social mobility. The real, authentic identity is *bürgerlich*, the aspirational, performed identity is superior, or in Goethe’s terms noble. It might be compared to a language acquired at a later stage in life, spoken after a fashion, but without the instinctive freedom of a mother tongue.

The moral status of manners is another permanently ongoing issue. Occasional voices can be heard asserting the actual identity of manners and morals in the nineteenth century.³⁰ The theme is already present in *Werther* and *WMTS*, however, and is discussed below. That a system such as table manners, for example, has an ethical foundation is obvious,³¹ but equally obviously the ethical base has acquired a social superstructure. To the sociologist, the elaborations of etiquette are simply an aspect of court society’s self-presentation.³² As manners, accents, vocabulary and other social markers become ‘codes’ with a decipherable meaning, however, we move from the sociological terrain of Norbert Elias to the semiological one of Barthes and others. These viewpoints are at least in principle value-free, but for the later Goethe the heightened manners of noble society were both an ethical and an aesthetic spectacle.

This evaluation inevitably placed Goethe on one side of a longstanding and continuing debate with political overtones. In the seventeenth century there had been much discussion, prominently featuring Goethe’s admired Thomasius, on the status of

²⁹ Roland Barthes, *L’empire des signes* ([Paris:] Editions du Seuil, 2005), pp.87-9.

³⁰ For Goethe and the novel of manners, see Jane K. Brown, ‘Die Wahlverwandschaften and the English Comedy of Manners’, *Comparative Literature*, 28.2 (1976), 97-108, and Susan Winnett, *Terrible Sociability: The Text of Manners in Laclos, Goethe, and James* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

³¹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, revised edn., ed. Eric Dunning and others (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp.45-88. For more ambitious ethical claims see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques*, vol.3, *L’Origine des manières de table* ([Paris:] Plon, 1968), pp.412-22.

³² Werner Gephart, *Goethe als Gesellschaftsforscher und andere Essays zum Verhältnis von Soziologie und Literatur* (Berlin: Lit, 2008), p.39.

‘decorum’, to which Thomasius had on the one hand attached great importance, but which he had seen as adiaphora. In particular, he had rejected the suggestion that there was or could be an authoritative standard which we should imitate.³³ Clearly any such judgement has positive implications for the self-assertion of a rising social group. By the late eighteenth century these social and political implications had become much more overt. For Knigge, for example, noble manners had no inherent value. The manners of a caste were just that, necessarily adopted by those who aspired to, or had to frequent a court, but ridiculous if one tried to imitate them in ordinary life. For Christian Garve, by contrast, social intercourse was a skill like any other. It had to be learned and had been learned by the nobility, whose manners therefore should be a model for imitation.

By the 1790s it was clear that to assert the value of these manners was to defend the aristocracy itself, but Goethe’s distaste for entering the political arena was profound. Such political theories as he had were either instinctive attitudes or early acquisitions from Möser and Herder, perhaps also from Montesquieu. These were settled questions, not to be theorised upon by anyone with a ‘general aversion towards politics’.³⁴ At the same time an undoubted conservatism in the 1790s and later was partly masked by a determination to evade any semblance, at least any public semblance, of adherence to a party. The desire to place himself above politics leaves for modern commentators the open question of whether this was possible.³⁵ This issue is peripheral in the period before Italy, but needs to be borne in mind.

Goethe’s concerns were often limited and personal, for example aristocratic dilettantism in the arts, or the related question of how the artist can associate with the aristocracy without loss of integrity. But he certainly also assumed that the aristocracy embodied values and manners which should be more widely disseminated throughout society, and for a time asked himself what role the theatre could play in this. His own career, and in particular the

³³ Manfred Beetz, ‘Ein neuentdeckter Lehrer der Conduite. Thomasius in der Geschichte der Gesellschaftsethik’, in Werner Schneiders, ed., *Christian Thomasius 1655-1728. Interpretation zu Werk und Wirkung* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1989), pp.199-222.

³⁴ For Goethe’s ‘Scheu vor allen politischen Dingen’, see a conversation with Boisserée, 7.10.1815, FA 2.7:531. He had always had this, he claimed, and went on to speak of the period of the Fürstenbund. Clearly ‘always’ included the first Weimar decade, at the latest.

³⁵ His position is sympathetically assessed by N. Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, vol.2, *Revolution and Renunciation (1790-1803)* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), pp.201-2. Borchmeyer asks rhetorically: “Bedeutet das Ausweichen vor politischer Parteinahme aber nicht notwendig eine Sanktionierung des Status quo, somit doch eine uneingestandene Parteinahme für das ‘Bestehende’?”, *Die Weimarer Klassik*, ii.186. He answers no, but many would instinctively disagree.

relationship with Charlotte von Stein, raises the separate question of whether it was possible or desirable to try to become noble, as a conscious developmental project.

A note on ‘edel’ and ‘bürgerlich’

In Germany social and moral senses of ‘edel’ had coexisted for perhaps a thousand years,³⁶ but by the time of Goethe the approbative uses had come to predominate. The word ‘adelig’ was coming to replace ‘edel’ as the normal one to refer to the social status, but ‘edel’ retained, and would never lose, its social implications. The ascription of positive moral qualities to a dominant social group, and the resulting linguistic ambiguity, are an extraordinarily powerful mechanism, apparently universal in the main European languages. The whole process seems to be largely unexplained, apart from a doubtful speculation by Nietzsche in the first part of *Zur Genealogie der Moral*.

The co-presence of social and ethical senses in such words, or what Conze calls the ‘Adel-Tugend-Topos’, was, as he says, extremely double-edged, contributing to the prestige of the nobility, but also drawing attention to prosaic reality in a way which might be socially critical. If there was a superior ‘Seelenadel’, the implication, by no means always unspoken, is that it was a reproach to members of the actual nobility not to belong to it.³⁷ The (very) young Goethe could moralise about the princes, their venal loves and their scandalously non-bourgeois marriages (below, pp.25-6). A little later he would angrily dismiss satirical criticism of the nobility (below, pp.35-6), and himself satirise the popular stereotype of noble libertinism,³⁸ but a time would come when general answers as to its value would have to be given, and this would lead him into uncomfortable positions.

For a society to use the same concept to denote membership of certain families, tenure of certain offices (including some elective civic offices), a reward for administrative skill or

³⁶ For an early example, see Hans Eggers, *Vollständiges Lateinisch-Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch zur Althochdeutschen Isidor-Übersetzung* (Berlin: Akademie, 1960), s.v. ‘egregius’; and for a historical account of ‘Adel’ as a concept, the art. by Werner Conze on ‘Adel, Aristokratie’ in Otto Brunner and others, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 9 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997), i.1-48 (hereafter Conze, ‘Adel, Aristokratie’).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.16. Conze refers to Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter*. In the 8th edn. (Bern: Francke, 1948), the passage in question is at pp.188-9, and gives numerous classical and medieval examples, including a much-quoted favourite, Juvenal’s ‘nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus’.

³⁸ The ‘Schattenspielmann’ in the *Jahrmarktsfest* attributes the biblical Flood to divine wrath at the outrageous behaviour of ‘Ritter und Damen’, and his use of the present tense seems to imply that that of contemporary ones threatens us all with a repetition, ll.326-336, FA 1.4:264. Slightly more seriously, libertinism, with its overtones of freedom versus (middle-class) convention, is an important component of the Anacreontik.

other personal excellence (as in the case of Goethe himself), or simply the possession of certain virtues, is logically absurd, or at least makes the concept radically incoherent. From an anthropological perspective, however, it is entirely normal.³⁹ We might compare, for example, the belief of the Nuer people of the Sudan that twins are birds.⁴⁰ Beliefs of this kind have interested philosophers since Wittgenstein's polemic against Frazer,⁴¹ his point being essentially that they cannot be considered as delusions, or as evidence of some sort of 'primitive mentality': they must be referred to the entire cultural matrix. From the anthropological viewpoint, the questions will be: what function does the belief perform? Does the society depend on it for the functioning of its culture?

Such beliefs may be religious, and it has long been argued, notably by Kierkegaard, that religious language depends on the exploitation of logical inconsistencies. To dispense with the normal requirements of logic is to assert that we are in a privileged area exempt from those requirements. In the present case the protection is not of the religious beliefs of a society, but of its social structure. The distinction is of course only partial. Attachment to the nobility had religious features: it was supported by biblical texts, heavily reinforced by Lutheran teaching, and was by definition an ancestor cult with taboos (on misalliance, on certain occupations, etc.), ceremonial, a rigid hierarchy, and so on.

An alternative to the anthropological approach would be to argue that nobility by blood is the simple, 'literal' sense, and that other uses are 'metaphorical', but Goethe himself became literally, indeed legally, noble in 1782. In any case, such separation of the literal and metaphorical cannot be complete. Theorists of metaphor view it as a way of forcing together two separate concepts, leading to a fusion reaction and bringing into existence a new entity.⁴² Clearly Conze's 'Adel-Tugend-Topos' is the product of such a fusion, and despite recurring ironies, Goethe seems never to have radically challenged it.

Goethe's own use of the word 'edel' was studied in detail a century ago by Carl Liederwald.⁴³ He cannot be said to have established any very idiosyncratic features, and his classification is less helpful than the one in *GWb*. He did, however, see a sharp change

³⁹ Ernest Gellner, 'Concepts and Society', in *Transactions of the Fifth World Congress of Sociology* (Louvain: International Sociological Association, 1962), vol.1, pp.153-83.

⁴⁰ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), pp.128-33.

⁴¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, ed. Rush Rhees (Retford: Brynmill, 1979).

⁴² Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Metaphorical Twist', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 22 (1962), 293-307; Paul Ricoeur, 'Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language', in P. R., *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.65-85.

⁴³ Carl Liederwald, *Der Begriff 'edel' bei Goethe* (Schleiz: Weber, 1913).

in both frequency and range at the time of the move to Weimar, and a numerical high point in the period 1787-1803, as Goethe distanced himself from the Sturm und Drang.⁴⁴ In fact, Goethe certainly already treated nobility as problematic in the Weimar decade, but the later span-date is still useful in pointing to a lower interest in the theme after *Die natürliche Tochter*, with the enormous exception of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. The latter seems to close the period when the references are rich and varied. Thereafter they are more general, often in the sense merely of ‘excellent’, and are sometimes even ironical, as very seldom before.

In general use the word could be applied to (a) birth; (b) outward appearance; (c) behaviour, usually in the sense of manners; (d) individual actions; or (e) inner qualities or dispositions, always subject to two reservations: first, that the senses very frequently combine, so that it may be doubtful which predominates in an individual case; and secondly, that at a deeper level of implication every occurrence may be affected by the overall structure of the word, and so to some degree by all the available senses.

Sense (a) may occur in explicit contrast to the other *Stände*, but even here complexities may intrude. Wilhelm Meister, for example, thinks authors must address their works both to ‘die Edeln und das Volk’, but he seems to mean ‘the cognoscenti and the wider public’,⁴⁵ and we are left wondering what the role of the actual nobility is here, if any.

Sense (b) (outward appearance) becomes of great importance with the later introduction of aesthetic senses. Earlier, however, the physiognomists claimed to be able to infer sense (a) from sense (b), even if Goethe seems later to have abandoned this as naive. Whether (e) (inner qualities) can be inferred from (b) is even less certain, but the *Physiognomische Fragmente* depend entirely on such inferences. Sense (d) (noble actions) is rare, and may not mean much more than ‘disinterested’.⁴⁶

Sense (c) (manners) is decorum, often female decorum, and tends to stress stillness, self-control, and an absence of emotional excess.⁴⁷ This is important in connecting nobility with theatre. Wilhelm Meister’s delusions naturally come under this heading. His letter to Werner in *WML* depends on deriving nobility entirely from senses (b) and (c) (that is, outward appearance and manners), and almost entirely discounts sense (e).

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.162. Both span-dates are criticised in *GWb*, s.v. ‘edel’, col.1369, n.1.

⁴⁵ *WMTS*, FA 1.9:91.

⁴⁶ Tasso hopes to rouse his contemporaries ‘[z]u edlen Thaten’, that is, to a crusade (2636).

⁴⁷ *Liederwald*, pp.137-40, gives examples.

The significance of senses (c) and (e), taken together, is that they point to Goethe's concept of etiquette and formal manners as habits which modify the disposition. He seems not to have theorised on the matter, and so we may quote Kant,⁴⁸ whose position was similar: 'Denn dadurch, daß Menschen diese Rolle spielen, werden zuletzt die Tugenden, deren Schein sie eine geraume Zeit hindurch nur gekünstelt haben, nach und nach wohl wirklich erweckt und gehen in die Gesinnung über.' Kant is speaking here of minor politenesses, but also of 'Wohlständigkeit', decorum. Habitually to perform symbolic actions is by degrees to become a different person. This links decorum both with nobility and with theatrical performance, and recalls Dorothea:

Alles, was ich gelernt und was ich von jung auf gewohnt bin,
Was von Herzen mir geht – ich will es dem Alten erzeugen.⁴⁹

There is no antithesis here between the heart and childhood ethical training. To learn formal manners is itself to internalise. Goethe is thinking of what will become Otilie's 'Höflichkeit des Herzens', learned manners which are so deeply instilled as to form an unconscious layer of personality.⁵⁰ Like Dorothea, Otilie is no doubt speaking of childhood training, but Kant's point is that the minor social virtues, if habitually acted out as a role, will even in adult social life become internalised as part of the disposition.

The implications of this for theatre are clear: actors act out these virtues and may sometimes acquire them. Spectators (much more doubtfully) rehearse them by imitation as they observe and identify with characters on stage. If part of the superiority of noble manners is an inherent moral value, this can perhaps be disseminated, either directly, by social contact with the nobility, or at second hand, through theatre attendance.

The difficulties of 'edel' have been stressed, but those of 'bürgerlich' are hardly less. Goethe had a firm sense of the existence of an intermediary between the nobility and the *Volk*, for which his normal word was 'Mittelstand' (very occasionally also 'Mittelklasse', 'Mittelclasse'). His context was often cultural, rather than economic, as in his nearest approach to a definition:

Hiezu gehören die Bewohner kleiner Städte, deren Deutschland so viele wohlgelegene, wohlbestellte zählt. Alle Beamte und Unterbeamte daselbst, Handelsleute, Fabrikanten, vorzüglich Frauen und Töchter solcher Familien, auch Landgeistliche, in so fern sie Erzieher sind. Diese Personen sämtlich, die sich zwar

⁴⁸ Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, section i.14, in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Reimer, 1902-), 7.151. On this passage see also Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.321-2.

⁴⁹ *Hermann und Dorothea*, viii.48-9, HA 2:500 (emphasis added).

⁵⁰ *Wahlv.*, HA 6:397.

in beschränkten aber doch wohlhabigen, auch ein sittliches Behagen fordernden Verhältnissen befinden [...] ⁵¹

The objections to 'bourgeois' are well-known. The word inevitably evokes a 'bourgeoisie' which eludes any definition at all, other than a list on the above lines. On the other hand it cannot be objected to on the grounds of ambiguity between socio-economic and vaguely pejorative senses, since both were part of Goethe's practice. ⁵² It is used below, with regrettable frequency, along with alternatives such as 'middle-class', which is open to similar objections (what is referred to is not a class, hardly even a set of classes), and in preference to 'bürgerlich', which is best kept for burgesses, who were not a class for Goethe. It applies to a group (or groups, but with a growing consciousness of group identity) coming into contact, even rivalry with the nobility, a rivalry sometimes in wealth or career advancement, often in cultural attainment, but not normally in political power.

⁵¹ *Über Kunst und Altertum*, 'Deutsche Sprache', FA 1.20:216-17. See in general Werner Conze on 'Mittelstand' in Otto Brunner and others, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 9 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997), iv.49-92, and for Goethe, whose usage above seems to have been fairly typical, *ibid.*, p.60.

⁵² There is also a third case where it simply means 'civil', as in 'civil society'. This is not usually ambiguous, but may occasionally be so. See *GWb*, s.v.

Chapter 1: Goethe before *Werther*

In the nostalgic retrospect of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe was clear that his early years had been spent in a time of social calm, amongst a bourgeoisie which was confident of its own self-worth and without envy or animosity towards the aristocracy. The political tone had been set theoretically by the works of Justus Möser, whom Goethe presents as his mentor in this area, and practically by civic patriotism and a mild enthusiasm for Frederick the Great. The picture might be simplified, but it remains essentially unshaken.

At a deeper level, however, a complex relationship with the nobility was pre-programmed. A great-uncle by marriage, himself noble, but of mercantile origins and married to a bourgeoisie, had written an influential novel on the ‘honest man at court’, and a substantial treatise on the nobility, both from an enlightened viewpoint.¹ Goethe’s family belonged to an urban patriciate which thought of itself as constituting a nobility. His father never tired of denouncing the princes and their courts, and of warning his son against associating with them,² although Caspar Goethe was himself rumoured to have been of noble birth (no doubt quite falsely). As a child Goethe had been horrified at the brave little tailor in a *Märchen* being given the princess’s hand in marriage as a reward for slaying the giant; his mother had had to improvise a different ending to the story.³ For years during the French occupation of Frankfurt, the governor, Comte de Thoranc, was quartered on the household, in a sense displacing his father and certainly influencing Goethe’s future career.⁴ All of these details are vaguely suggestive, but no attempt can be made to evaluate their individual significance.

The pre-Weimar Goethe suffered from a normal difficulty of the young author, the disparity between his literary and his social experience. He had mastered with apparent ease the Anacreontic tradition current in Leipzig, and even managed to imbue it with some

¹ Johann Michael von Loen, *Der redliche Mann am Hofe* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1966, repr. of the original, Frankfurt am Main, 1742); id., *Der Adel* (Ulm: Gaum, 1752). The title of the novel is of course already a paradox. On *Hofkritik*, see Kiesel, ‘*Bei Hof, Bei Höll*’, and for Loen as the archetypal, model *Aufklärer* of the 1740s and 1750s, Hans Reiss, ‘Goethes Großonkel und die Politik. Die politischen Anschauungen Johann Michael von Loens (1694-1776)’, *JDSG*, 30 (1986), 128-60.

² *DuW*, HA 9:76.

³ Friedrich Gundolf, *Goethe* (Berlin: Bondi, 1918), p.34. This is from Bettina Brentano, but seems authentic. Princesses would still be rejecting socially inferior suitors in *Iphigenie* and *Tasso*, and Eugenie’s acceptance would be heavily qualified. The prolonged engagement of Wilhelm and Natalie is also relevant here. Noblewomen do not, on the whole, ‘marry down’ in Goethe.

⁴ He arrived when Goethe was nine. See Eissler, *Goethe*, ii.1099-1105, and Bernhard Lang, *Joseph in Egypt: A Cultural Icon from Grotius to Goethe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, c.2009), pp.84-111.

personal elements. The usual account of his poetic development thereafter is that he outgrew it and developed his own style, partly by the eroticisation of nature, and partly by suffusing the Anacreontic lyric with more realistic (or conventional) bourgeois attitudes, leading, with the growth of experience, to the *Erlebnislyrik*. This account tends to hurry over the Anacreontik, but at any rate identifies it as a point of departure.⁵

The Anacreontik of c.1740-c.1770 is in class terms ambiguous. On the one hand its readership was largely bourgeois (the nobility were not yet reading German literature). On the other hand the tone was aristocratic, or at least aggressively anti-bourgeois. The poet has a privileged identity. Like the grasshopper of La Fontaine, he sings and assumes a licence to abstain from economically productive work.⁶ Fathers and other authority figures had to be assured that the poems were not expressions of personal feeling, let alone experience, but merely technical exercises on classical models.⁷ The older scholarship tended to take these disclaimers at face value,⁸ but an element of bad faith is obvious, and there is no doubt that the Anacreontik was part of a liberation movement of the bourgeoisie, by the formation of a fantasy utopia on aristocratic lines. In some cases this was a conscious challenge to Pietist renunciation of the world, and also to Wolffian rationalism.⁹ At least some Enlightenment figures, including Nicolai,¹⁰ were supportive, and thought that the Anacreontik made a positive contribution to the tone of middle-class social life, of whose stiffness and artificiality Goethe was not alone in complaining.

If the rococo lyric was a holiday from reality, with the limitations that implies,¹¹ the holiday destination is still significant. It both expresses and reinforces a tendency to polarise assumed aristocratic values as the contrary to a bourgeois version of the Christian

⁵ On the Anacreontik in general, reference has been made to Trunz in HA 1:441-5; Heinz Schlaffer, *Musa iocosa: Gattungspoetik und Gattungsgeschichte der erotischen Dichtung in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971), especially pp.156-60; Hans-Georg Kemper, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit*, 6 vols. in 10 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987-2006), 5.2.173-205, and for Goethe's development from it, 6.2.310-26; Reiner Marx, 'Anacreontik als lyrische Initiation. Zu Lessings *Kleinigkeiten* und Goethes *Annette*', in Matthias Luserke and others, eds., *Literatur und Kultur des Rokoko* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), pp.135-47; and Christoph Perels, *Studien zur Aufnahme und Kritik der Rokokolyrik zwischen 1740 und 1760* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), pp.123-55.

⁶ Marx, 'Anacreontik als lyrische Initiation', p.139, points to the recurring theme of idleness ('Faulheit') in Lessing's *Kleinigkeiten*.

⁷ Rainer Nägele, 'The Weaving of the Veil: Goethe and the Symbolic Order', in his *Reading after Freud: essays on Goethe, Hölderlin, Habermas, Nietzsche, Brecht, Celan, and Freud* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp.23-45, here at p.27. For Lessing, see the letter to his father quoted, *ibid.*, p.205, n.4. Trunz quotes Gleim to similar effect, HA 1:443.

⁸ E.g., Trunz, *ibid.*

⁹ Kemper, *Deutsche Lyrik*, 5.2.187.

¹⁰ Perels, pp.154-5.

¹¹ 'Was hilft es, eine Sittenlehre so reizend zu mahlen, die wir doch nie annehmen dürfen?', Geßner, quoted by Perels, p.135.

virtues, but with form and content borrowed from France and from authors who had actually belonged to the baroque nobility. Projection of these attitudes on to another class helped to evade the Freudian censor, at least for a time. Once the court aristocracy had been firmly identified as the ‘other’, however, the compromise broke down and the tradition of the erotic epigram virtually expired (c.1770). Goethe’s role in this development was affected by what he may have felt to be an unusually wide gap between the conventional self-projection of the first-person Anacreontic poet and his own temperament and private life. He certainly saw himself as unrefined in manners by Leipzig standards, a conflict reflected in ‘Ziblis’, where the horned wood-god is so easily overcome by the smooth Emiren.¹² The conflict also contributes to the unstable balance between middle-class *Frauendienst* and aristocratic gallantry in other early poems.

Norbert Elias saw the rise of the bourgeoisie in Germany as passing from an initial phase of imitation of the *Adel* and attempted assimilation, to one of self-definition by conscious rejection and opposition.¹³ This contrast is precisely reflected in that between Goethe’s Anacreontic and two socially critical early poems. The first, from April or May 1767, is on the death of the brother of his friend Behrisch.¹⁴ The brother had been in the service of the landgrave of Hessen-Philippsthal, who had supposedly wronged him by forbidding his marriage to a fiancée, who mourns at the graveside. The antithesis prince/subject is reinforced by a contrast between force and absence of affect (‘riß’, ‘[t]yrannisch’, ‘zwingen’, ‘[u]nwillig fühlend’, etc.), and on the other hand the usual sentimental values (‘Seelen’, ‘empfinden’, ‘zärtlich’, etc.). The antithesis is also between an outer and an inner world. Aristocracy is personified by a fantasy authority figure who can command outward obedience and must be permitted to do so, but who must not try to compel his subjects’ souls:

O Fürst, du kannst die Menschen zwingen,
 Für dich allein ihr Leben zu zubringen,
 Das wird man deinem Stolz’ verzeihn;
 Doch willst du ihre Seelen binden,
 Durch dich zu denken, zu empfinden,
 Das muß zu Gott um Rache schrein. (ll.33-38)

The real world is surrendered without challenge to the princes, apart from a passing gesture towards radical protest (the dead brother’s last words are spoken ‘Als Bürger der bedrängten Erde’, l.45). The victim forgives the proud tyrant, and even gains a moral

¹² HA 1:14-16.

¹³ See in general Paul Mog, *Ratio und Gefühlskultur. Studien zu Psychogenese und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976), chapter on ‘Höfische Rationalität und bürgerliche Kontrafaktur’, pp.36-46.

¹⁴ ‘Elegie auf den Tod des Bruders meines Freundes’, FA 1.1:63-5.

victory over him as he hurries guiltily past his grave (ll.51-4). The emphasis, however, is on asserting the integrity of the inner world, which must be preserved free from encroachment. This is *Empfindsamkeit* as the ideology of a bourgeoisie in withdrawal from the public sphere.

The other text followed later in the same year. ‘Der wahre Genuß’ took its origin from the court at Dessau, where Behrisch had obtained a new appointment as tutor to the illegitimate son of the reigning prince. The prince had recently married a Prussian princess, rather than Eleonore Hoffmeier, the child’s mother. This suggested to Goethe another aspect of the ideology of *Empfindsamkeit*, the contrast between the bourgeois marriage as affective contract, and the sensuality and irresponsibility of the nobility, prompting him to a remarkable set-piece effusion in a letter to Behrisch.¹⁵

The tone is one of exaggerated sophistication. On the one hand there is a stress on the harshness of the prince, inferred entirely from his status – Goethe foresees problems for Behrisch from the child’s ancestry and the inherited hardness of his disposition. Like Rousseau he congratulates himself on not being a prince, and then proceeds to a dramatic monologue, attributed to the prince a few years previously, in which the pathos of constraint and determination to advance his own interests are dramatized (‘möchte ich doch mein eigener Herr seyn, um jener schrecklichen Verbindung entsagen zu können die durch Interesse und nicht durch Liebe geknüpft ward [...] Ich will sie heurathen, ich muß, aber mein Herz soll sie nicht haben [...]’). After pluming himself on his maturity in grasping these complexities,¹⁶ Goethe contrasts the miseries of grandeur with his own happy relationship with ‘meiner Eva’ (Käthchen Schönkopf). Only the entire distortion of his own situation as well as that of the prince made this possible, and enabled Goethe to maintain an already traditional antithesis between the affective emptiness of aristocracy and bourgeois warmth and emotional fulfilment.¹⁷ The link with the ‘Elegie’ is a similar antithesis, between public and private (that is, between nobility and bourgeoisie).

A month later on 4 December he wrote again to Behrisch enclosing his latest poem. ‘Der wahre Genuß’ is a sustained rhetorical success, indirectly linked to the above letter, but further removed from even the purported original situation. The ‘Fürst’, solemnly

¹⁵ Letter to Behrisch, 2-3.11.1767, HaBr, i.54-7, at p.56.

¹⁶ ‘So redete der Fürst noch vor wenigen Jahren, in den Armen seiner Geliebten, hat er nicht so geredet; so nenne mich einen elenden nichts verstehenden Schulknaben’, *ibid.*

¹⁷ For the very different historical reality, see Gustav Seibt, ‘Der Fürst im Gartenreich: Leopold III. Friedrich Franz von Anhalt-Dessau (1740 bis 1817)’, *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung* (2007), 23-32; and a letter to Kestner of [Aug. 1773], HaBr, i.150.

addressed as 'Jüngling', is now adjured to cease from filling maidens' laps with gold and hoping to find emotional fulfilment or even physical pleasure from such venal loves. He should rather imitate the poet himself:

Empfinde Jüngling, und dann wähle
Ein Mädgen dir, sie wähle dich,
Von Körper schön, und schön von Seele,
Und dann bist du beglückt, wie ich! (ll.33-36)

As in the letter, there follows a self-congratulatory and self-deceived version of his relationship with Käthchen Schönkopf, no less rapturous, we are firmly told, for being unconsummated.

The paucity of relevant material among the juvenilia bears out Goethe's claim in *DuW* to have passed his early years in a milieu not characterised by a consciousness of class animosities. Class animosities or at least tensions are self-evidently dramatic, however, and it is hardly surprising that one of his earliest surviving plays, *Die Mitschuldigen*, should address the subject, nor that the text should show a greater dependence on reading than on life experience. Another, *Die Laune des Verliebten*, has more doubtfully also been thought to have a social background.

In the latter case, the superficial impression is of pastoral as evasion of social reality. The formula is of one happy and balanced couple, and one whose happiness is spoiled by pride or jealousy, thus establishing its ethical purpose as a school of manners, like a modern teenage soap opera. Wolfgang Preisendanz has seen the resolution of the dilemma as a mediation between bourgeois, Protestant 'Lustfeindlichkeit' and aristocratic libertinage, the mediator being the 'Vernunft der Zärtlichkeit'.¹⁸ Obvious questions arise at this point. Are the characters in fact socially differentiated, as this seems to require? This is not clear, although Eridon's inability to dance suggests a more general difficulty in adapting to a charmed milieu and its rococo code of manners. He is perhaps an incomer suffering from feelings of inferiority due to social class, or at least to unpolished manners, as it might be like a young Frankfurter in Leipzig. There are more reasons for feeling oneself to be an outsider than a sense of social inferiority, however, and it seems safer to treat this as a possible added implication rather than a core meaning.

¹⁸ Wolfgang Preisendanz, 'Das Schäferspiel *Die Laune des Verliebten* und das Lustspiel *Die Mitschuldigen*', in Walter Hinderer, ed., *Goethes Dramen: Neue Interpretationen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980), pp.11-22, here at p.15.

One defence of Preisendanz's point of view might be to develop a link between the irresponsibility of the pastoral world and aristocracy. The premise behind this tradition is an imagined society which will economically support individual shepherds and shepherdesses, but not marriage. The characters are trapped in a kind of timeless adolescence (hence the soap opera atmosphere referred to above), diverted by ambiguous courtships and dalliance which cannot issue in marriage and procreation. These are games requiring formal rules, defined as formality of manners, breach of which must receive a (rather mild) punishment. The implied flight from bourgeois marriage and responsibility contributes to what might be considered a courtly or aristocratic atmosphere.

With the other survival, social reference is much more overt. To some commentators the puzzle about *Die Mitschuldigen* is what led Goethe to the theme of direct confrontation between aristocracy and bourgeoisie, a subject not obviously of personal interest at the time. The question is misplaced, however. Goethe's own most significant comment, in the *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, admittedly points towards his adolescent experiences in Leipzig, but also to his 'fleißiges Studium der Molièrischen Welt' during the same period.¹⁹

The link with Molière is self-evident, not only in the subject, the explicit confrontation of bourgeoisie and aristocracy, but in the versification and the point of view, which distinctly favours the aristocracy. Indeed Goethe's difficulties began with the attempted importation of Molière's debate between 'la ville' and 'la cour', especially since the former had no real German counterpart, or at least none with which Goethe was familiar. If Molière's characters were to be replaced by much humbler, more realistic German figures, there would be problems in preserving even his show of impartiality. A dramatic debate is impossible where one side is flatly and dully in the wrong, and unable even to maintain its position by argument. A determination to develop the theme, however, might be referred, not merely to Goethe's reading, but to recent literary developments within Germany, themselves reflecting social change.

In 1751 Gottsched's classification of dramatic forms had included, among others genres, tragedy, comedy ('Lustspiel') and pastoral. Tragedy depicted the lives of kings and

¹⁹ *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, 1764-1769, HA 10:429. For detailed parallels, especially between *Die Mitschuldigen*, Sganarelle and George Dandin, see Carl Hammer, jr., 'Intimations of Molière in Goethe's Leipzig Comedies', in Roger Johnson, jr., and others, eds., *Molière and the Commonwealth of Letters: Patrimony and Posterity* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1975), pp.276-86.

princes, and pastoral, country life ('Landleute').²⁰ Comedy was the province of the 'Mittelstand der Welt', by whom he means not only 'Bürger', but also 'zur Noth Baronen, Marquis und Grafen'. All of these are distinguished from 'die Großen dieser Welt', who certainly also commit absurdities but are not to be ridiculed, because of the respect due to them.²¹ This was an upward extension of the permitted limits from an earlier edition, and the implied change reflects a growth in bourgeois self-confidence or at least self-awareness. Practice had preceded Gottsched's theory, but his influence as 'legislator' in turn affected practice. *Die Mitschuldigen* should be referred to this background.

Goethe's attempt at neutrality between the characters was an atavism rather than an innovation, a return, not merely to Molière, but through him to the commedia dell'arte.²² It is of course the case that Alcest, the role Goethe was later to play himself, is more favourably treated than his fellow 'partners in guilt', but Goethe tried hard to hold an approximate balance between bourgeoisie and aristocracy, as his structure requires. The play's later failure with audiences was due to an uncertainty as to where sympathy was to be placed (the very attempt at neutrality has given it a lasting reputation for cynicism); artistically the failure was in not carrying neutrality far enough.

The typical bourgeois qualities are distributed between Söller and his father-in-law, the innkeeper. To the former are assigned greed for money and physical cowardice, to the latter a curiosity about current affairs, presented as absurd,²³ and a desire for financial success mingled with naive social snobbery (he will have his inn painted and be able to call it a hotel: 'Da regnet's Kavaliers, da kommt das Geld mit Haufen').²⁴ Already we have the emerging gap between reading and life experience, since the innkeeper impresses us as having been drawn at least in part from life, whereas the entirely unreal Söller is based largely on Harlequin and on Molière's Sganarelle.²⁵

²⁰ Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst* [1751] (repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), p.772.

²¹ Walter Hinck, *Das deutsche Lustspiel des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts und die italienische Komödie: Commedia dell'Arte und Théâtre Italien* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1965), pp.172-3, and see p.422, n.25. See also his art., 'Das deutsche Lustspiel im 18. Jahrhundert' in Hans Steffen, ed., *Das deutsche Lustspiel*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), i.7-26, at pp.11-12.

²² Hinck, *Das deutsche Lustspiel*, pp.359-61.

²³ Cf. *DjG*, ii.265. The theme is a recurring one in Goethe.

²⁴ Version 2, line 39. The three versions of the play, of 1768, 1769 and 1783 are cited from FA 1.4:41-74, HA 4:28-72 and FA 1.5:319-68, respectively.

²⁵ Literary influences are discussed exhaustively in Alfred Döll, *Goethes Mitschuldigen: Mit Anhang: Abdruck der ältesten Handschrift* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1909) (Bausteine zur Geschichte der neueren deutschen Literatur, 3), pp.64-134.

The nobleman, Alcest, suffers from the same limitation. The influence of Richardson is obvious: not only *Pamela* (1740) (a bourgeois heroine attempting to win an aristocratic *Freigeist* over to the cause of virtue), but also *Clarissa* (1748-9). Like Lovelace, Alcest attributes his immoralism to a first unhappy love affair, which has led him to seek revenge on all women.²⁶ Apart from *Freigeisterei* (in the usual forms of cynicism and sexual irresponsibility), the typifying aristocratic qualities include arrogance and a propensity to physical violence (he draws his sword and threatens the unarmed Söller). The last of these links him to another aristocratic figure who does not appear on stage, the gambler Herr von Tirinette.²⁷ Alcest is the creation of an author with inadequate access to his professed subject, but Goethe felt the need to develop the character both in the interests of the balance on which the structure depended, and also as a personal theme.

To attribute to the central characters these stock attributes is to omit one of the most radical aspects of the play. The usual view of it as an ambitious failure depends on perceived tensions between the *commedia dell'arte* (directly or via Molière) and the realistic Saxon comedy of Lessing. But in fact the play is an early example of the carnivalesque or saturnalian Goethe, with a mixture of farcical stereotypes. Söller boards free at an inn, drinks, does no work, attends masked balls, gambles with money he does not have, and is in general a social parasite. All this makes him seem remarkably like an aristocrat, either in social satire or as a parody of the bourgeois cliché. He even thinks he can sell his wife to Alcest, and so does not have the proper middle-class attitude towards marriage.

Alcest, on the other hand, also lives in an inn and does no work, but is financially responsible (that is, he lives well within his means and presumably pays his bills to the 'Wirt') and is even romantically in love. It would be too much to say that he is a parody bourgeois, but he is certainly the first example of that recurring figure in early Goethe, the half-hearted seducer. As Liebetraut would say of him, he is weak and has a powerful conscience, and is given a substantial soliloquy in which to daydream wistfully about being a debauchee. Whereas for Clavigo or Faust (or even Werther), this would be socially aspirational, for a nobleman it is a sign of *Verbürgerlichung*. The real aristocrat has a conscience partly replaced by a code, which does not apply in its full extent beyond his

²⁶ Döll, pp.102-3, and for Richardson in Germany, Erich Schmidt, *Richardson, Rousseau und Goethe: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Romans im 18. Jahrhundert* (Jena: Fromann, 1875).

²⁷ He does not appear in version 1; in version 2 he is demanding payment from Söller and will beat him up if he does not get it; in version 3 Söller adds that he is a cardsharp, and that his violence will include a (duellist's) sword and pistol ('Er haut und schießt sich gleich!', 32-5). The effect of these progressive strengthenings is to increase the realistic motivation of Söller, and to make him to some extent a victim of the nobility (we are probably not to take Tirinette's noble status entirely seriously, but gambling and violence are noble stereotypes).

own social class. Alcest would not seduce, still less attempt to purchase, a young noblewoman, even if her need for money were as pressing as Sophie's. In his relationship with Sophie, however, he is confused and caught between a bourgeois conscience and a noble *Ehrenkodex*, just as Söller is caught between a partly aristocratic lifestyle and his inborn bourgeois attitudes.

The only book-length study of the play is not only very old, but has an untenable central thesis: in Döll's view the theme is the successful conversion of an aristocratic *Freigeist* to an ethical idealism,²⁸ of which we see little sign, other than a propensity to lecture the other characters in a rather unearned tone of moral elevation. The accusation that the loves of the aristocracy are venal and superficial is familiar from 'Der wahre Genuß'. In *Die Mitschuldigen* this theme is more resourcefully used, not as anti-aristocratic satire, but to link the two classes. Söller is under the sign of Mercury, the god of merchants, but also of thieves and newspapers (version 2, 374), and he confuses marital relations with money in a way which almost anticipates the critique of Marx. Alcest is very rich, apparently as a matter of course, and in a substantial soliloquy as repentant *Freigeist*, does indeed virtuously resolve to refrain from using his money to put pressure on Sophie. Once he is told she is a thief, however, his immediate reaction is to reproach himself for his own past weakness and to drop any moral qualms about seduction.

Alcest, du schickst dich nicht zur Bosheit, zum Betrug;
Dein Herz ist übrig böß, allein nicht stark genug.²⁹ (817-8)

He will not prosecute the theft, but will treat the money as a price paid down in advance. In the ensuing scene with Sophie his manner is changed and considerably more forward (he addresses her as 'du'). She is offended and replies with 'Sie', and he responds with aggressive sarcasm. Sophie has no call to strike moral attitudes and is now in no position to resist his advances. Alcest, emboldened out of his bourgeois sexual and moral timidity, proceeds to a crude financial transaction, in other words reverts, or attempts to revert, to the aristocratic stereotype of 'Der wahre Genuß'.

The next scene is a debate between Alcest and Söller, and here a show of moral balance is required. Alcest can draw his sword on Söller and be rewarded with a spectacular display of cowardice, but this does little more than reinforce a cliché about relationships between

²⁸ Döll, p.13. Helmut Bachmeier, in the 'Nachwort' to the Reclam edn. (1987), thinks the play 'shows the conversion of a libertine to a proponent of selfless friendship', p.65, which is once more to take Alcest at his own valuation. In fact he merely promises never again to doubt Sophie's virtue, hardly a conversion to bourgeois respectability (version 3, 968-9).

²⁹ A further parallel with Söller, who says of himself, 'Doch ist's ein schlechtes Ding um halbe Bösewichter', version 2, 331.

the *Stände*. Söller confesses to the theft, but remains stubbornly defiant: ‘Ich stahl dem Herrn sein Geld, und er mir meine Frau’ (970). He even thinks seduction is still a criminal offence. The more modern and better informed Alcest corrects him with a sneer (976), but this hardly puts him on the moral high ground.³⁰ As the quarrel proceeds, some of Söller’s replies are not only sharp in themselves, but have the dignity of real feeling, and might be called socially challenging, in the sense that *Figaro* is.³¹ In the final scene, which follows, Alcest still thinks the moral gap between an unsuccessful seducer and a successful thief is wider than many of his audience would allow.³²

Goethe’s success at least in his original conception of comparative even-handedness is confirmed by the play’s acceptance across a broad social divide, at least for a time, on the familiar Swiftian principle that satire is a glass in which the beholders see everyone’s face but their own. The play was a repertory staple at Weimar between 1805 and 1816, and a particular favourite of Carl August.³³ On the other hand Zelter saw a performance in Berlin in 1824, and reported that the audience in the front row, like himself, was embarrassed by a play where ‘all the good and better class of people are guilty’. Those in the cheap seats had applauded enthusiastically.³⁴ Martini comments that as a result of the social unrest of the *Restaurationszeit*, the piece had acquired a new, socially critical accent. It would be truer to say that it had always had that accent, but that changing social circumstances had increased the sensitivity of the upper bourgeoisie, now identifying with the aristocracy, to a point where even as much equilibrium as Goethe had attempted was no longer acceptable. At any rate he made it clear in his reply to Zelter (of 3.12.1824) that he now entirely agreed with the feelings of the better class of spectators.³⁵

The problem of direct, even of allegorical social comment in drama was for Goethe a lasting one, although for reasons which differed at different stages of his career. In his own frequently quoted words, in a different letter to Zelter, he was not born to be a tragic

³⁰ Goethe later referred to the ‘hart ausgesprochenen widergesetzlichen Handlungen’ in the play as a cause of offence to the public, *DuW*, HA 9:286. Apart from theft, the plural can only refer to the attempted seduction.

³¹ Söller is of course no Figaro, but his situation anticipates the last act of *Le mariage de Figaro* (1784), where Figaro retains some of his dignity despite being comically mistaken as to Susanne’s infidelity. Goethe mentions *Figaro* immediately after *Die Mitschuldigen* in *DuW*, HA 9:286-7, perhaps by an association of ideas.

³² Cf. his rather awkward statement that ‘All wart ihr im Verdacht, und ihr habt Alle Schuld’, version 1, 614, where we might have expected the first person plural. The line was dropped from the later versions.

³³ W. Kayser, ‘Nachwort’, HA 4:474.

³⁴ Quoted in part in Fritz Martini, ‘Goethe’s *Die Mitschuldigen* oder die Problematisierung des Lustspiels’, in Hans Steffen, ed., *Das deutsche Lustspiel*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), pp.68-93, at p.89.

³⁵ WA 4.39:27.

poet, since his nature was ‘konziliant’, and tragedy was inherently implacable (irreconcilable, ‘unversöhnlich’).³⁶ But to be ‘konziliant’ is problematic also for comedy, which often ends in reconciliation but can do so only after a contest and a clear repudiation of one of two rival societies in favour of the other.³⁷ In practice the comic dramatist usually portrays social tensions by satire, which also presented difficulties for the young Goethe, due not only to temperament, but also to the limitations of his experience. Criticism of courts as places of intrigue and social falseness was a cliché and not necessarily even anti-aristocratic, as in the very early fragment known as <Die königliche Einsiedlerin>,³⁸ but literary models for satire directed against the nobility were still scarce. When social tensions or even marked social contradictions appear in his early drama, they tend to be carefully removed from local or contemporary reference (*Götz*, *Clavigo*, *Claudine von Villa Bella*).

In this period Goethe maintained, in his few comments about politics, what might be called a ‘Frankfurt tone’, one of mild, but entirely objective curiosity, coupled with an equally mild irony. In early 1770, for example, we find him reading the letters of a Swedish statesman, Count Tessin. Tessin’s wisdom, he notes, is the result of practical life, not of speculation. Goethe continues: ‘Ich binn zuweit von der Mayestät, um zu beurtheilen in wiefern die Schmeicheleyen die er dem Prinzen auf ieder Seite sagt, entschuldigt werden können.’³⁹ This is of some biographical interest, since Tessin’s letters are from an elder statesman, of partly bourgeois origins, to a young crown prince, and are thus an anticipation of Goethe’s own future role. More importantly they exemplify an interest in practical statesmanship combined with an almost complete lack of interest in political speculation. In the same place he comments: ‘Ich binn nie an Hof gewesen, mich interessirte der Herr und Diener von Mosern also nicht.’ But F. K. von Moser’s *Der Herr und der Diener* had sold 10,000 copies on publication in Frankfurt in 1759, and was ‘undoubtedly the most widely known political treatise in Germany at that time’.⁴⁰ In fact Goethe’s interest in politics at this stage was largely confined to what might be of use in his future career and to what was relevant to his own, necessarily limited experience.

³⁶ HaBr, iv.458.

³⁷ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp.163-86.

³⁸ FA 1.4:13. Dating is conjectural; Borchmeyer’s conjecture is 1765 x 1767. See his commentary, *ibid.*, pp.663-9. The opposite of the court is above all nature, viewed as freedom and hermit-like isolation.

³⁹ *DjG*, i.436.

⁴⁰ F. M. Barnard, *Herder’s Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p.22, n.71.

The main work of the early *Geniezeit* is the *Urgötz* (*Gottfried von Berlichingen*), dating from November-December 1771. Modern criticism has stressed Götz himself as a problematic figure, rather than a simply heroic one,⁴¹ but the portrayal of his opponents is unambiguous. The court at Bamberg is a reversal of the natural order, dominated by women and their allies, the clergy.⁴² This is linked with the reception of Roman law, which depends on disputation, a kind of sublimated, effeminate conflict, as opposed to heroic violence.⁴³ Weislingen is the typical product of this historical process of ‘Verhofung’, whereby the court is used to dominate and tame a landed aristocracy,⁴⁴ who will be forced to neglect their estates and farm them out to leaseholders, to their own disadvantage.⁴⁵ It is a place of captivity, associated with darkness and dungeons.

If the court is ruled by feminised values, it shows little compensating sophistication in manners or culture.⁴⁶ Goethe seems, in the *Urgötz*, to have wished to set up the opposition between *Landadel* and *Hofadel* as one between nature and culture, but then in redrafting to have decided not even to allow the court any claim to culture. Gottfried in the *Urgötz* pursues the antithesis as if it were established. He claims to remember princes who did not need to make knights into court toadies. When, he asks, will princes take pleasure in their own lands and not in ‘steife gezwungne einsiedlerische Gärten’? When will the sight of happy peasant faces and fertile lands give them more pleasure than stage plays and picture galleries?⁴⁷ Goethe later pruned much of this, and indeed its relevance, other than in his own mind, is not obvious. We are left with the vices of the court without any compensating virtues, since ‘einsiedlerisch’ has not even the positive qualities of unsociability, but rather has overtones of introspection, morbidity, even neurosis.⁴⁸

Adelheid is of course also noble by birth, and is clearly a projection of bourgeois anxieties at the ‘erotische Zügellosigkeit des Adels’, like Lessing’s Countess Orsina.⁴⁹ As a multiple adulteress she is as much a threat to the patriarchal order as the rebellious

⁴¹ Edward McInnes dates this critical development from the 1960s, ‘*Ein ungeheures Theater*’: *The Drama of the Sturm und Drang* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1987), p.35, and id., ‘Moral, Politik und Geschichte in Goethes *Götz von Berlichingen*’, *ZDP*, 103 (1984), 2-20.

⁴² Weislingen will be taken captive by ‘[d]er Händedruck eines Fürsten, und das Lächeln einer schönen Frau’, which ‘halten fester als Ketten und Riegel’, *Urgötz*, FA 1.4:162.

⁴³ Chess is another example of symbolic, instead of real warfare, hence Liebetraut’s surprisingly Nietzschean objection to it: it was invented by someone ‘der schwach wäre und ein stark Gewissen hätte, wie das denn meistens beisammen ist’, *ibid.*, p.160.

⁴⁴ Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, pp.91-4.

⁴⁵ HA 4:100.

⁴⁶ Bishop and abbot, for example, are both grossly, even implausibly ignorant, *ibid.*, p.94.

⁴⁷ *Urgötz*, FA 1.4:202.

⁴⁸ *GWb*, s.v.

⁴⁹ Andreas Huyssen, *Drama des Sturm und Drang: Kommentar zu einer Epoche* (Munich: Winkler, 1980), p.153.

peasants, and like them must be suppressed in blood.⁵⁰ Inevitably the reaction to this figure, later a popular stereotype, was ambivalent, an ambivalence which Goethe shared.⁵¹ Superficially, she is a counterpart to the numerous seductive males in early Goethe, but the distinction between the two is sharp. Her male equivalents, from the prince of Anhalt-Dessau onwards, are either satirised (Satyros, Crugantino, Herkules) or are constricted, repentant figures. As Liebetraut says, they are weak and have powerful consciences, and are above all degenerate. The theme of degeneracy is entirely explicit. The play points backwards, to the high middle ages, the time of self-help and the 'Faustrecht', and the *Urgötz* points forward to Goethe's still more degenerate contemporaries.⁵² At a deeper level, however, Adelheid is much more closely associated with Götz. The link between *Kraftkerl* and *Machtweib* is in their socially marginal status, made explicit in the *Urgötz* by the strong association of both, but especially Adelheid, with gypsies.⁵³

What to some extent isolates *Götz* within Goethe's work is precisely its thesis on courts and the *Hofadel*, which confers on it the character of a *Tendenzstück*. The theme, taken from Möser and thereafter consciously worked out ('alles nur gedacht', as Herder said),⁵⁴ is the degenerate and functionless character of an aristocracy uprooted from nature and from organic contact with the soil. Götz magnificently presents himself on the historical stage, and even dictates an autobiography to establish how we are to interpret his performance, but the practical relevance for Goethe's contemporaries is not obvious. Superficially, nothing in the play serves as useful social comment, even if we agree to pretend, with its closing lines, to regard the period with nostalgia. The natural assumption would be that the endangered species of the 1520s must now, 250 years later, be entirely extinct. But in fact the rhetorical effect of the ending contains a subdued appeal to the aristocracy, which in Germany was unusually closed, and stressed blood lines to a degree

⁵⁰ In both versions the verdict of the 'Feme' is that she deserves death on two separate capital charges, adultery and murder.

⁵¹ *DuW*, HA 9:571. Cf. Ilse A. Graham, 'Vom Urgötz zum Götz: Neufassung oder Neuschöpfung? Ein Versuch morphologischer Kritik', *JDSG*, 9 (1965), 245-82, at p.251.

⁵² Möser, in 'Der hohe Stil der Kunst unter den Deutschen', one of Goethe's main theoretical sources, is explicitly dealing with the 12th and 13th centuries, Werner Kohlschmidt and others, eds., *Justus Möser's sämtliche Werke: historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Oldenburg: Stalling, 1943-c.1990), iv.263-8. He refers with approval to Rousseau on our degeneracy from our ancestors, *ibid.*, p.265. In a cancelled scene in the *Urgötz*, Elisabeth tells Marie that Carl would make a ridiculous figure as a knight. Marie protests: an excellent, noble figure. Elisabeth: perhaps, in a few hundred years, 'wenn das Menschengeschlecht recht tief herunter gekommen sein wird', FA 1.4:171. Their theatrical vocabulary ('Figur', 'spielen', 'Rolle') is significant.

⁵³ Claudia Breger, *Ortlosigkeit des Fremden: "Zigeunerinnen" und "Zigeuner" in der deutschsprachigen Literatur um 1800* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), pp.79-83, 87. Mignon is another aristocrat on the fringes of society, and with strong 'Zigeunerin' characteristics, *ibid.*, p.132, n.17.

⁵⁴ Letter to Herder, July 1772, HaBr, i.133, and the commentary on it by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, 'Goethe to Herder, July 1772: Some problems of pedagogic presentation', *GLL*, 15 (1961-2), 110-22, esp. p.117.

enormously greater than the more open aristocracies of France or England. Hence the comment by Goethe on the reputation the play had gained him of being a friend to the aristocracy, and his slightly quizzical tone in making it.⁵⁵

It has been claimed that the treatment of class relations changed in the interim between the *Urgötz* and *Götz* itself.⁵⁶ In fact the difference in this respect between the two texts can easily be exaggerated. Both show at least some sympathy for the peasant leaders,⁵⁷ an early instance of Goethe's instinctive feeling that social disturbances were the fault of governments. As it happens, the young Goethe's brief foray into journalism falls within the gap between the two texts, but his reviews for the *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen* hardly show any change or development in his social or political attitudes.

As sources the reviews for the *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen* are problematic, because of their collaborative status and difficulties in attribution.⁵⁸ The fact that these are unresolvable, however, is a reminder of the absence of any individual position by Goethe within the group. As far as political or social questions are concerned, the stance of the review was characterised by what Bräuning-Oktavio, with some understatement, called 'politische Lauheit',⁵⁹ and is in fact an almost complete uninterest.⁶⁰ Only two reviews attributed to Goethe are of more than passing interest for the present subject.

In the review of *Die Vorzüge des alten Adels*, we have the admirer of Justus Möser, sharply reproving those who lazily repeat satirical clichés about the aristocracy.⁶¹ When will poets and philosophers grasp that the nobility is the only thing which protects us from despotism? We might wish they had a more enlightened education, and should then be more willing to accept the differences in rank which are so necessary under our

⁵⁵ *DuW*, HA 10:116-17.

⁵⁶ Roughly, Jan. 1772 – Feb. 1773. In another version, the accusation is of hypocrisy: that Goethe was a closet radical, who was prudent or cowardly enough to censor his own work before publication. See W. Daniel Wilson, 'Young Goethe's Political Fantasies', in David Hill, ed., *Literature of the Sturm und Drang* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003) (The Camden House History of German Literature, 6), pp.187-215.

⁵⁷ Steven D. Martinson, *Between Luther and Münzer: The Peasant Revolt in German Drama and Thought* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1988), pp.38-49. The tone does, of course, become much harsher in later versions.

⁵⁸ Hermann Bräuning-Oktavio, *Herausgeber und Mitarbeiter der Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen 1772* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1966). For Goethe's contributions, see esp. pp.224-47; and Michael Sturm, *Goethes Weg nach Weimar: Zur Kontinuität und Diskontinuität des Sturm und Drang in den Jahren 1770-1790* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2007), pp.75-80.

⁵⁹ On its politics, Bräuning-Oktavio, pp.466-79, here at p.476.

⁶⁰ After 1772 it became gradually more political, even radical, William F. Roertgen, *The Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen, 1772-1790: An Analysis and Evaluation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1964), pp.374-84.

⁶¹ *DjG*, iii.91.

constitution. But pride in ancestry is no more ridiculous than the pride of the learned, or of merchants, or any other exaggerated prejudice in favour of the advantages of fortune. The moral is that we should be content with the station in life in which we find ourselves, and will then be able to look with indifference on those above and below us.

All this is more or less routine, and could have been written by almost anyone, certainly anyone who had read Montesquieu.⁶² Goethe knew Montesquieu as early as 1770,⁶³ and his main positions (hostility to courts, a desire to provide aristocracy with a rationale and aristocracy as defence against despotism) would have been congenial to him. The last of these, defence against despotism, was also strongly urged by Möser, and was widely current, despite having rather little support from history, or at least recent history.⁶⁴

The other review, that of the *Charakteristik der vornehmsten europäischen Nationen*,⁶⁵ is more significant for Sturm und Drang values, and is also more securely attributed to Goethe, perhaps in collaboration.⁶⁶ Certainly it has much closer links with *Götz*, with its complaint that Germany has become polished or polite ('polirt'), and has lost all national individuality, at least at the upper levels of society, since nothing is more unnatural ('schiefer') than fine ladies and gentlemen. Its imagery links closely with *Götz* and helps to illustrate how far that play is isolated from the later work, with *Werther* as the important dividing line.

This second review has naturally fascinated Marxist critics, one of whom, Edith Braemer, quotes Lenin on the coexistence in modern nations of a popular culture and a ruling bourgeois culture. She even reads it as a call to Germany to abandon 'polish' and become once more 'characteristic'.⁶⁷ This is very much not Goethe's point. That the upper classes in the eighteenth century were everywhere in Europe becoming more alike (that is, more French) was a contemporary cliché. Goethe is merely insisting that if his author, an English traveller, had seriously wished to research 'Germanness', he would have needed to

⁶² Bräuning-Oktavio attributes it to Goethe with a query, p.697 (his no.330), but notes previous attributions including Herder and Merck. For Montesquieu in Germany, see Vierhaus, *Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert*, pp.9-32; and Conze, 'Adel, Aristokratie', pp.20-21.

⁶³ *DjG*, i.434.

⁶⁴ It may, however, have had some added currency from the crisis in France over Maupeou's contemporary attack on the *parlements*, Julian Swann, 'Robe, Sword and Aristocratic Reaction Revisited: The French Nobility and Political Crisis (1748-1789)', in Ronald G. Asch, ed., *Der europäische Adel im Ancien Régime: Von der Krise der ständischen Monarchien bis zur Revolution (ca. 1600-1789)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001), pp.151-78.

⁶⁵ *DjG*, iii.88-9.

⁶⁶ Bräuning-Oktavio, p.694, no.323.

⁶⁷ Edith Braemer, *Goethes Prometheus und die Grundpositionen des Sturm und Drang* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1968), pp.92-3.

look further afield than the German courts. An important Sturm und Drang element comes from the hostility to formal manners. Politeness, we are told, is either the opposite of character or irrelevant to it: ‘werft die Münze in den Tiegel, wenn ihr ihren Gehalt wissen wollt; unter dem Gepräge findet ihr ihn in Ewigkeit nicht.’ Goethe goes on to develop a further series of antitheses: ‘conventionnel’/‘Charakter’, ‘polirt’/‘eigen’, ‘der Stoff’/‘die Politur’, ‘schöne Damen und Herren’/peasants, artisans, burgesses, etc. By confining himself to the upper classes, his author has reduced Europe to a ‘feines französisches Drama’, or in other words (in an anticipation of *Werther*), a ‘Marionettenspiel’.

Götz would, of course, have no place in a fine French drama. He guarantees his own authenticity by bluntness and obscenity. He appears to be unconventional, but this is an illusion created by historical change. Götz is a conservative anarchist, that is, an anarchist who wishes to conserve a society, Möser’s idealised middle ages, presented as an anarchy limited, first by a small number of primitive loyalties, notably to the emperor, and secondly by a performed life-style which excludes certain types of action. Instinctive submission to these limitations is one of the meanings of the word ‘edel’, and is a condition of the liberties which he claims for himself (that liberties need to be deserved is a recurring theme in Möser). The peasants too will claim rights and liberties, but whether they have them or not, cannot be allowed to assert them, because their lack of this regulatory mechanism makes any political initiative by them anarchic in a much more radical sense.

If we ask how Götz acquired this quality, the play’s answer is ambiguous. He comes of a line of noble ancestors, but does not place great stress on them. In his dying words he refers to his father, who at his marriage had prayed for ‘eine Nachkommenschaft von edeln tapfern Söhnen’, a prayer which would of course be unanswered. He speaks of his own roots, both at the end and by implication earlier to his son (88),⁶⁸ and we hear of his adolescent training as one of the ‘Edelknaben’ of a margrave (85, 89), but Weislingen has shared all of these advantages. They are necessary, but not sufficient conditions.

Götz’s position is full of moral and practical incongruities, but he has a clear vision of the good society as being on the one hand static and hierarchical, and on the other hand tolerating the degree of social disorder necessary to permit the survival of certain primitive, heroic virtues. His best account of it is in the description of the hunt given by the Landgrave of Hanau: ‘Das war keine Maskerade, die er selbst zu Ehren angestellt hatte’(142). It had arisen from an impulse of the Landgrave for its own sake, but had

⁶⁸ The following page references to *Götz* are to HA 4:73-175.

turned into a kind of informal celebration, in which the people ‘teilnahmen an der Herrlichkeit ihres Herrn’. The Landgrave had performed nobility and unconsciously turned it into a public celebration by society of itself, as an organism.

A court is inconsistent with such a process, being not so much a part of society, as a microcosm parallel to it. Courts are formal and ceremonial, excluding the *Volk*, but also competitive, restless and dynamic, inhabited by chess-players, who make strategic moves based on unspoken intentions, which can however be inferred and countered by more skilled players. Self-presentation exists here too, but is conscious and calculated, aimed at furthering or else disguising the chess-player’s real strategy. Adelheid says in praise of Weislingen that he had once been an active man, ‘der die Geschäfte eines Fürstentums belebte, *der sich und seinen Ruhm dabei nicht vergaß*, der auf hundert großen Unternehmungen [...] zu den Wolken hinauf gestiegen war [...]’ (117, emphasis added).

The ‘Unternehmungen’ are important too. Ryder pointed to the fluidity of the political situation in *Götz*, with its possibilities for social advancement.⁶⁹ These possibilities have dazzled and corrupted almost all the noble characters other than Götz, who is incorruptible, partly because he has no strategic ambitions. Weislingen and Adelheid have ‘unsere Projekte’ (118); elsewhere Weislingen has ‘Anschläge’ (151), and ‘[e]in so schöner Anschlag’ for the destruction of Götz, that it deserves to succeed (152); Götz refers to Sickingen’s ‘großen Anschläge’ (125), and Sickingen himself hopes for Götz’s support for his ‘Unternehmung’ (125), that is, his dream of promoting himself from condottiere to elector; the emperor complains of ‘so viel halbe, so viel verunglückte Unternehmungen’ (151), which is indeed the modern historical judgement on his reign. All of these, like Adelheid’s hopes of the young heir to the throne, are fallacious. The same applies to the vague references to a crusade against the Turks. In such a society integrity must lie in withdrawal from the public sphere and reliance on instinctive virtue. Götz only once infringes this rule, when under duress he agrees to place himself at the head of the peasants. It is his nearest approach to an ‘Unternehmung’, to planned instrumental action, and it is fatal.

What is presented is not the failure of the hero, but the corruption of the class to which he belongs. It is, above all, their failure of conservatism, their failure to deserve their freedoms, which brings to an end Möser’s middle ages. The nobility have in different

⁶⁹ Frank G. Ryder, ‘Towards a Revaluation of Goethe’s *Götz: The Protagonist*’, *PMLA*, 77 (1962), 58-70, at p.60, n.3.

ways become careerists: civil lawyers, administrators, courtiers, conspirators. They are not content to be conservatives and to rely on noble instinct to inform their life choices, which should aim at the maintenance of social stasis rather than the dynamic fulfilment of ambition.

Chapter 2: Werther in the great world

Ist das die große Welt
Heute zum ersten mal
Tret ich hinein
Und es begegnen mir
Sorgen und Pein.

*Der Groß-Cophta*¹

With one exception, the Goethe of the *Geniezeit* left his attitudes towards aristocracy to be inferred from texts removed from contemporary Germany in time or place, or both. This led to misinterpretations, but these have abounded also in the case of the exception, *Werther*.² Critics of *Werther* have tended to fall into hostile camps, respectively psychological and political/sociological,³ a tendency occasionally deplored by individual commentators, who have attempted to conflate the two, for example by proposing a Werther who certainly suffers from a personality disorder, but one which is especially characteristic of, or even caused by bourgeois society.⁴

The current, already long-term trend towards a more pathological Werther contains a constant risk of imbalance, but the tension between the two approaches is inherent in the text and not resolvable. It emerged quite early in the *Rezeption*, and derives from Goethe's fusing of the two main blocks of material, his own experience and that of Carl Jerusalem. More fundamentally it results from the co-presence in the text of two of Goethe's identities, Werther and the author of *Werther*, the latter as both clinician and exorcist, but also as social critic.

The social critique has, however, profound psychological implications. The background presence in *Werther* of a contemporary debate on masculinity is well-established.⁵ The 'old' masculinity of Lovelace, conventionally aristocratic, could be confidently repudiated, but defining a new, middle-class ideal to succeed it was more problematic. *Werther* is among other things an exploration of the risks of the other extreme, and thus a contribution

¹ Paralipomena, from the opera text (the niece), WA 1.17:382.

² *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* [hereafter *Werther*], FA 1.8:9-267. Unless otherwise specified, the text is cited from the first edn.

³ Bruce Duncan, *Goethe's Werther and the Critics* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), pp.39-105. Ingrid Engel surveys psychological interpretations and comments on their apparent inconclusiveness, *Werther und die Wertheriaden: Ein Beitrag zur Wirkungsgeschichte* (Sankt Ingbert: Röhrig, 1986), pp.67-72. She suggests that: 'Die Integration psychologischer Betrachtungsweisen in den Gesamtkomplex der sozio-historischen Interpretation ergäbe vielleicht eine interessante und gangbare Lösung', p.72, but does not herself attempt this.

⁴ See the ref. to Rüdiger Scholz in Duncan, p.96.

⁵ E.g., Inger Sigrun Brodley, 'Masculinity, Sensibility, and the "Man of Feeling": The Gendered Ethics of Goethe's Werther', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 35.2 (1999), 115-40.

to a line of debate including such names as Richardson, Diderot and Rousseau, all in different ways attempting to reconcile 'politesse' with 'nature'. Is it possible to frame a contemporary masculine ideal at once natural, heroic and polite? Both Homer and Ossian may be of help here,⁶ although there will be difficulties, expressed as bathos, in adapting them to modern circumstances. Again, one of the conventional functions of the nobility is precisely to act as 'role models' (the phrase has an especial cogency here). But although the young 'Genie' of the Sturm und Drang has no, or very little political hostility towards the *Adel*, he is committed to the development of a different ideal, and will rebel against any requirement to assimilate into the existing one.

Werther famously has no personal quarrel with the existence of *Stände*, or with aristocracy as such, or indeed with absolutism, enlightened or otherwise. If the novel is an objective critique of aristocracy, then, it must be of its behaviour, its ethos, or perhaps its composition. Was Germany simply a family with the wrong members in control? It has been just possible to read *Werther* in this way. It would then be a plea for a reconstituted ruling class, weeding out the poor and debt-ridden, the physically ugly, the unintelligent, and replacing them with elements from the rising (or already risen) bourgeoisie, such as Werther himself, chosen on the basis of their own sense of inherent entitlement.

Fantastic though this sounds, it is not so far from *WML* in one of its aspects, but differences between the two texts are obvious. Werther's sense of entitlement is innate, and as we shall see, regressive, even infantile. Unlike the more realistic Wilhelm Meister, he feels no need to qualify himself for membership, for example by a careful study of behaviour. But in any case neither is seriously interested in the exercise of political power, and this is a crucial weakness in any political critique, Marxist or otherwise. A fascinating attempt by Professor Daniel Wilson, in particular, to portray Werther as an idealistic young political reformer, devoting himself to the service of enlightened absolutism, fails because, although entirely convincing on the general historical issue as it presented itself to Goethe's generation, it can produce almost no support from the text.⁷ Nor is it the case, as there implied, that the 'expulsion' scene is the outcome of a power struggle between the

⁶ Sir Walter Scott thought that Fingal combined 'all the strength and bravery of Achilles, with the courtesy, sentiment, and high breeding of Sir Charles Grandison', quoted, Dafydd Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance in James Macpherson's The Poems of Ossian: Myth, Genre and Cultural Change* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.6.

⁷ W. Daniel Wilson, 'Patriarchy, Politics, Passion: Labor and Werther's Search for Nature', *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 14.2 (1989), 15-44.

Stände, or of professional jealousy towards a more competent colleague.⁸ There was, of course, professional friction between bourgeoisie and nobility in contemporary bureaucracies, not least because of the virtual exclusion of the former from posts at a higher level, but this is not a theme in *Werther*. What certainly is one, is the related question of the social interface between the *Stände*, and the frictions resulting from it.

Wilson's study raises the theoretical problem of the proper boundary between the text and the historical background, a problem compounded by *Werther's* early notoriety as a *roman à clef*, which encouraged questions about how 'true' it was. Unsophisticated as this sounds, it still affects the use of external historical data. Horst Flaschka, who draws widely on historical sources, especially relating to Wetzlar, is an example. His practice is at its most controversial in his treatment of one of the noble characters, the ambassador. He wishes to insist that Werther's account of his difficulties with his superior is reliable, and offers evidence based on Jerusalem's relationship with the 'original': 'Das negative Porträt, das Goethe Werther von seinem Vorgesetzten zeichnen läßt, *entstammt nicht der bloßen Phantasie* und ist *keine freie Erfindung*, sondern *trägt reale Züge* des [...] Gesandten [...] Hofrats Johann Jakob von Höfler [...]' (p.87, emphasis added).

This use of historical evidence is entirely inadmissible: it needs to be restricted to the elucidation of allusions or ambiguities in the text, especially where we cannot suspect that the ambiguity was authorial and intended. Above all it cannot be used to supplement, still less to correct or amend the text, even if it is wholly unambiguous, as in this case it is not. Here the same data will support an argument to the contrary. If Goethe had at his disposal the information supplied by Flaschka, he certainly used it selectively (omitting, for example, Höfler's heavy drinking), and presented some of it ambiguously. Commentators draw attention to Werther's complaints about the ambassador's pedantry, for example, without reflecting that Werther is, after all, a trainee under instruction, and that extreme care in legal drafting is not a fault. Especially absurd is his indignation at having to forego 'Inversionen': his suggestion that official documents would benefit from the introduction of stylistic mannerisms from the Sturm und Drang cannot be taken at face value.⁹ If the

⁸ On the contrary, it is the women who object most strongly to Werther's presence, apparently from purely social motives. It seems to have been agreed, at least by men, that insistence on rank was stronger among women, Horst Flaschka, *Goethes Werther: Werkkontextuelle Deskription und Analyse* (Munich: Fink, 1987), pp.73-4, and cf. Loen, *Der redliche Mann am Hofe*, p.519. Noble women had, of course, a good deal more to lose from a liberalisation of social attitudes, and especially from *mésalliance*. For *mésalliance* in general, especially the legal aspect, see Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, i.146-7.

⁹ *Werther*, 24 Dec. [1771], FA 1.8:126, 128. Cf. a satirical letter by Möser, 'Der Autor am Hofe'. A court lady asks the 'Kanzler' about a recent young addition to his staff. The 'Kanzler' is polite,

novel is to be read as an attack on the nobility, or even individual members of it, the evidence must be internal or, very much a second best, taken from the *Rezeption*, whose heterogeneity in this case limits its usefulness. Historical evidence on Wetzlar needs to be treated with great care if it is not to threaten the autonomy of the text.

An exclusively sociological perspective has led to a distortion which can be traced at least as far back as Balzac. Norbert Elias, for example, took as his starting point a well-known passage: ‘Was mich am meisten nekt, sind die fatalen bürgerlichen Verhältnisse. Zwar weis ich so gut als einer, wie nöthig der Unterschied der Stände ist, wie viel Vortheile er mir selbst verschafft, nur soll er mir nicht eben grad im Wege stehn [...]’¹⁰ The way of course leads socially upwards, and, as Elias puts it, the passage expresses that most characteristic demand of a middle class: the doors below must remain closed, but those above must be opened. Part of the appeal of the novel was due to a long-standing unhappy love affair of the bourgeoisie with the aristocracy, exemplified by the hero’s numerous female predecessors in a line descending from Richardson, and including Fräulein von Sternheim. The tedium of court life, its ‘glänzende Elend’,¹¹ its insincerity and superficiality, its direct contrast to the sentimental virtues with which the middle classes were coming to identify as defining characteristics, were already literary clichés. On the other hand the intolerable anguish of exclusion from it was so much a matter of course as not to require expression at all. Indeed a tactless admission of it would not have been well received by a middle-class audience.

In one sense this is unjust to Werther, who is not a thwarted social or professional careerist. High society is not a mountain to be climbed, but a spiritual home from which he has been unaccountably exiled. In fact some later concentration on the social aspect, including a much-quoted allusion by Balzac,¹² is no more than an attempt to reinvent Werther as a nineteenth-century novel hero, to compensate for a decline of interest in the lover. The characteristic nineteenth-century theme of the young man socially on the make had no

but adds: ‘Die jungen Genies wissen die gemeinsten Sachen nicht anzugreifen, sie sind *allumfassend* und *allzugewaltig*, besitzen *Horn-* und *Stoßkraft*, wollen die Natur gebären helfen und können kein Protokoll fassen’, *Justus Möser’s sämtliche Werke*, vii.84 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰ Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, i.22-3. The quotation from *Werther* is here taken from the first edn., 24 Dec.[1771], FA 1.8:130.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² ‘le dégoût qui met le pistolet à la main de Werther, beaucoup plus ennuyé des princes allemands que de Charlotte’, *Le cousin Pons* (1847), from *La Comédie humaine*, vol.7 (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p.532. Stuart Pratt Atkins, *The Testament of Werther in Poetry and Drama* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), discussed the more social nature of the French reception, pp.132-8. Mme de Staël, for example, had defended Goethe for attributing to Werther ‘la vive douleur d’une humiliation, et le ressentiment profond contre l’orgueil des rangs, qui a causé cette humiliation [...]’, quoted, *ibid.*, p.134.

place in the Germany of the Sturm und Drang, where exclusion, apart from a handful of exceptions, was assumed to be absolute. To have a tailor or a baker for a grandfather, like Goethe and Schiller respectively, was to belong to a caste which did not socialise with the nobility on terms of equality. 'Caste' is a metaphor, but Knigge, for example, was prepared to use a stronger one, and to speak of courtiers as belonging to an entirely different species.¹³

The strictness of the division led to a self-legitimizing definition of itself by the bourgeoisie as the class embodying sincerity, *Kultur*, *Bildung* and the sentimental virtues, and of the aristocracy as hypocritical, mannered, un-German and characterised by mere *Zivilisation*.¹⁴ This viewpoint is not wholly absent from pre-Weimar Goethe,¹⁵ but it is unusual. There is certainly a case for arguing that anti-bourgeois sentiment is more typical of *Werther* than anti-aristocratic.¹⁶ But anti-bourgeois sentiment can take various forms, including psychological ones, another example of the partial falseness of the antithesis between the psychological and the sociological.

The key innovation in Goethe's technique is the abandonment of the ethical prescriptiveness of the *Aufklärungspoetik*. There are no longer explicit moral norms corresponding to the individual characters, or to the social hierarchy, either directly or, as more commonly in contemporary fiction, in polemical inversion. On the other hand, this does not lead to a kind of sociological neutrality. The ruling class may not be unambiguously attacked or defended, but it certainly does not comprise the 'best' in society, the *aristoi*, and in this limited sense contemporaries were correct in diagnosing social radicalism. A revolution has placed us as readers, under our leader, the charismatic Sturm und Drang author, in a position of moral dominance. We now constitute the true aristocracy ourselves, with clear social implications. We sit in judgment as a kind of representative, judicial committee of the ethical bourgeoisie. But we also find ourselves in an extended family, such as *Werther* will seek in vain at court and elsewhere.

¹³ Knigge, quoted in Elias, op. cit., p.31: 'Wo machte mehr als hier [sc. in Germany] das Korps der Hofleute eine ganz eigene Gattung aus[?]' Different 'Gattungen' cannot of course interbreed, which is relevant to the question of *mésalliance*.

¹⁴ Elias, op. cit., pp.10-42, takes the story forward to the triumph of the bourgeoisie and its redefinition of its favourite qualities as national characteristics, with very important consequences. The antithesis was already well-established in the 1770s, however. As we have seen (above, pp.36-7), the young Goethe did not challenge the view that the nobility were less German than their inferiors.

¹⁵ E.g. the review of *Charakteristik der vornehmsten europäischen Nationen*, *DjG*, iii.87-8.

¹⁶ Stefan Blessin, *Die Romane Goethes* (Königstein/Ts.: Athenäum, 1979), pp.275-6.

Readers of *La nouvelle Héloïse* are rewarded at the end by a valedictory blessing from the author. The above collection of letters may not be of great interest, Rousseau tells us, but it will give pleasure to every reader of a virtuous disposition ('à tout lecteur d'un bon naturel').¹⁷ Goethe's technique is similar, if immensely more economical. We have only to open *Werther* to be not so much invited as coerced into joining a select group. Its nature seems reassuringly familiar. The first page of the main text contains scrupulous examination of conscience ('und doch – bin ich ganz unschuldig?'), biblical quotation ('O was ist der Mensch?'),¹⁸ and a resolve to amend and lead a better life. We are, in other words, in a Pietist circle, even if an increasingly heretical one, and as in all such circles, we will have difficulty in avoiding a sense of being an elite, raised above our neighbours, first by the higher standards we set ourselves, and secondly by a modern split in the self, encouraged by Pietism, as it had been by English puritanism. Like Hamlet we have outer selves which move through society, and for which Werther will later find a name which would become a cliché, 'marionettes'.¹⁹ These selves are distinct from, and unworthy of, our 'real' inner selves, who have told us that we are too good for this world and may even have tempted us to quit it prematurely. 'This world', however, means society, with its falseness and superficiality, and there are less drastic ways of fleeing from society. Flight may be directed outwards, into the solitude of nature, inwards into the recesses of the self, downwards towards the unthreatening simplicity of the *Volk*, or upwards to the court.

Werther will try all of these in turn, but a long tradition of *Hofkritik*, dating from the humanists or even earlier,²⁰ has prepared us for his deep disappointment in the last case. On the other hand the young Goethe would have had to be unusually free of the 'anxiety of influence' to be willing merely to repeat the socially critical message of a novel written more than thirty years before by his great-uncle. It would be less surprising to find him distancing himself from any overt critique, and this is indeed what occurs. Werther's expectations of the court and his actual experience there will be deeply ambiguous. As a whole the court will confirm much of what its critics have said in its disparagement, but it will also contain both fantasy and real elements of a genuine aristocracy.

The opening of the text, then, is a mixture of formal innovation and reassuring familiarity, certainly for readers of Rousseau. One aspect of Goethe's 'conciliating' nature which

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou La nouvelle Héloïse*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959, 1961), ii.1-793, at p.745n.

¹⁸ Psalms 8:4, 144:3.

¹⁹ *Werther*, 20 Jan. [1772], FA 1.8:134.

²⁰ Kiesel, 'Bei Hof, bei Höll'.

accords particularly well with Rousseau is the absence of any identifiable villain. The gradual triumph of bourgeois values in the novel had soon been followed by the appearance of forms of compromise between aristocracy and bourgeoisie, as we see from the *Leben der schwedischen Gräfin von G...* (1747-8), *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), or indeed *La nouvelle Héloïse* itself (1761). In each of these cases the compromise had taken the form of the *embourgeoisement* of the aristocracy, and one aspect of Goethe's value system is the new form this compromise takes. The formal innovation of highly subjective presentation in *Werther* makes possible an innovation of content, the introduction of credible aristocrats with values and qualities which are displayed as positive through the irony of their denunciation by an unreliable narrator. At the same time the prevailing anglophilia allowed a further compromise between the *Stände*, a bourgeois hero who can assert himself through *Selbstdarstellung*. The famous costume asserts identification with the English landed gentry, a class which was noble (in continental terms) and was at the same time an implied reproach to the German courtier with his French formal dress, which aggressively asserted his distance from the bourgeois world of productive work.²¹

The sociological and the psychological are almost inseparable in this text. Concentration on the psychological, although much more securely based on Goethe's own testimony, is problematic, in the absence of agreement as to how Werther is to be diagnosed, whether in contemporary or modern terms.²² There is also an obvious risk of circularity in arguing from Werther's abnormal mental state to his unreliability as narrator and vice versa. As with any unreliable narrator, there is a problem of degree, of deciding just when the reader should begin to disbelieve. The result is a very open text, with almost excessive freedom of interpretation, since any countervailing evidence can be discounted. This affects the reading of the 'expulsion' scene, and also the interpretation of the minor noble characters, Fräulein von B. and Count C., who are only very briefly and subjectively treated and have consequently tempted commentators into interpretations going beyond the text.

The 'expulsion' scene has a curious history. From being ignored by most early reviewers, it has since acquired a status among historians which is almost literally canonical, in the sense that no historical account of the German aristocracy seems to be complete without

²¹ Daniel Purdy, 'The Veil of Masculinity: Clothing and Identity via Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*', *Lessing Yearbook*, 27 (1995), 103-29.

²² Duncan, *Goethe's Werther*, pp.39-71. For Werther as 18th-century melancholiac, see Thorsten Valk, 'Poetische Pathologie: Goethes *Werther* im Kontext zeitgenössischer Melancholie-Diskurse', *GJb*, 119 (2002), 14-32; and for the modern narcissist, Wolfgang Kaempfer, 'Das Ich und der Tod in Goethes *Werther*', *Recherches Germaniques*, 9 (1979), 55-79.

it.²³ Its fortunes in German literary circles were quite different. It only began to attract considerable interest in the 1820s, through changes in social sentiment of the kind we have already seen illustrated in the case of *Die Mitschuldigen*.²⁴ The process was a slow one, however. Writing as late as 1971, Kluge could claim that almost all previous analyses of the novel had neglected the *Residenz* episode,²⁵ sometimes, it seems, because commentators had felt, but been too tactful to admit, that the introduction of social issues had been an artistic blunder on Goethe's part.

Goethe soon decided that his abandonment of the ethical explicitness of the *Aufklärungs-poetik* had placed too heavy a burden on his unprepared readers, notably in the case of suicide. But the same is true of the 'expulsion'. As far as I am aware, no interpreter has suggested that the reason it is not immediately traumatic is that Werther has subconsciously engineered it himself,²⁶ and yet the text makes this clear.²⁷

His account is full of inconsistencies. In the first place he tells us, with obviously suspicious reiteration, that he had been innocently unaware of the scene developing around him: 'die noble Gesellschaft [...] an die ich nie gedacht hab, auch mir nie aufgefallen ist daß wir Subalternen nicht hinein gehören [...]; Ich denke, Gott weis, an nichts [...]; [ich] bemerkte erst nach einiger Zeit [...]; Ich merkte nicht [...]; ich hätte eher dran denken sollen [...]', all within little more than a page. With this is combined an inconsistent claim that he had noticed the situation, but had remained out of a kind of sociological curiosity ('und doch blieb ich, weil ich intrigiert war, das Ding näher zu beleuchten'), altered in the

²³ E.g., William Doyle, *Aristocracy and its enemies in the age of revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.147-9; Jonathan Dewald, *The European Nobility, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.55-6, 192. Dewald's summary of the scene is entirely tendentious and the description of Werther as 'a fictional character, but one who distilled many of Goethe's own bitter experiences' is unsupported by any evidence whatsoever, certainly if the reference is to the Goethe of 1774. It is not even clear precisely what happened to Jerusalem. Kestner's report to Goethe, *DjG*, iv.351-6, merely says that his stay in Wetzlar was unhappy, among other reasons, because 'ihm gleich Anfangs (bey Graf Bassenheim) der Zutritt in den großen Gesellschaften auf eine unangenehme Art versagt worden', p.351. Neither this, nor his reference to 'heftige Streitigkeiten [with his superiors...] die ihm Verweise vom Hofe zuzogen', *ibid.*, necessarily implies a scene like that in the novel.

²⁴ For Heine, see Martin Swales, *Goethe: The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.101.

²⁵ Gerhard Kluge, 'Die Leiden des jungen Werthers in der Residenz: Vorschlag zur Interpretation einiger Werther-Briefe', *Euphorion*, 65 (1971), 115-31, at p.116; and see Wilson, 'Patriarchy', p.29, n.45.

²⁶ A partial exception is Reinhard Assling, *Werthers Leiden: Die ästhetische Rebellion der Innerlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1981), p.173. For Assling: 'Der Gesandtschaftsdienst ist für Werther [...] von Anfang an als ein Akt der Selbstbestrafung gewollt', but 'gewollt' goes too far in the direction of a conscious intention, which is not in the text. His thesis is that the 'Gesandtschaftsepisode' is a conscious attempt to demonstrate to Wilhelm and others that he has no place in the adult world, but this ignores Werther's unsuccessful attempt to adapt.

²⁷ *Werther*, 15 Mar. [1772], FA 1.8:140, 142.

second version to a wish to go on speaking to Fräulein von B. His excuse to the Count ('ein böser Genius hat mich zurück gehalten') contrives, through the ambiguity of the word 'böser', to imply yet a third (or fourth) motive, a malicious desire to provoke the company into behaving badly, badly, that is, by his own bourgeois standards, which by 1774 were those of the novel itself.

We are surely entitled to see behind this muddle an unconscious motivation, part of the irreconcilable contradictions within his personality which have already launched him on his trajectory towards suicide. Werther is driven by impulses towards self-destruction of which he is only partly and intermittently aware, and for which an indwelling 'böser Genius' is a very apt metaphor. He is collecting rejections, expulsions and reasons for flight, which, once he has a complete set, will justify him in suicide as the 'only logical' outcome. Part of the horror he later feels at the 'expulsion' is due to an obscure awareness that a line has been crossed. The importance of the episode is confirmed by its careful positioning in the structure,²⁸ but its relationship to the final catastrophe is not so much one of cause and effect, as of dress rehearsal and performance.

But if the offence is Werther's own, why is it so grave? It is usual to suggest that the relationship with Lotte is essentially oedipal,²⁹ so that the final embrace is the infringement of a taboo. Given that the shame of the expulsion is cited by the editor as a prime reason for the suicide, it is natural to ask whether there are features of the 'expulsion' scene which also invite a Freudian interpretation. Its considerable force, even for a reader remote from its social circumstances, makes this a natural approach.

Werther is above all a son, and will later attempt to represent, or even displace Christ. One of the earliest prefigurations of Christ is the scapegoat of Leviticus 16:21, driven out each year into the desert with the sins of the people cast upon it. But like Christ, Werther is not in fact expelled. He is rather the 'consenting victim' of René Girard,³⁰ dying for us, as the editor seems to imply in his foreword, committing suicide so we will not have to. In his

²⁸ For the significance of the time scheme, see Klaus Müller-Salget, 'Zur Struktur von Goethes Werther', in Hans Peter Herrmann, ed., *Goethes Werther: Kritik und Forschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994), pp.317-37, here at p.331. The overall date range is from 4 May 1771 to 23 Dec. 1772. The centre point is at 27 Feb. 1772. Immediately before it comes the farewell letter to Albert and Lotte and immediately after it the 'expulsion'.

²⁹ E.g., Engel, *Werther und die Wertheriaden*, pp.67-9; Caroline Wellbery, 'From Mirrors to Images: The Transformation of Sentimental Paradigms in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 25.2 (1986), 231-49, at pp.240-3.

³⁰ René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p.63.

character as the son (or the Son), Werther is a child, as he has already repeatedly told us.³¹ If we take him literally, we may conclude that in this scene he is a child who has remained improperly in adult company. The scene, that is, derives its force partly from its Christian (or mythic) overtones, and partly from inherently infantile (or Freudian) aspects.

Nobility is a metaphor for adulthood and adult society, and consenting expulsion for social flight or refusal. Membership of any social group is only available at the price of adaptations, experienced as sacrifice, in this case of the immature or childish self. Noble society is a special case, because ‘exclusive’ – ‘alles Vornehme ist eigentlich ablehnend’, as Goethe would later put it (below, p.179) – but this merely adds force to the metaphor. It may be an extreme case, but is not inherently exceptional.

To repeat his excuses, Werther has stayed up too late, either:

- (1) because he has failed to notice the passage of time, or the fact that only adults are still in the room; or
- (2) because of his preoccupation with one of the adults present, the safely distant figure of Fräulein von B.; or
- (3) from curiosity to see what reaction his bad behaviour will provoke; or
- (4) simply out of an anarchic naughtiness, a wish to set adult authority at defiance (his ‘böser Genius’).

Explanations (1) and (2) are ‘innocent’, that is to say, free from sexual implications. In his later rationalisation, Werther will insist on (1) with a kind of desperation, as if his life depended on it, as indeed in a sense it does. (2) is an afterthought on Goethe’s part and not on a par with the others, although it has a certain formal attractiveness in drawing attention to the complementary parental roles of Count C. and Fräulein von B. (3) and (4) are transgressive. All curiosity, according to Freud, is sexual in origin,³² and this must apply *a fortiori* to curiosity about adult activities after the children have gone to bed. (4) is more straightforwardly childish, and so can be offered apologetically to Count C., along with (1), with a combination of self-conscious charm and self-defensive irony. The Count accepts his paternal role and forgives, but guilt remains unaddressed, and the effect is to shift the punitive role on to society. If Werther consciously refuses to take his punishment, as he does, very unwisely, this role can only devolve on himself.

³¹ See especially the letters of 13 May and 8 July [1771], FA 1.8:16, 72.

³² George Loewenstein, ‘The Psychology of Curiosity: A Review and Reinterpretation’, *Psychological Bulletin*, 116 (1994), 75-98, esp. p.80.

The scene is thus an early example of a type of child sentiment which would recur in different forms in the nineteenth century and later: the child as judge. Goethe's readers are enlisted into a league against the nobility by the pathos of Werther's situation, even if the immediate stress is not on the social theme. The precise nature of Goethe's conscious intentions in this first version are obscure, but comparison with the suicide, above, is justified by his obvious later feeling that inadequately prepared readers were attributing to him an unintended social radicalism. This led to some of his later modifications of the text.

To the child all non-internalised adult rules are unfair, or at least irrational, but Werther does not deny or even criticise the right of the nobility to social exclusiveness, and there is no hostility to the *Adel* as such, even in retrospect. He will now leave [Wetzlar] to spend over a month with a prince, who, however, will turn out to be an even more unsatisfactory father than Count C., because entirely non-judgemental. The surrogate figures in the town who are to carry out the actual punishment are not necessarily, perhaps not even predominantly noble. Objections to Werther's social climbing are at least as likely to come from those who think themselves his equals. Thus far, if we persist in adhering to the individual text, we cannot say that it straightforwardly supports the usual assumption of hostility to the nobility. This is, however, a case where the claims of intertextuality are especially strong. *Werther* is a novel, and novels were already committed to bourgeois values. No portrayal of class friction could possibly be value-neutral, at least without a much heavier weighting towards the nobility than Goethe was willing to allow.

None of this is compatible with a balanced judgement on the nobility, even a rationally adverse one, although it is of course by no means incompatible with the perception of real features of adult, that is, noble, society. On the other hand it demonstrates how Goethe has used Werther's unreliability to preserve the ambiguity of his own position. This accords with his later references to the novel, not only in letters, but in *DuW*. At that time, he tells us, he had been much favoured by the upper classes. There had certainly been unpleasantnesses between the *Stände* in *Werther*, but this was overlooked (that is, by the nobility) in view of the other 'passionate' expressions in the book, so that everyone realised that no direct attack was intended ('so liess man das in Betracht der übrigen Leidenschaftlichkeiten des Buches gelten, indem jedermann wohl fühlte, daß es hier auf

keine unmittelbare Wirkung abgesehen sei'). In modern terms, he is claiming that there had been a general awareness from the first that Werther was an unreliable narrator.³³

Such rationalisations by the older Goethe of his younger self are usually regarded with suspicion and no doubt this is a case in point, at least as far as historical fact is concerned. But this would not justify us in accusing Goethe of falsifying retrospectively to the extent of attributing to Werther an unreliability which he had not originally intended. It is, in fact, mildly curious that *Werther* has retained a reputation for hostility towards the nobility, solely on Werther's own, quite inconsistent testimony.³⁴ Sometimes this is part of a general view that such hostility was characteristic of the Sturm und Drang, but the few noble readers of contemporary German novels would have found more to object to in *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771), or even in *Der redliche Mann am Hofe* (1742).³⁵ Sweeping denunciations of the *Adel* were much more characteristic of the enlightened Loen than of the young Goethe. The Sturm und Drang had in fact a complex view of the aristocracy, in which hostility to courts, where noble and middle-class bureaucrats were coming into competition, was balanced by individual sympathetic portrayals of noble characters and an entire absence of politically motivated hostility.³⁶

To quote Assling, conventional bourgeois hostility to a court aristocracy was based on "der moralisch begründeten Polarisierung von Schein und Sein, körperlicher Attraktivität und innerer Vollkommenheit, äußerem Glanz und innerer 'Einfalt', Sinnlichkeit und Unschuld des Herzens, Heuchelei und Aufrichtigkeit, Verschwendung und Selbstgenügsamkeit", etc.³⁷ But as he points out elsewhere, and is indeed obvious, Werther's critique is barely moralistic at all.³⁸ None of the familiar jibes (extravagance, libertinage, unproductive idleness) are included, even by implication. On the contrary, his complaint is not that the *Adel* lack the bourgeois virtues, but that they lack the external graces conventionally

³³ *DuW*, HA 10:116. For 'Leidenschaftlichkeiten' as unreliability, cf. the letter to Kestner of 2.5.1783 on revising *Werther*. His intention was now 'Albarten so zu stellen, daß ihn wohl der leidenschaftliche Jüngling, aber doch der Leser nicht verkennt', HaBr, i.425.

³⁴ An exception is Guido Morpurgo Tagliabue, *Goethe e il romanzo: Tre saggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991). For Goethe, 'Natur è il popolo, Gesetz è il nobile', and specifically on *Werther*, 'Per Goethe l'aristocratico è l'ordine, la legge, l'uomo pubblico, ed egli non è mai anti-legge', pp.28, 29.

³⁵ The main proponent of noble values in the former is the heroine's aunt, who tries to procure her niece as a mistress for the prince. For Loen, see esp. *Der redliche Mann am Hofe*, pp.553-6.

³⁶ Roy Pascal, *The German Sturm und Drang* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), pp.56-9; Gerrit Walther, "'... uns, denen der Name 'politische Freiheit' so süße schallt": Die politischen Erfahrungen und Erwartungen der Sturm-und-Drang Generation', in Christoph Perels, ed., *Sturm und Drang: Ausstellung im Frankfurter Goethe-Museum, 2. Dez. 1988 – 5. Febr. 1989* [...] (Frankfurt am Main: Freies Deutsches Hochstift, 1988), pp.307-27.

³⁷ Assling, *Werthers Leiden*, p.38.

³⁸ Assling, pp.85-6, and p.210, n.11. He excepts Werther's critique of arrogance towards the common people on the part of 'Leute von einigem Stande'.

attributed to them. With individual exceptions they are poor, ugly, ill-dressed, dull in conversation, boorish in manners, in fact outrageous frauds by their own standards.

Apart from the 'expulsion' scene there are other ambiguities in the depiction of the nobility in *Werther*, notably in Werther's attitude to them as a class, and in the treatment of individual minor characters. Commentators have occasionally asked, but not answered, the question of why Werther should wish to associate with them at all, especially during (and after) the embassy episode, and should even speak extraordinarily emphatically about his need to do so, in view of his low opinion of them.³⁹ A further question, as to why he should assume in advance his right of entrée, has hardly even been raised. The answer to the latter question might seem banal: Werther's idealised image of the aristocracy corresponds to his idealised self-image. Since a desire for association, and especially a feeling of identity, with a higher social class is more or less a definition of snobbery, his motive might not seem to require an elaborate explanation.⁴⁰

There are, however, other reasons for his sense of entitlement. He is hostile to the world of work,⁴¹ and has an idle, unproductive rentier life-style which he might view as aristocratic. His general aversion towards economic and rational activity, towards what Assling calls 'instrumental reason',⁴² might also lead him to expect to find kindred spirits at court. In the event he will find court society active, ambitious, competitive and, in the case of the prince, rationalistic. As has been argued above, he expects to find them children, like himself; instead he finds them adults,⁴³ and hence the mutual rejection.

In a sense, however, even this is to over-simplify, for Werther's expectations and experiences of court life are both profoundly ambiguous. On the one hand the prospect of subordination and submission to discipline causes him to hesitate before applying for an appointment.⁴⁴ Once appointed, however, he makes a serious attempt to adapt to routine work and shows real signs of regarding it as a cure for his emotional problems ('Das beste ist, daß es zu thun genug giebt').⁴⁵ But he persists in his antithesis of 'Herz' and 'Kopf', and in trying to associate the former with the nobility. Goethe has carefully linked Count

³⁹ E.g., Wilson, 'Patriarchy', p.38.

⁴⁰ The fact that the 'expulsion' scene has numerous parallels in the 'Wertheriaden' is significant here, Engel, *Werther und die Wertheriaden*, pp.355-62.

⁴¹ *Werther*, 17 May [1771], FA 1.8:20.

⁴² Assling, p.181 (instrumentelle Vernunft).

⁴³ This is clear from his startling regression to an angry child in blaming Wilhelm for the expulsion: 'Er ist nicht zu ersezzen, und ihr seyd doch allein schuld daran, die ihr mich sporntet und triebt und quältet [...]', *Werther*, 15 Mar. [1772], FA 1.8:140.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 Aug. [1771], FA 1.8:110.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 Nov. [1771], FA 1.8:126.

M. ('ein fühlendes Herz'), Count C. ('[e]inen weiten grossen Kopf, *und der deswegen nicht kalt ist* [...]') and the prince ('ein Mann von Verstande', who is rejected as valuing Werther's 'Verstand' more than his 'Herz').⁴⁶ The three correspond respectively to the infantilism of Book 1, to the attempt at maturity, but showing the precariousness of the attempted balance, and finally to the regressive decline towards collapse.

On arrival at court he begins to develop more contradictory feelings, divided between idealisation of a place 'wo ich noch ein wenig Freude, einen Schimmer von Glück auf dieser Erden geniessen könnte', and contempt for 'Menschen [...] deren ganze Seele auf dem Ceremoniel ruht'.⁴⁷ He has failed in social contact with the peasantry and has deliberately distanced himself from his social equals, so that noble society is a last resort, hence his despair at the 'expulsion'. This is only partly directed towards the court, however, which is both a symbol for society and, as in *Götz*, a microcosm of it, and thus provides a laboratory setting to illustrate Werther's difficulties in social adaptation.

The link between Werther and Tasso was recognised by Goethe, and that between Tasso and Molière's *Alceste* has been discussed by Theo Buck.⁴⁸ But *Alceste* is equally closely related to Werther, who refuses to adapt, and hopes to find the court free of the compromises required by social life, which his narcissism has hitherto led him to interpret as defects in bourgeois society. Much later (1828) Goethe said of *Le Misanthrope*:

Wir möchten gern Inhalt und Behandlung dieses Stücks *tragisch* nennen; einen solchen Eindruck hat es wenigstens jederzeit bey uns zurückgelassen, weil dasjenige vor Blick und Geist gebracht wird, was uns oft selbst zur Verzweiflung bringt und wie ihn aus der Welt jagen möchte.

Hier stellt sich der reine Mensch dar, welcher bey gewonnener großer Bildung doch natürlich geblieben ist und, wie mit sich, so auch mit Andern, nur gar zu gern wahr und gründlich seyn möchte; wir sehen ihn aber im Conflict mit der socialen Welt, in der man ohne Verstellung und Flachheit nicht umhergehen kann.⁴⁹

Behind the reviewer's distancing first person plural, the tone here is remarkably personal, even confessional (we are surely attending a brief resurrection of Werther himself, still longing to flee from society after half a century of Weimar). Generations of readers have over-invested in *Alceste* and found him tragic, while knowing that this is self-indulgent. By contrast, there have always been those who refused to invest in Werther, and insisted

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.12, 126 and 154 respectively (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 24 Dec. [1771], p.130, and 8 Jan. 1772, p.132.

⁴⁸ Theo Buck, 'Die Einflüsse von Molière, Voltaire und Diderot auf das Werk Goethes', *Etudes Germaniques*, 66.3 (2011), 597-622, esp. pp.602-7; Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, pp.106-15.

⁴⁹ FA 1:22:479, quoted in part by Buck (Goethe's emphasis).

on finding him comic, or at least ridiculous, and Goethe's awareness of his own over-investment accounts for his scatological fury at the expression of this feeling by Nicolai.⁵⁰

As we have seen, the court is a microcosm of society, or society raised to a higher power. This explains why so many, like Goethe's own 'königliche Einsiedlerin', and like several noble characters in Loen's novel, should flee from it, either into the lifestyle of the *Landadel*, or into completely hermitic isolation. Flight, autonomy and oedipal regression are the key fantasy characteristics of the *Adel*, flight usually being from society (the adult world) itself. If we ask why Goethe should associate the nobility with social phobia, two immediate answers are to hand. In the first place, the nobleman is like Hamlet, the glass of fashion and the mould of form, that is, autonomous and self-legislating, not subject to 'Gesetze und Wohlstand',⁵¹ but rather forming and defining these for himself, and thereby both legislating for society and indifferent to its rules. He is therefore free to neglect the normal requirements of sociability. Secondly, a truly anti-social existence requires the financial independence possessed by many nobles, and indeed by Werther, but not by Goethe, who in another of his identities was determined to make his way in a public career.

Extremes meet, however, and several noble characteristics will be common to the base and apex of society. Physical violence is an obvious example (Alcest, Herkules, Götz, Crugantino). The implicit critique of bourgeois society accounts for Goethe's interest in 'alternative lifestyles', with gypsies and robber bands on the fringes of society (*Götz, Jahrmarktsfest, Claudine*).⁵² Their prototype is Odysseus, a significant minor motif in *Werther*. Odysseus is a secret king, who like Goethe prefers to travel incognito, as a 'nobody', a vagabond and occasionally also a *Kraftkerl*. His later parodic counterparts will include the players in *WMTS*, both as fantasy kings, queens and nobles, and as real vagabonds.

Of the minor aristocratic characters the most developed is Fräulein von B. Werther presents himself as honestly desiring, even claiming, a right of acceptance within noble society, but the desire is unreal, just as one condition of his feeling for Charlotte is her inaccessibility.⁵³ This is clearly ambiguous, however, and the strength of the link between

⁵⁰ 'Ein junger Mensch, ich weiß nicht wie', FA 1.1:158.

⁵¹ *Werther*, 26 May [1771], p.28.

⁵² Thomas Frantzke, *Goethes Schauspiele mit Gesang und Singspiele 1773-1782* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1998), pp.99-111. Fernando might have been a 'Zigeunerhauptmann', and a violent and dangerous enemy of society, *Stella*, HA 4:327.

⁵³ FA 1.8:220. Commentators are agreed that the aggressive rudeness of his reply to her accusation of this is an admission of its truth. Cf. Kaempfer, 'Das Ich und der Tod', p.78.

the two women emphasizes the ambiguity. Before he meets Charlotte he is told she is engaged, and the circumstances of their meeting, with its oedipal implications, no doubt reinforce the taboo. It is further reinforced by a threatening older female figure who pointedly reminds her, in Werther's hearing, of Albert's rights. On the other hand Charlotte's own version is merely that she is 'as good as' engaged, and her manner on several occasions thereafter can be interpreted as flirtatious. The literally fatal attraction this combination exercises on Werther is clearly connected with his well-established lack of freedom with the physical.⁵⁴

The link between Charlotte and Fräulein von B. is made by Werther himself, and then heavily reinforced by verbal parallels.⁵⁵ On the one hand, she is safely, but again ambiguously unavailable by virtue of her noble status, similarly underlined by a threatening female authority figure, in this case her aunt. The ambiguity arises from her poverty, by Werther's standards, since a trade-off between wealth and nobility was the normal background to *mésalliance*.

The position of *mésalliance* in the contemporary novel was complex. Its comparative rarity in real life was offset by the common occurrence of 'hypergamie des femmes' (women marrying up) as a fantasy element in fiction. In Britain the stress on female gentility under the influence of Richardson meant that only women could do this, since female to male *mésalliance* risked implying a physical attraction towards the lower orders.⁵⁶ The only exception would be where the motive of the noble female could be presented as being financial. In Germany, by contrast, both forms of *mésalliance* were common in the general run of novels, a sign of a real difference in moral sentiment.⁵⁷ Indifference to class distinctions was a guarantee of *Empfindsamkeit*, of the possession of a beautiful soul, and this applied to women as well as men. Gellert's *Swedish Countess* is the best-known example, where the theme occurs both in the main plot and, with heavy emphasis, in the sub-plot. Goethe was not attracted by it: Fernando, for example, marries

⁵⁴ Hans Rudolf Vaget, 'Die Leiden des jungen Werthers (1774)', in Paul Michael Lützeler and James E. McLeod, eds., *Interpretationen: Goethes Erzählwerk* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1985), pp.37-72, here at pp.59-61; and id., 'Werther, the Undead', *GY*, 12 (2004), 17-29, at pp.23-6.

⁵⁵ *Werther*, 20 Jan. [1772], FA 1.8:134. Fräulein von B. is 'ein lebenswürdiges Geschöpf', who shows 'viel Freymüthigkeit' in permitting him to call on her, p.130; Charlotte is 'ein's der lebenswürdigsten Geschöpfe', p.36, and cf. pp.48, 211. She assures him 'mit der lebenswürdigsten Freymüthigkeit von der Welt' of her pleasure in waltzing, p.46.

⁵⁶ On the issue in general, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* [1957] (6th edn., London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), pp.159-60; Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), pp. 115-6.

⁵⁷ For examples, see Eva D. Becker, *Der deutsche Roman um 1780* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1963), esp. p.128.

beneath himself, Stella does not.⁵⁸ There is a parallel here with Loen, who has a cautionary tale of the ruinous consequences of a bourgeois marrying a noblewoman,⁵⁹ but who, by contrast, in *Der Adel* lectures his sons (the dedicatees) on the entire acceptability of a young nobleman marrying a bourgeois maiden, who might be better financially endowed than a noble counterpart, and not necessarily any worse educated (pp.225-8).

Werther does not think of Fräulein von B. in terms of marriage – she is rather a reincarnation of the ‘Freundin [s]einer Jugend’. Our estimation of her feelings depends on how we interpret her behaviour when they meet after the ‘expulsion’ scene. Her evident emotion has led at least one commentator to assume an element of attraction, but this goes beyond the text.⁶⁰

The close connection between the two women, despite the absence of emotional involvement in the latter case, is perhaps the key to an otherwise unexplained glimpse into Goethe’s working practice. Napoleon asked why Goethe had introduced the motif of ‘disappointed ambition’ into *Werther*, and complained that it was unnatural and weakened the effect of the main love story. According to Chancellor von Müller, this objection struck Goethe as ‘so richtig und scharfsinnig, dass er ihn späterhin oftmals gegen mich [v. Müller] mit dem Gutachten eines kunstverständigen Kleidermachers verglich, der an einem angeblich ohne Naht gearbeiteten Ärmel sobald die fein versteckte Naht entdeckt.’⁶¹

The carefully reinforced link between the two female characters is precisely such a ‘fein versteckte Naht’. Superficially it is merely part of the solution to the technical problem of integrating Goethe’s own Wetzlar experience (Charlotte) with Jerusalem’s (the court), but it points to a deeper, more precise answer to Napoleon’s criticism. Werther’s attraction to Charlotte is above all a search for an intimacy unmediated by adult convention and *Wohlstand*, such as he had enjoyed with the ‘Freundin [s]einer Jugend’. The nobility and

⁵⁸ See also above, p.22, n.3.

⁵⁹ Loen, *Der redliche Mann am Hofe*, pp.330-59. The theme is similar to that of Gustav Großmann’s *Nicht mehr als sechs Schüsseln* (1780), a favourite comedy of the 1780s, quoted by Goethe along with Gemmingen’s *Deutsche Hausvater* as typifying the new anti-aristocratic trend in the drama, FA 1.14:979 (and see below, pp.147-8).

⁶⁰ For an extreme instance, see R. C. Zimmermann, *Weltbild des jungen Goethe*, quoted H.-E. Friedrich, *Der Enthusiast und die Materie: von den ‘Leiden des jungen Werther’ bis zur ‘Harzreise im Winter’* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991), pp.122-3. Blanckenburg, one of the few contemporary critics who noticed the scene, made no such assumption, Karl Robert Mandelkow, ed., *Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker: Dokumente zur Wirkungsgeschichte Goethes in Deutschland*, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1975-84), i.76.

⁶¹ See the comments on the source (there quoted) in Kurt Rothmann, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente: Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971), p.150.

court life, personified by Fräulein von B, are, he hopes, a possible similar refuge. If we take Fräulein von B. as personifying this aspect of the court (that is, as regressive, even oedipal intimacy), the link between the court and Charlotte is clearer.

The key to unifying sociological and psychological approaches to *Werther* is not to postulate a personality type which is typical of, or produced by, bourgeois society or by the frustrations of a rising social class. It consists rather in identifying symptoms characteristic of relatively common personality disorders, and referring the forms taken by them to the contemporary social matrix. Like most neurotics, Werther uses different defences at different times, but is particularly prone to forms of narcissism and avoidant personality disorder.⁶² The symptoms consist of repeated flight from situations involving threat of conflict, but also in an assumption towards others, including his social equals, of an aloof superiority of which he seems unaware.⁶³ There is much use of distancing words such as ‘ehrlich’.⁶⁴ In so far as this contempt has any objective basis, it is partly intellectual (there is amusement over the ‘unglaubliche Verblendung des Menschensinns’),⁶⁵ but the fragility of the sense of superiority leads to a reluctance to engage in debate. His response to an invitation to discussion is either silence, a tirade or an affectation of amused superiority towards reason itself – ‘Ach ihr vernünftigen Leute! rief ich lächelnd aus.’⁶⁶

The aloofness of aristocracy is based on a superiority which is like Werther’s in being largely undefined, but unlike it in having no need to fear a lack of endorsement from society. It corresponds to the aloofness of the neurotic defence, to which he resorts whenever he meets with opposition, real or imagined, and whether social or intellectual. On the other hand, if the nobility fail to acknowledge his kinship with them, the defence can readily be used against them as well (their arrogance, poverty, unfashionable clothes, physical unattractiveness, and so on). This dynamic is inherently unstable, however, and is made more so by the reality element in the conflict.

⁶² See the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edn. (*DSM-IV*) (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), pp.658-61 and 662-5, on narcissistic and avoidant personality disorders respectively; and on narcissism, Kaempfer, ‘Das Ich und der Tod’.

⁶³ For an exception, see his awareness that the expulsion will be a pretext for his enemies to punish him for ‘meinen Uebermuth und Geringschätzung andrer, das sie mir schon lange vorwerfen’, *Werther*, 16 Mar. [1772], FA 1.8:146.

⁶⁴ The word has, of course, a superior, patronising tone, like its English equivalents ‘honest’ or ‘worthy’. It is used ten times in *Werther*, including twice about Albert. The basic ironic meaning is ‘simple’, in the sense of ‘too simple to deceive us’.

⁶⁵ *Werther*, 11 July [1771], FA 1.8:76.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 Aug. [1771], FA 1.8:94. The smile is symptomatic. Cf. the ‘cold smile’ with which he replies to Charlotte, FA 1.8:220, or the smile with which he replies to the Count in the ‘expulsion’ scene. It is still in place in the ‘Trilogie der Leidenschaft’: ‘Du lächelst, Freund, gefühlvoll, wie sich ziemt’, HA 1:381.

To stress the pathological nature of Werther is obviously not to deny the reality content of his experience. Indeed the European-wide *Rezeption* would have been unthinkable if the novel had been no more than what Goethe called it, a ‘*historia morbi*’,⁶⁷ presented with ironic subjectivity, like his much-admired *Manon Lescaut*. Werther’s hypersensitivity deprives his judgement of balance, but makes him an instrument capable of recording aspects of social reality with unusual precision. The indifference of the first reviewers to the social aspect, and notably to the ‘expulsion’ scene, has an exception in the most competent of them, C. F. von Blanckenburg, who addressed it, not without apology for treating at length so trivial an incident, but finding Werther’s account wholly credible, even asserting of his ‘annoyances’, that ‘wir nichts von ihnen hören, was wir nicht täglich sehen’, and assuming that Goethe had intended a straightforward attack on ‘unsre unsinnigen Gebräuche und Einrichtungen’, their ‘Abscheulichkeit’ and ‘Lächerlichkeit’ – ‘Welche Schmach für die Feierlichkeiten und die Pedantereien unsers deutschen Adels!’⁶⁸

At least one other contemporary, J. C. Riebe, also took the scene at face value, but justified the behaviour of the nobility. There were, after all, good reasons for the *Stände* to socialise separately. If they were too much in one another’s company, there was a risk that manners would be mutually contaminated, leading to lowness and vulgarity on the one hand and absurd pretentiousness on the other. The bourgeois might also, purely through ignorance of ‘die feinen Sitten’, fail to show due respect to persons of rank.⁶⁹ Apparently missing from contemporary reactions is any suggestion that the scene was implausible, despite its being specific to Wetzlar, which had a reputation for exaggerated social exclusiveness.

The weak historical position of the bourgeoisie contributed to a feeling of artificial constraint and exclusion from ‘die große Welt’. Conversely, an important group of images in Goethe centres on such words as ‘eng’, ‘Enge’, ‘beschränken’. They have an interest which may even be partly psychoanalytical, in the sense that they may reflect practices of child-rearing (‘Als ich noch ein Knabe war, / Sperrte man mich ein’),⁷⁰ but they also have, to a varying degree, a social content. On the one hand, ‘eng’ means ‘homely’, even ‘cosy’, but ‘Enge’ is also what Faust suffers from. A sense of constriction, of *Bevormundung*, links Werther with Faust, Tasso, Wilhelm Meister and of course Hamlet (the Hamlet who finds Denmark a prison and would be almost, but not quite, content to live in a nutshell).

⁶⁷ According to Lavater in a letter of 10.7.1777, quoted in full in Georg Jäger, *Die Leiden des alten und neuen Werther* [...] (Munich: Hanser, 1984), p.107.

⁶⁸ Mandelkow, *Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker*, i.76.

⁶⁹ Flaschka, *Goethes ‘Werther’*, pp.78-9.

⁷⁰ The influence of Rousseau on swaddling (in *Emile*) must be important here. See also *DuW*, HA 10:74.

Their archetype is the barber in 'Die neue Melusine', who finds to his apparent surprise that he has an ideal of himself, which makes it impossible for him to be happy living in a casket, even with a princess.⁷¹

As these examples show, there is a further social ambiguity here. The frowsy intimate warmth of Frankfurt may be a trap, but so too may palaces and courts. 'Palast' is especially ambivalent in Goethe.⁷² The topos of flight from courts and palaces begins early in Goethe with <Die königliche Einsiedlerin>, and at least as a mood, was permanent. 'Prächtige Gebäude und Zimmer sind für Fürsten und Reiche', he told Eckermann, and were quite contrary to his nature.⁷³

The image of the aristocracy in *Werther* is inevitably complex, ranging from hermit-like withdrawal to the harsh competitive world of bureaucratic work. The first nobleman to occur is the late Count M., a man with a feeling heart, who laid out an informal garden and whose favourite spot, a little ruined summerhouse, is now also Werther's; the last is a man of action and an intellectual ('ein Mann von Verstande'), but lacking in feeling and qualities of heart, and rejected by Werther on that account.⁷⁴ Apart from the theme of flight and withdrawal, Count M. at once establishes a key characteristic of the nobility in this text, the capacity to enhance, or aesthetically transform reality, through the kind of synthesis sometimes called 'Hegelian'. A park in the fashionable English style is Nature, but Nature raised to a higher level by art. Similarly Fräulein von B. will combine the courtly and the natural, and the manners of Count C. will be so refined as to be more than manners, rather a kind of superior sincerity. The paradox is perfectly expressed by his words to Werther in the 'expulsion' scene, deprecating court ceremonial and at the same time obeying its dictates. One of Werther's impossible demands of the court is that it must provide him with intimate friends who belong, and yet do not belong there.

This theme is continued in Werther's literary enthusiasms. In the patriarchal worlds of Homer and the Old Testament,⁷⁵ it had been possible to slaughter animals and roast them,

⁷¹ *WMW*, HA 8:375.

⁷² That is, where it is not simply a translation of *palazzo*. Among many examples, Pluto has a 'höllischen Palast', *Scherz, List und Rache*, I.736, FA 1.5:395, and Satan's 'Palast' features strongly in the 'Walpurgisnacht'. Tasso asks, 'Ist im Palast der freie Geist gekerkert?' (1348), as if this were a paradox, but moments later it will become literal fact. For walls and palaces in general, cf. 'An Werther', II.28-30, HA 1:381; 'Dauer im Wechsel', I.19, HA 1:247; *Tancred*, 1941-2, where neither appear in Voltaire's original, FA 1.11:653; and *Reise der Söhne Megaprazons*, FA 1.8:587.

⁷³ To Eckermann, 23.3.1829, FA 2.12:321.

⁷⁴ *Werther*, 4 May [1771], FA 1.8:12, 14; 11 June [1772], *ibid.*, p.154.

⁷⁵ The word 'patriarchalisch' is used of both.

without being, or becoming, a butcher or a cook. The suitors in the *Odyssey* are not degraded by such menial tasks; rather their status is asserted and confirmed by heroic violence.⁷⁶ The heroes of Ossian may be primitives, but their manners are so refined as to put us to shame.⁷⁷ The bathos of Werther's belief that he is following in the same tradition by boiling sugar peas is significant for his misunderstanding of art and especially literary mimesis.⁷⁸

Contrary to Rousseau, or even Herder, such enhancements of reality were not carried out by some supposed past aristocracy and memorialised by art. They are themselves a creation of art.⁷⁹ The literary styles of Homer or the authors of the Old Testament create worlds where aristocratic status is not incompatible with the mundane details of everyday life, nor with the violent resolution of personal conflict, nor with the entire absence of the kind of divided self typified by Werther and by us, the 'gute Seelen', his readers. If we mistakenly take these effects as historical reportage instead of the consequence of particular literary styles, we shall certainly find modern aristocracy degenerate. Heroic violence, in particular, will seem to have retreated to the very poor; hence Werther's extravagant expressions of inferiority towards the *Bauerbursche* in this episode in the second version.⁸⁰ Whether the modern aristocracy really is degenerate is a question Goethe would have answered in different ways at different stages in his career. For the author of *Götz* and *Werther*, it was enough that it had once embodied qualities not now to be found in society, except in the doubtfully relevant case of social outcasts.

Werther will soon succeed the count as 'Herr vom Garten', in a sense displacing him. His tears devoted to the memory of someone he has never met, and also his fantasy identification with the aristocracy, are early indications of mental disturbance. Such identification will recur in the case of the deranged clerk,⁸¹ but also in that of Werther himself with the heroes of Ossian.⁸² All three instances are associated with flight from society into rural solitude, and echo Werther's own repeated flights within the plot itself,

⁷⁶ They are described as 'die herrlichen übermüthigen Freyer der Penelope', *Werther*, 21 June [1771], FA 1.8:58; 'herrlichen' was dropped from the second version, but they are still objects of admiring imitation.

⁷⁷ See above, p.41, n.6.

⁷⁸ *Werther*, 21 June [1771], FA 1.8:58.

⁷⁹ On the effect and nature of the absence of *Stiltrennung* in Homer and the O.T., see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp.21-3.

⁸⁰ *Werther*, 4 Sept. [1772], FA 1.8:165.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 30 Nov. [1772], *ibid.*, pp.186, 188.

⁸² *E.g.*, *ibid.*, p.244.

from the first sentence onwards. Withdrawal of this kind, typical of *Empfindsamkeit*, will later be identified in a few cases with aristocracy (Fernando, Pedro, Crugantino).

Clearly related to Count M. is Fräulein von B., at once 'natural' and noble, at court but not of the court, and apparently willing to join Werther in dreams of flight into solitude.⁸³ Like Count C. she will be placed in a difficult social position by Werther, but unlike him will resort to sincerity, or at least to *Empfindsamkeit*, to exculpate herself. Significantly this is a serious failure of tact, whereas the display of courtly manners by Count C. is a brilliant success ('Sie wissen sagt er, unsere wunderbaren Verhältnisse'). The ability to seem sincere is much more valuable socially than actually to be so.

This point is worth stressing, since an alternative view is more general, and is argued strongly by Friedrich.⁸⁴ The suggestion here is that the Count's motive is merely a politic and hypocritical self-interest: Werther is not to be openly antagonised, since he has support at ministerial level. On this interpretation, he is at serious risk of misinterpreting courtly manners as intimacy, and we are to see pathos in his belief that he has found a kindred spirit in the Count on so brief an acquaintance. Friedrich aptly quotes Knigge on the danger of taking friendly overtures from the great at face value. They perhaps only wish to make use of us and will treat us with coldness, even contempt, once we have served their turn. He summarises: 'Zwei verschiedenen Lebenswelten mit unterschiedlichen Codes überlappen sich und geraten in Konflikt.'⁸⁵ This is entirely correct, but apart from the risk of leaving the text behind here, commentators, including Friedrich himself, seem to find great difficulty in treating the two codes with any approach to the even-handedness which Goethe surely requires. The question of whether the Count is actually sincere hardly arises. He is the product of an apprenticeship to nobility, which defines for him the crux of the situation as the preservation, or restoration, of a smooth social surface.

Such virtuosity is inherently ambiguous, however. Werther may not be the victim of the Count's manipulative social skill, but he is certainly its object, and although the scene is private between the two men, it is observed by us, the indignant readers. Our intense identification ensures that we anticipate his later humiliation. Setting aside the question of Werther's complicity, our sympathy is not entirely unjust. Social skill is a form of 'soft power', one of many to which the non-noble contemporary was regularly subjected. But of

⁸³ Ibid., 24 Dec. [1771], FA 1.8:130, 20 Jan. [1772], p.136.

⁸⁴ Friedrich, *Der Enthusiast und die Materie*, pp.100-2; cf. Müller, *Zeitkritik und Utopie*, pp.164-5.

⁸⁵ Friedrich, pp.100-1.

course Werther's complicity cannot be set aside, and as soon as we notice it, it should modify our initial impression more than it seems usually to have done.

The issue of manners, and especially courtly manners, is of great importance to Goethe and has been stressed, for example, by Jane K. Brown,⁸⁶ who however concentrates on the period from around 1790, and sees a move by him at about that time towards 'controlled civility', the aestheticisation of manners as a part of his political conservatism. But this theme is already present in *Werther*, although probably not in any of the earlier works considered so far (*Die Laune des Verliebten*, another celebration of social skill, is a possible exception), and it is one of the unifying bridges between Werther's psychology and the treatment of aristocracy. In Werther's own *Selbstdarstellung* his intensity of feeling places him above considerations of manners, since they impose themselves between impulse and action, and unmediated action on impulse is the guarantee of sincerity.

Of course Werther does not think of himself as having bad manners. He has the normal, universal instinct that the manners of others are either bad (and he has much to say about bad manners), good, in the sense of natural and sincere (like his own), or superior, that is, artificial and unnatural. 'Natur' is the key term. He approves of Fräulein von B., for example, because she has 'sehr viele Natur mitten in dem steifen Leben erhalten', that is, in court life.⁸⁷ He believes himself to be in an unusually close relationship with 'Natur', whom he will later call upon to mourn his death.⁸⁸

Repeatedly in *Werther*, *Tasso*, *WML* and elsewhere, conflicts between 'natural behaviour' and aristocratic manners will arise. In *Werther*, these manners show a triumphant social poise and are to be assessed positively. Count C.'s finesse, in particular, both extracts Werther from the company, to its general satisfaction, and at the same time enables him to retire in good order with his defences intact: 'Ich machte der vornehmen Gesellschaft mein Compliment.'⁸⁹ The choice of adjective has ironic overtones ('elegant', 'distinguished'), to make the point clear. Evidently aware that he was still being misunderstood, Goethe strengthened the passage in rewriting: 'Ich strich mich sacht aus der vornehmen

⁸⁶ Jane K. Brown, 'Goethe: the politics of allegory and irony', in Daniel W. Conway and John E. Seery, eds., *The politics of irony: essays in self-betrayal* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), pp.53-71, here at p.65.

⁸⁷ *Werther*, 24 Dec. [1771], FA 1.8:130. For the concept in general in this text, see Erna Merker and others, *Wörterbuch zu Goethes Werther* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966), s.v.

⁸⁸ *Werther*, p.248.

⁸⁹ 15 Mar. [1772], p.142.

Gesellschaft',⁹⁰ where verb, adverb and adjective heavily underline the conscious irony.⁹¹ The misunderstandings continued, however. The picture of a sensitive soul crushed and humiliated by aristocratic arrogance apparently met a contemporary need which precluded careful reading of the text.

Werther is much given to a construction in the form:

'I felt [x], and so (inevitably, immediately) I did [y]'

where [x] is one of a range of emotions, presented as overpowering, and [y] a breach of decorum, usually fairly minor, but to which he is in any case indifferent. For example:

Ich hab's nicht überwinden können, ich mußte zu ihr hinaus.
[...] kam ich eben ausser mich und sagte ihr alles was ich mußte
Mir wurmte das, und ich konnte nicht umhin [...] den Faden zu ergreifen, und recht herzlich gegen die üble Laune zu reden.
meine Unruhe lies mich nicht lange sizzen, ich stand auf, trat vor sie [...], etc.⁹²

Action without reflection guarantees sincerity. His practice is backed up by implied precept, especially in the important letter of 26 May 1771.⁹³ His main point here is aesthetic: there are rules in art but they are not for the great artist, whose allegiance must be to Nature alone. Adherence to rules is for the mediocre, and may even condemn a great artist to minor performance. This is reinforced by two analogies, with romantic love and, more significantly, with civil society.⁹⁴ The rules of social behaviour ('Gesezze und Wohlstand') will prevent a man from being an absolute villain or even a bad neighbour, but by analogy with the artist's case, will destroy true sincerity of expression. The passage develops a sophisticated series of antitheses, with social implications. Associated with the mediocre artist, the slave to rules, is the well-mannered good neighbour, the 'Philister, ein

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.143.

⁹¹ 'Vornehm' in Goethe before about 1790 is largely confined to cases where the speaker is (a) being consciously ironical or sarcastic, as here, or (b) where the context supplies the irony, normally by reflecting and commenting above the speaker's head on his social unsophistication. Among numerous examples of (a) we have Lieschen at the well: 'Das ist das Vornehmtun!' (*Urfaust*, 1240); or Goethe himself reproaching a friend for being a bad correspondent: 'Ich glaube gar du bist in Dessau vornehm geworden' ('very grand'), letter to Behrisch, 4.12.1767, WA 4.1:153; or again, in a very private scrap of paper: 'Wenn mann die vornehmen Leut ansieht so hungerts einen. Obs ist weil sie alle schulden haben', *DjG*, v.382. As an example of (b), Thomas, in *Jery und Bätely*, thinks that 'ein Soldat sieht immer vornehmer aus als ein Bauer', FA 1.5:205. To take the word seriously and analytically, and to query its normal social/ethical use, as Metzler does in the stage version of *Götz*, is the mark of a dangerous radical, FA 1.6:405. This is a later development, however.

⁹² From FA 1.8:38, 44 (where the breach of decorum is explicit, and has to be mended by Charlotte), 64 and 116 respectively. Werther's defence of suicide as the outcome of an irresistible impulse is relevant here, as is the *Bauerbursche* episode in the rewritten version.

⁹³ Ibid., pp.26, 28.

⁹⁴ 'bürgerlich[e] Gesellschaft'. The word occurs unambiguously in *Werther* both as 'civil' and as 'bourgeois'. The aunt of Fräulein von B. looks down 'von ihrem Stokwerk herab über die bürgerlichen Häupter', 24 Dec. [1771], FA 1.8:132, but this is the only case where 'bourgeois' or 'middle-class' is absolutely required.

Mann, der in einem öffentlichen Amte steht' (and is surely middle-class), and the prudent and moderate lover. These are summed up as 'die gelaßnen Kerls' with their 'Gartenhäuschen, Tulpenbeete, und Krautfelder'. The contrast is with the great artist, the follower of Nature, the (perhaps) bad neighbour (at least to the extent of being neglectful of the rules of courteous behaviour), the passionate lover and the 'Genie', who in full flood washes away the garden houses and flower-beds of the bourgeoisie.⁹⁵

If philistine mediocrity is bourgeois, we might expect genius, its antithesis, to have a social counterpart in the nobility, and if this antithesis is not explicit, we are entitled to supply it, even if only as an aporetic implication, especially since the bourgeoisie is associated not merely with mediocrity, but with social falseness and constraint, qualities which, in the existing tradition were rather among the defining characteristics of the nobility. Werther longs for a lost ideal of 'natural', unconstrained social intercourse, unconstrained, that is, by formality of manners. He evokes the memory of the 'Freundin meiner Jugend', an older woman with whom his relations had been at the same time entirely in accordance with Nature, and had borne the stamp of genius, as he oddly but significantly puts it.⁹⁶

The 'Genie' is thus once more associated with an idealised absence of social constraint, although here the oedipal tone suggests one of his several attempts to recreate a mother-child nexus. This is, of course, also part of the significance of Fräulein von B., and of the aristocracy in general, fantasised as the locus of an ideally harmonious social intercourse, based not on the artifice of manners but on an impossible regressive, familial intimacy. The intense bitterness of his reference to the class barriers between himself and the court is to be attributed to this essentially oedipal exclusion.⁹⁷ His mind holds a loosely established connection of ideas between Nature, behaviour which is 'natural' (in the sense of unconstrained, not rule-bound), the 'Genie' (himself) and the nobility. The absurdity of this, especially as regards the nobility, is being consciously exploited by Goethe as a theme. One of his main interests is in what may be called the paradox of manners.

Werther is not, of course, unaware that manners are more formal at court. Soon after his arrival he tells Charlotte with heavy irony that he has already become *galant* ('artig'), and

⁹⁵ The 'Genie' as bad neighbour was taken up by Nicolai in *Die Freuden des jungen Werther*, Klaus R. Scherpe, *Werther und Wertherwirkung: zum Syndrom bürgerlicher Gesellschaftsordnung im 18. Jahrhundert* (Bad Homburg von der Höhe: Gehlen, 1970), photographic reprint, p.55.

⁹⁶ *Werther*, 17 May [1771], FA 1.8:20.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 Dec. [1771], p.130.

a social success, especially with the ladies.⁹⁸ His ironical point is that court life depends on verbal display and on gallantry, both for him nauseatingly outdated forms. Relations between the sexes, in particular, are still based on the baroque model of sham warfare (sieges, defence, conquests). He could play the game, were he not repelled by its formality (that is, by its status as a game), which he associates with insincerity.

To Werther's sensibility no delaying strategies are necessary or desirable between first acquaintance and social intimacy. We recognise kindred spirits easily and immediately, as he will do with the first three noble characters, but not the prince. Conversation, a social skill, and one which was studied in the eighteenth century as never before, is inherently suspect. Social fluency is the opposite of naturalness, which is expressed either by monologues, or by tears or pointed silence (forms of aphasic jamming), or by allusive, elliptical short-cuts, sometimes based on shared cultural experience, but in any case leading directly to intimacy ('Klopstock!').⁹⁹ Behaviour of this kind has its obvious analogue in the stylistic mannerisms of a literary clique (the Sturm und Drang itself, or indeed the readers of the novel).

Given Werther's thwarted search for ideal intimacy, the crucial relationship is with Fräulein von B. He is at first on his best behaviour, formally asking permission to call on her, but there is pathos already in his over-eager response to perceived informality on her part.¹⁰⁰ Within a month, if we believe him, the acquaintance has developed into relative intimacy. She has assured him that her noble status is a burden to her, and satisfies none of the wishes of her heart. They join in fantasies of flight into a rural idyll, intermixed with lengthy praises of Charlotte from Werther, which are listened to by Fräulein von B. with enthusiasm, even reverence. Surely scepticism is in order here: rather than a meeting of souls, we have prolonged rhapsodies on the one side and formal politeness on the other.

The paradox of manners in Werther's case is that while he deplores them as insincere, his own lack of them makes him unusually dependent on good manners in others, to prevent or

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 Jan. [1772], p.134.

⁹⁹ Some of the issues involved here are dealt with by Edgar Landgraf, 'Self-Forming Selves: Autonomy and Artistic Creativity in Goethe and Moritz', *GY*, 11 (2002), 159-76, esp. at pp.170-1. He points out the irony that in the case of seduction, the Sturm und Drang mannerisms can in turn become strategies to be imitated. Elsewhere he discusses the Lord Derby of La Roche, a would-be seducer who in an almost Darwinian adaptation develops a new rhetoric of inwardness and apparent sincerity to suit a new kind of victim (pp.119-25 in the Reclam edn. of the novel), Landgraf, 'Romantic Love and the Enlightenment: From Gallantry and Seduction to Authenticity and Self-Validation', *German Quarterly*, 77.1 (2004), 29-46. Faust in the garden scene shows signs of having learned the same lesson.

¹⁰⁰ 'Sie gestattete mir das mit so viel Freymüthigkeit, daß ich den schicklichen Augenblick kaum erwarten konnte', *ibid.*, 24 Dec. [1771], FA 1.8:130.

repair breaks in the social fabric. Since the best manners are to be found among the nobility, where they are so good as to be indistinguishable from sincerity, at least by Werther, he is even correct in believing that this is where he belongs, although hardly as he supposes. The further question of whether the antithesis between good manners and sincerity is not itself a false one hangs over *Werther*, especially for the reader of later texts such as *Tasso* and *WML*, but is not yet fully addressed. There are even passages in the letters and elsewhere which suggest that in this area the future bear in Lili's park still had lessons of his own to learn.

Chapter 3: From *Werther* to the court at Weimar

If Götz himself was to have no lasting progeny in Goethe's works, as in life, Weislingen was to have them in profusion. The link with Clavigo was made by Goethe himself. Clavigo, like Weislingen, is a careerist, with a brilliant future which will almost certainly take him into the nobility. Such a career involves role performances, and the play is much concerned with performing and self-dramatising. Beaumarchais, Clavigo and Carlos all perform roles at different points, and Marie sometimes dreams of becoming a Spanish woman and reaching (theatrically) for the dagger and the poison bowl.¹

Bernd Fischer discussed the social background in a controversial article.² His thesis centres on Clavigo as a new social phenomenon, the *bildungsbürgerliche* official. He considers the originality of Goethe by positing versions of the play in the manner of Diderot and the *comédie larmoyante* (Clavigo returns to Marie and a contented middle-class marriage), the Sturm und Drang (the focus moves to Beaumarchais, who will become a successful revenger, probably at the cost of his life), and so on. He concludes that the closest parallel is with the French heroic tragedy of the early eighteenth century (the hero is summoned to play a great role on the world stage, and is in a love and duty conflict, which he will resolve by choosing duty and living with the necessary burden of guilt). This seems plausible, especially when we consider Sesenheim and Weimar, but of course Goethe has not so much undermined this model as entirely reversed it by irony. The bourgeois/nobility antithesis is only one between love and duty in the entirely unreliable perspective of the hero.

Clavigo's future is presented to us, both by himself and Carlos, as the triumph of ambition. He will become a powerful administrator, be personally ennobled and marry into the established nobility. His career will benefit his country, if we accept his assumption that he is the best man for the job, but there is no hint of a reform programme, or of any political reason why we should regard it positively. If the focus is on duty, it is entirely the duty of self-development, of the cultivation of innate abilities, which Kant prescribed in the *Grundlegung* and elsewhere.³ Whether the attainment of noble status is part of this

¹ Gaby Pailer, 'Identität als Inszenierung: Soziales, nationales und geschlechtliches Rollenbewusstsein in Goethe's *Clavigo*', in Matthias Luserke, ed., *Goethe nach 1999: Positionen und Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), pp.99-110.

² Bernd Fischer, 'Goethe's *Clavigo*: Das Melodrama des Bildungsbürgers im Trauerspiel des Sturm und Drang', *GY*, 5 (1990), 47-64.

³ For the *Grundlegung*, Kant's *gesammelte Schriften*, 4.422-3. The point is developed in *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, *ibid.*, 6.473-4.

duty, or merely a reward for its performance, is unspecified. Since refusal to step on to the public stage is in part presented as a retreat, almost as social flight, it conflicts with another duty about which Kant was clear, but which seems to be implied also in Goethe, the duty not to isolate oneself, but to contribute to social intercourse.⁴ In any case, this is not the standard love and duty conflict, but a conflict between duties.

Clavigo has a bourgeois substrate which serves as his conscience, but in an anticipation of Wilhem Meister, dreams of advancing by *Selbstdarstellung*. The key passage is the famous conversation between Clavigo and Carlos, which turns into a sophisticated discussion of being for oneself and being for others (286-96),⁵ and to which the context gives clear social implications. Clavigo initially presents himself as embodying a contented, inner-directed bourgeois ideal. He will have a quiet wedding, without outward show, 'Wie Menschen, die fühlen, daß ihr Glück ganz in ihnen selbst beruht' (287).

The ethic behind Carlos's argument, as it develops, is at least partly aristocratic, especially since he presents himself as the voice of (Spanish) society, and the play trades heavily on an antithesis between France/bourgeoisie and Spain/aristocracy.⁶ France and the French characters represent the bourgeois ethical norm; Spain is a place of seeming, a theatrical stage on which to perform and present the self – that of a typical Spanish woman, for example, 'eine stattliche, herrliche, hochäugige Spanierin', who lets her train sail out as far as possible, 'um ihre Erscheinung ansehnlicher und würdiger zu machen' (291).

The demands of Spanish society are therefore inherently aristocratic; but Carlos is not crudely preaching total subjection to those demands. Certainly for Clavigo to abandon Marie will be to become 'a second king', to satisfy potentially limitless ambition. On the other hand, Carlos's ethic can allow for at least one alternative self-image. The husband of the pretty chambermaid has to some extent defied society by a kind of (bourgeois) *mésalliance*, but is still happy from a sense of being envied. What is impossible is to be happy without a consciousness of being either envied or admired.

⁴ That man is a social animal and unable to live a solitary life is strongly insisted on by Spinoza, E4p35s, and for Shaftesbury, see below, pp.93-5.

⁵ *Clavigo* is quoted by page number from HA 4:260-306.

⁶ Clavigo edits an improving weekly review, as well as holding a crown appointment, but he is an outsider, even a foreigner ('einen Fremden', 261), from the Canary Islands. Moreover he is already a courtier ('Höfling', 265). His status is in every way anomalous, and this is part of the originality of the conception. One of its key innovations is the displacement of the inherent social conflict to *within* the protagonist, as pointed out by Joachim Heimerl, 'Der moderne Charakter: Das Trauerspiel *Clavigo* als Schlüsselwerk des jungen Goethe', *Euphorion*, 100 (2006), 11-27, here at p.14. 'Der moderne Charakter' is from Hegel, and refers to personalities who are internally divided, and thus paralysed and indecisive, but of course this merely puts Clavigo in line with Alcest, Weislingen, Werther, Fernando and others.

CARLOS: [...] Denn daß einer aus Leidenschaft einen seltsamen Streich macht, das laß ich gelten. Ein Kammermädchen zu heiraten, weil sie schön ist wie ein Engel! gut, der Mensch wird getadelt, und doch beneiden ihn die Leute.

CLAVIGO Die Leute, immer die Leute.

CARLOS: Du weißt, ich frage nicht ängstlich nach anderer Beifall, doch das ist ewig wahr: wer nichts für andere tut, tut nichts für sich; und wenn die Menschen dich nicht bewundern oder beneiden, bist du auch nicht glücklich.

CLAVIGO: Die Welt urteilt nach dem Scheine. O! wer Mariens Herz besitzt, ist zu beneiden!

CARLOS: Was die Sache ist, scheint sie auch. (290)

The question of whether, or under what conditions, it is possible to rise in society without loss of integrity is familiar from English and French nineteenth-century novels, but is here being raised as tragic farce. The conventional critique of Merck, that the play was one which could have been written by a much lesser talent, with the implication that its subject matter was not of deep personal concern to Goethe, was precisely wrong, and we need only think of *Sesenheim* to see why this is so.

Since the pretty chambermaid is apparently unexplained by any of the play's editors, it should be noted that she is borrowed from the original source in Beaumarchais. Clavijo (or Clavico, as Beaumarchais calls him) had by his account given repeated promises and made repeated withdrawals and excuses. One of the excuses was a prior engagement to marry what he calls '*una dueña* (fille de chambre)'.⁷ This is a mistake or misunderstanding by Beaumarchais: the word means a landlady. Elsewhere in the same scene Carlos speaks of the many misspelt letters he has received from women as a result of his known friendship with Clavigo: 'Wie manche hübsche Duenna ist mir bei der Gelegenheit unter die Finger gekommen!' (288). This is another borrowing by Goethe from the same place, and should be translated 'Kammermädchen', not 'Herrin', or 'Frau des Hauses', as in FA and *GWb*.⁸

Carlos makes a difficult case with great skill. He does not argue that social seeming is (social) reality, nor that happiness is conditional on slavish obedience to society. Instead he reverses the first proposition, and allows the converse to be inferred as a corollary. The second proposition is conveyed by a rhetorical figure (a form of chiasmus): 'wer nichts für andere tut, tut nichts für sich', where the first 'für' means something like 'at the behest of', and the second 'for the advantage of'. The two meanings interact, and the implication is

⁷ Beaumarchais, *Œuvres*, ed. Pierre Larthomas (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), pp.914-5, and p.1581, n.3. She is described as 'jolie' on p.915.

⁸ FA 1.4:933 and *GWb*, s.v. 'Duenna'. The latter gives the spelling in the first edn. of *Clavigo* as 'Duena', obviously later hyper-corrected.

that to act selfishly is to do what society expects, indeed has a right to expect, and so is more or less a social duty. The interaction is helped by the word 'andere'. Never to think of other people before we act is almost the definition of selfishness. But if 'other people' means 'society', then it must be our duty to adapt our behaviour to society in such a way that it can never be ridiculous, in other words that it should be expertly conventional.

In view of Goethe's lifelong admiration for Molière, it is difficult not to think of *Le Misanthrope* at this point, even of Rousseau's passionate quarrel with it in the *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*.⁹ The implication is that the extraordinary man, the 'Genie', has a duty to himself, a duty not to be intimidated by moral considerations which would daunt 'einen gewöhnlichen Menschen' (288). This is above all a duty to act, to perform.

Faced with this rhetorical onslaught, Clavigo's pretence of being inner-directed collapses with farcical speed, and within a few lines he is asking for practical advice on how to extricate himself. The satire is harsh, but its immediate object is not the nobility, but social ambition, a further link with *Götz*. To be a *Bürger* is to possess a certain kind of ballast, which will have to be jettisoned to allow the empty vessel to rise. An implicit element of critique of the nobility remains, of course. Unless Clavigo's ambition is wholly unrealistic, which is nowhere suggested, noble society can be penetrated by those capable of playing, and willing to play, a certain role on the social stage. This is clearly related to the argument which Wilhelm will advance in the well-known letter to Werner.¹⁰

The sophistication of *Clavigo* is to some extent made possible by an evasion on Goethe's part. Spain is far enough removed from Germany for anti-aristocratic satire to avoid offence, certainly in the less hypersensitive world before 1789. Spanish aristocratic values differ from German ones in important respects. As in <Die königliche Einsiedlerin>, the court is a place of walls, of fawning courtiers and ceremonial (283), but it is the court of an all-powerful monarch. The king is always referred to with respect, but is too distant, too far above us to be an effectual force in our lives.¹¹ Guilbert insists, and Buenco cannot deny, that a courtier will have hired assassins in his pay, and that Clavigo may well employ

⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur son article Genève* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), pp.96-110; Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), pp.17-18. On Goethe, Molière and *Le Misanthrope* ('eins meiner liebsten Stücke in der Welt', to Eckermann, 28.3.1827, FA 2.12:590), see Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, pp.105-12. For the possible direct influence of the second *Discours* on the passage quoted above, see Stefania Sbarra, 'Der junge Goethe und Jean-Jacques Rousseau', *GJb*, 119 (2002), 23-41, at pp.40-41.

¹⁰ *WML*, FA 1.9:657-60.

¹¹ HA 4:266 (Beaumarchais) and 283 (Buenco).

one to get rid of Beaumarchais (283). Duelling on the other hand, at least according to Carlos, is absurd and quixotic (279, 295). All this is remote enough from German reality to enable Goethe to advance a radical questioning of the Sturm und Drang ideal, even in a context where it has strongly aristocratic associations, whereas if the play had been set in Germany, it could not have avoided an unwanted social critique, in the manner of *Kabale und Liebe*.

The *Urfaust* is linked to *Clavigo* not merely by the ‘Genie’ who is above normal moral considerations, but also by role performance, including aristocracy as role performance. Wagner thinks Faust’s ‘declamieren’ is from a Greek tragedy (*Urfaust*, 170);¹² a minister of religion will often only be an actor (174); the practice of medicine is largely a matter of self-confidence, an ‘act’ (413-6); Faust and Mephistopheles in Auerbach’s cellar have the unpleasantly superior air of nobility in disguise, but they too are perhaps only actors.¹³ Mephistopheles comes upon Gretchen dressed in jewels and pretends to take her for a ‘Fräulein’, as Faust had done. Her replies in both cases confidently assert her imperviousness to flattery, based on a sensible repression of social fantasy, but as we know from her soliloquies, her confidence is misplaced.

Aristocracy and the ‘Genie’ are linked, among other characteristics, by sexual attractiveness. This theme had been central to *Die Mitschuldigen*, continues in various forms in the line descending from Weislingen, and is treated farcically in *Satyros*. The ‘Genie’ has a capacity for *Selbstdarstellung*, a heightened intelligence and fluency which are forms of power. On the other hand the ideal also rests on a concept of nature, viewed as sincerity and authenticated by behaviour which is truthful, unselfconscious and unconstrained, as in *Werther*. These two halves of the ideal are not easily compatible, and in the *Urfaust* Goethe deliberately forces them apart.

The key scene is 879-924, between Mephistopheles and Faust. Faust is reluctant to lie about the death of Marthe’s husband. Mephistopheles pointedly asks whether his courtship of Gretchen that evening will be truthful. He replies in true Sturm und Drang terms: the intensity of his feelings will guarantee his sincerity. This develops into a debate on spontaneity, sincerity and the insincerity of seeming sincere. Faust in the end takes refuge in a plea of necessity, a submission to compulsion, but cannot then go on pretending, even

¹² Verse from the *Urfaust* is cited by line number from HA 3:365-420, prose by page number.

¹³ BRANDER: Still! Das ist was Vornehmes inkognito, sie haben so was Unzufriednes Böses im Gesicht.

SIEBEL: Pah! Komödianten, wenns hoch kommt (p.381).

to himself, that his actions will be an aristocratic defiance of bourgeois *Frauendienst*. The passage is one of several studies in akrasia in early Goethe, and as in other cases, the inner voice of the Sturm und Drang 'Genie' is a call to moral failure.

Mephistopheles is clearly aristocratic, although the heavy and persistent emphasis on this comes later, from passages not in the *Urfaust* as we have it. The aristocracy had been seductive long before Lovelace, and the devil has been seducing women since the book of Genesis. Faust's progress as a pupil will be measured by his success in defying his bourgeois conscience. We have already seen him modelling his behaviour on the prince in *Emilia Galotti* by accosting Gretchen on her way from church, and in the above scene we have him as 'Zauberlehrling', using the rhetorical techniques of seduction against his own conscience as a trial run for their use against Gretchen.

The exceptional man has a right to rise in society and feels the rigidity of its structure as an intolerable constraint. This applies to Weislingen, and in part also to Werther and Clavigo, but certainly to Faust, part of whose initial complaint is of a lack of 'Ehr und Herrlichkeit der Welt' (22). The three elements of the *Urfaust*, the discontented scholar, the university satire and the *Gretchentragödie*, which Willoughby thought 'imperfectly related',¹⁴ are perhaps linked not merely by Mephistopheles, but by nobility as defiance of social norms, especially if we take the Gretchen episode as at least beginning with Faust making a clumsy attempt to ape the gallantry of his betters. Much of this is only implied in the *Urfaust*, however, and does not become explicit until later. The 'Flohlid', for example, is already *Hofkritik*, although heavily discounted by coming from Mephistopheles; in *Faust I*, by contrast, it is followed by the much more elaborate *Hofkritik* of the 'Walpurgisnacht' scene.

Apart from *Götz*, the works discussed so far have shown only a slight tendency for socially elitist attitudes to merge with those of the Sturm und Drang. A more pronounced trend in that direction can be seen in the four main texts from the year before Weimar: 'Salomons Königs von Israel und Juda güldne Worte von der Ceder biss zum Issop', *Stella*, *Claudine von Villa Bella* and the contributions to Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente*.

The cedar tree is still the artist rather than the literal aristocrat, but his special status is now elevated with what Boyle fairly calls 'a stagey arrogance'.¹⁵ The mere use of species as

¹⁴ L. A. Willoughby, ed., *Goethe's Urfaust and Faust, ein Fragment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946), p.xxi.

¹⁵ Boyle, *Goethe*, i.201. The text is taken from *DjG*, v.357-9.

metaphor for types or classes of humanity is symptomatic of this, although it goes back to Goethe's Pindar reception of 1772 and to 'Der Adler und die Taube' (undated, but perhaps from the same year). The cedar is naturally loftier than the other trees, which arouses resentment, but also attempts at imitation. The envious bushes pray to heaven to ruin it, although the wind through its branches spreads the perfume of balsam through the land. Men come from the sea and chop it down, and the bushes meanly rejoice ('Also strafet der Herr die Stolzen, also demütigt er die Gewaltigen!'), but it crushes them in its fall.¹⁶ The nobility of the cedar is self-pitying in its isolation: 'Ich habe auch Brüder, sagt die Ceder wenn gleich nicht auf diesem Berge.' We hear of pine trees, bushes and grass, all with an evident social sub-text, even of a parrot who comes from the 'Residenz' and is obviously a courtier. As befits the purported author, a great king as well as an artist, the moral is in part political, and might be that of the review in the *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen* quoted above (p.36), that is, contentment with the social or intellectual species to which we have been assigned, together with an absence of envy towards our superiors.

Fernando in *Stella* is, like Clavigo, a variant of Weislingen, but with a radically different viewpoint. Clavigo is called upon by Carlos to defy his bourgeois conscience and claim for himself the moral privileges of the 'Genie', which will include infidelity and access to the aristocracy. In *Stella* we have two aristocrats and a third main character with a number of aristocratic characteristics. All three, by virtue of their status, are already entitled to claim the society-defying privileges of the Sturm und Drang.¹⁷ Fernando, however, soon also emerges as another Alcest, especially in what Borchmeyer calls his 'Unentschiedenheit [...] zwischen bürgerlichem und adligem Liebesethos'.¹⁸ The legend of the Graf von Gleichen underwrites this conception of the *Adel* in the first version, but self-evidently Fernando can only represent a degeneracy from the heroic middle ages and Goethe's necessary ambiguity here made him dissatisfied with the original version.¹⁹

Any approach to *Stella* in its social aspects must begin with heavy concessions to feminist, and indeed pre-feminist comment.²⁰ Denunciation of 'Fernando's worthlessness and the

¹⁶ Ibid., p.357.

¹⁷ ' Erotische Freizügigkeit gehört in das höfliche und zu den Privilegien des Adels', Helmut Bachmeier, in the 'Nachwort' to the Reclam edn., p.61, and cf. Lothar Pikulik, 'Stella: Ein Schauspiel für Liebende', in Walter Hinderer, ed., *Goethes Dramen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992), pp.89-103.

¹⁸ *Johann Wolfgang Goethe Frühes Theater*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1982), Nachwort, p.568.

¹⁹ Cf. 'Es war ein König in Thule', whose pathos derives precisely from the singer's sense that such a relationship could have existed, but only far away and long ago.

²⁰ See, e.g., Gail K. Hart, 'Voyeuristic Star-Gazing: Authority, Instinct and the Women's World of Goethe's *Stella*', *Monatshefte*, 82.4 (1990), 408-20; and her *Tragedy in Paradise: Family and*

wildly disproportionate treatment he is accorded' is no doubt entirely in place.²¹ Lothar Pikulik claimed that the background is the relationship with Lili Schönemann, with whom he believed Stella to have features in common.²² This only aggravates the offence, however, by stressing an element of private fantasy, and by undermining the defence that Goethe is addressing a real psycho-social problem. Nevertheless, we might ask rhetorically whether Fernando is more 'worthless' than Don Giovanni, or whether the treatment of the latter is 'wildly disproportionate'. The male aristocrat was a problem for the bourgeois marriage as affective contract, socially (no doubt to a decreasing extent), but also as both male and female fantasy, and if Goethe was willing to point this out, that was presumably a public service. Of course Don Giovanni will burn in hell, but any complaint that Fernando is over-indulged in the original version by not coming to a satisfyingly bad end merely repeats the naïveté of contemporary Enlightened critics who demanded a more morally explicit ending to *Werther*.

In one respect, the distance from 'Der wahre Genuß', *Die Mitschuldigen* or even *Werther*, can hardly be exaggerated: the bourgeoisie is now typified by marriage as dullness and respectability, the aristocracy by passion and defiance of social norms. As Borchmeyer points out, defiance can hardly take the form of Fernando having an aristocratic wife and a middle-class mistress, since this was a recognised social institution.²³ Instead the moral radicalism is stepped up by seduction, *mésalliance*, and in the case of Stella herself a baroness as embodiment of the virtues both of the Sturm und Drang and of *Empfindsamkeit*. An obvious problem with this structure is the heroine, who is clearly weakened by social unreality, by our feeling that she is as much a bourgeois fantasy as Adelheid. Indeed the two are linked. From a female perspective, women can only interact with the *Kraftkerl* either by horrifyingly ruthless competition, or by succumbing to, even acquiescing in, victim status. But *Machtweib* and victim are also linked, as we see from Adelheid herself. From a male perspective, an occasional boredom with the passivity of the one can be compensated for by a fascination with the other. Goethe's experimental compromise is an aristocrat with both victim and *Machtweib* characteristics.

Gender Politics in German Bourgeois Tragedy 1750-1850 (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996), pp.421-54.

²¹ Hart, 'Voyeuristic Star-Gazing', p.417, giving what she describes as the general view of previous critics.

²² Pikulik, 'Stella: Ein Schauspiel für Liebende', p.94.

²³ Borchmeyer, however, rather underplays the moral shock of such a reversal to an eighteenth-century audience, especially the symbolism of Stella herself, and of course of the *ménage à trois*, FA 1.4:994-5. The success of parodies of *Stella*, as of *Werther*, highlights the embarrassment felt by contemporaries.

For all that is new in *Stella*, we still have the aristocracy as display as opposed to intimacy, although display now includes tirades, in the Sturm und Drang manner. Aristocracy is typified by a stress on exteriors, especially portraits (the words ‘Bild’, ‘Porträt’, ‘Gemälde’ recur). Stella pictures the absent Fernando in her mind, or, as she puts it, ‘Eh ich mich’s verseh, wieder sein Bild!’ (319).²⁴ Later she raises judgement by externals to a point of principle: ‘Ihr sollt sein Porträt sehn! – sein Porträt – O, mich dünkt immer, die Gestalt des Menschen ist der beste Text zu allem, was sich über ihn empfinden und sagen läßt’ (322). She possesses a picture of Venus, which she twice addresses as ‘Göttin’ (324); finally, much too late, she becomes aware of a gap between image and reality: ‘Edler! – Ha, Edler! – Meine Jugend! – meine goldnen Tage! – Und du trägst die tiefe Tücke im Herzen!’ (342). Her reaction, somewhat illogically from this point of view, is to set about Fernando’s portrait with a knife. The immediate focus here is on the pathos of her susceptibility, but there is a more distant one also on Fernando. To have the infallible charm of nobility is to have, and consciously or unconsciously to exercise, power over others, and thus to incur guilt.

In the Singspiel texts we might expect Goethe to indulge in mild social criticism, since this was conventional.²⁵ In fact, ‘konzilient’ as ever, in *Erwin und Elmire* he removed an element of social conflict from his source in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and confined the milieu to the prosperous bourgeoisie. In *Claudine von Villa Bella*, even more unconventionally, all but very minor characters belong to the aristocracy. In the first case the debate element is a discussion of Rousseauistic ideas of education, viewed as newfangled nonsense, and by implication as an inappropriate attempt to imitate the nobility. In the second case the attack is on both Empfindsamkeit and an aspect of the Sturm und Drang, by means of parody.

Since this is not the usual view of the first version of *Claudine*, it must be briefly defended. In the past attention has centred on Crugantino, viewed sometimes as a self-portrait of Goethe at his most socially defiant, or at any rate as ‘der eigentliche Revolutionär im Goetheschen Jugendwerk’.²⁶ W. Daniel Wilson has argued for a link between Crugantino and the *Genietreiben* of the early Weimar period, and therefore by implication for a

²⁴ Page references to *Stella* are to HA 4:307-51.

²⁵ For the Singspiel and its links with the English ballad opera, the *opéra comique* and the *opera buffa*, see Hans-Albrecht Koch, ‘Die Singspiele’, in Hinderer, *Goethes Dramen*, pp.42-64. All have a parodistic relationship with court opera.

²⁶ Fischer-Lamberg, quoted in Fehr, *Der junge Goethe*, p.177. For Crugantino and Goethe, see, e.g., Boyle, *Goethe*, i.215-6, Wilson, ‘Young Goethe’s Political Fantasies’, pp.197-202.

favourable view of him by Goethe himself, even a virtual identification.²⁷ If we accept this, it points firmly to an identity between aristocracy, admittedly in Spain, and the Sturm und Drang in a closer sense than in any of Goethe's works since the entirely special case of *Götz*. The figure of Crugantino is complex, however, arguably as complex within its limits as *Götz*, and like *Götz*, he cannot be taken entirely at his own valuation, as Professor Wilson's argument perhaps requires. A case will be made below for a strong element of self-parody, in the manner of *Satyros* or *Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*.

Wolfgang Fehr has protested against the usual foregrounding of Crugantino, but his alternative is to concentrate rather on the heroine: 'Die Emanzipation der Tochter, die Subjektwerdung Claudines, ist der Lebensnerv des dargestellten Geschehens.'²⁸ This is very paradoxical, however, since in fact Claudine passes from the care of her father to that of her prospective husband within less than twenty-four hours, during which she makes a brief attempt to emancipate herself, and is punished with male violence and humiliation.

The text needs to be refocused on both figures as joint objects of parody, and to do this it is helpful to refer to a source, Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which, though obvious, seems not to be mentioned by any recent commentator or editor.²⁹ It is linked to *Claudine* by *Räuberromantik*, with a robber band led by one of the noble heroes, and by critical difficulties arising from the fact that Proteus, like Crugantino, is an unsuccessful rapist,³⁰ who is almost immediately pardoned by his victim's lover in the interests of a happy ending. In the former case one editor has argued for an element of parody, directed against the Renaissance ideal of male friendship and 'greenwood' pastoral.³¹ In the case of *Claudine* the corresponding targets are *Empfindsamkeit* and an aspect of the Sturm und Drang.

The parody of *Empfindsamkeit* is self-evident. The heroine incorporates tearful sensitivity to a degree which cannot be seriously intended. One of the envious nieces says of her that the chaste moon makes her weep (Sibylle, 228),³² the other that she cries over a blade of grass or a daisy (Camille, 227), and in fact her repeated tearfulness and lapses into unconsciousness are notorious. The older generation, to whom we might look for

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.197-9.

²⁸ Wolfgang Fehr, *Der junge Goethe: Drama und Dramaturgie – eine analysierende Gesamtdarstellung* (Paderborn: Igel, 1994), p.179.

²⁹ The play was not referred to by Goethe before 1779, but Wieland's translation had appeared in 1765.

³⁰ *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 5.4.59; *Claudine von Villa Bella*, HA 4:249-50.

³¹ See the edn. by Kurt Schlueter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.14-17.

³² Page references are to HA 4:216-59.

opposition to the lovers, if only to provide an element of plot, are sentimental matchmakers ('Daß wir Alten gleich verheiraten!', Gonzalo, 220); and the lover himself, Pedro, a successful civil servant, thinks nature so beautiful that he would wish to withdraw from court and live the rest of his life in a hut (224).

Clearly a heavy counterweight is required, and it is the completeness with which Crugantino fills this role that has attracted attention. He is an aristocrat, in fact an elder son, who is punctilious about points of honour and duelling, and haughtily tells Sebastian that his blood is as good as his (255). At the same time he has properly egalitarian attitudes and seems to have been reading Rousseau. He dresses in rags like the other vagabonds (229), and on being exposed claims, not the privileges of his rank, but those of a human being: 'Seid großmütig! ich bin ein Mensch' (255). He is a charismatic leader, but also an artist, with an awareness of the most recent trends, including an interest in folk ballads and popular culture (239-40). Goethe uses this to give him a link to Gonzalo, who has a Götz-like enthusiasm for peasant life and the old ways, and is dismissive of the court ('Das natürliche das beste!', 239). Crugantino, normally hostile and aggressive towards his elders, strongly agrees.

His war against society is expressed, not by robbing the rich like Karl Moor, but by seduction. As a fault line between official Sentimentalism and the Sturm und Drang seduction is crucial, and is harped on both by Crugantino himself (he sings two songs on the subject, 228-9 and 240-3), by Sebastian (221), by Pedro (225), and indeed by both lovers, who sing a duet in which Claudine asks, very pertinently, whether one can tell a seducer by sight (*ibid.*). Pedro assures her that although the villains 'verstellen sich', and look and sigh like true lovers, they cannot sustain this pose for long.

Appearance, deceptive or otherwise, leads to the related theme of physiognomics. Camille has only seen Crugantino, but has a Gretchen-like confidence that he must be rich and 'vornehm' ('das sieht man ihm an', 227); and the theme is continued by Crugantino, who tells Sebastian: 'Eure Habichtsnase sieht freilich in eine alte Familie' (255).³³ The whole text, however, is filled with appearances, deceptive and otherwise, helped by scenes at night. Crugantino has a mask and Claudine will later dress up in male attire.

³³ Noses are especially significant in this respect. The emperor Titus, for example, had a nose which was '[h]öchst edel und trefflich', FA 1.18:164; that of Brutus was of a 'gelinde kraftvolle Erhabenheit', *ibid.*, p.166.

Seduction has at least two aspects. It is aristocratic but also socially disruptive, an attack on the rights of fathers and husbands. This is especially true in an aristocratic milieu, based to an exaggerated degree on blood and on purity of lines of inheritance. As a crime against property it is not to be sharply distinguished from rape, which a woman who removes herself from patriarchal protection is risking as a matter of course. When mildly reproved by Pedro for his attempt on Claudine, Crugantino feels he has a strong defence:

Vergrößert meine Schuld nicht; ich will sie tragen, wie sie ist. Aber gesteht mir: ein Mensch, der halbwege Abenteuer zu bestehen weiß, soll der eine Schöne, eine gewünschte, geliebte Schöne, die sich allein nachts dem Schutze des Himmels anvertraut, um so wohlfeilen Preis aus seinen Händen lassen?

Claudine has no answer to this argument: 'Wie erniedrigt er mich! Er hat recht! O Liebe! Liebe!' (254-5). Even Shakespeare's Proteus makes a less perfunctory apology than Crugantino, nor does his victim accuse herself of being partly to blame. It seems clear, then, that for all his considerable interest, Crugantino is not to be taken at his own estimation, and this must moderate the sympathy usually given to his *plaidoyer* ('Wißt Ihr die Bedürfnisse eines jungen Herzens, wie meins ist?', etc., 256). It need not be discussed in detail, other than to insist that his demand to be allowed to 'wander', can in practice only mean to be allowed to prey on society. In any case he soon abandons it and replaces it by an appeal to be excused on the grounds of youth, although he is in fact older than Pedro (257). His protracted adolescence almost over, we must assume he will now be integrated into his proper social role.

Placed as it is on the eve of the move to Weimar, the piece thus has an autobiographical interest, but as self-examination. The characterisation of Crugantino, in particular, is at the very least a questioning of the Sturm und Drang in its anti-social aspect. He succeeds in being both the complementary opposite to *Empfindsamkeit* and at the same time a warning of what will happen if the Sentimental rejection of society is increased or exaggerated. This gives us the symbolism of Crugantino as Pedro's brother, of the sympathy between him and Gonzalo, and even of the attraction, however mild in her case, between Claudine and Crugantino. Because of the exclusively aristocratic milieu, however, we are left with the feeling that these are the follies of our superiors. This is entirely appropriate to *Singspiel* as a genre, but the usual reading of Crugantino is still no doubt correct in seeing him in part as an unassimilated problem for society. He is an aristocrat who, instead of acting as a guarantor of the social structure, like Fernando challenges and subverts it. As a kind of throwback to the world of *Götz* and *Herkules*, he is forced into a position on the sidelines of society, but again, this is perhaps a reflection of our modern degeneracy. Also

like Fernando, he has an affinity with Alcest, and it may be significant that both texts are indebted to Molière, and especially *Dom Juan*.³⁴ Reasons have been given for regarding his presentation as more satirical than is usually assumed, but the basic ambivalence remains.

The general tendency of Singspiel is unsympathetic towards aristocracy, as with the *Hofkritik* of Pedro, which is as conventional as that of <Die königliche Einsiedlerin>. The word 'Schwarm' is common to both, an attitude which is typical of Goethe's *Hofkritik*, viewing court life as social, but characterised by a claustrophobic, insect-like intensity, to which the only antidote is the hermit's cell.³⁵ It is left to Gonzalo to provide the other, very thematic objection to courts: that they are places of insincerity, where the simplicity of life is 'vermaskeriert' (239). Crugantino heartily agrees. But if Pedro's *Hofkritik* is so extreme as to be barely compatible with social life, Crugantino is also in flight from society. His brother pities him as having 'verbannt [...] sich selbst aus der menschlichen Gesellschaft' (225). We might suppose this to mean merely 'respectable society', and make the pedantic objection that Crugantino has at least the company of his fellow robbers and his numerous sexual partners, but this would be a mistake. He himself insists on his love of solitude (236) and calls his guitar '[d]ie Gespielin meiner Einsamkeit und meiner Empfindung' (238). Solitude is a dereliction of duty for the nobility, and an irresponsible self-indulgence. The man of feeling and the Sturm und Drang hero are apparent opposites who meet in the temptation to abandon human society. The temptation has merely been better resisted by the former, who realises that this can only be a temporary stage, in his own life and presumably in that of his brother also. Pedro thinks with horror, he tells Claudine, that Crugantino will one day be healed of his moral blindness and will tremble to realise that as a seducer he has desecrated the innermost sanctuary of humanity (225). Seduction and social flight are linked together as refusals by the aristocrat to perform his proper role.

The final example of ambivalent social attitudes in this period is Goethe's increased involvement with Lavater and physiognomics.³⁶ Lavater had been in contact with Goethe as early as 1773, but his actual contributions to Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* date almost entirely from 1775, and his interest was already beginning to fade by early in

³⁴ For *Die Mitschuldigen* and Molière, see Döll, *Goethes Mitschuldigen*, esp. p.65. Crugantino implies an awareness of his own link with Dom Juan by singing a ballad in which a seducer is drawn underground, apparently for punishment by supernatural justice (240-3). The play may even have been Goethe's source for the rather un-Spanish name 'Claudine', Molière, *Dom Juan ou Le Festin de Pierre*, ed. Georges Couton (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), act 4, scene 3, p.122.

³⁵ <Die königliche Einsiedlerin>, l.20, FA 1.4:13, and *Claudine*, HA 4:224, a 'Schwarm' which 'um die Majestät wie Mücken ums Licht summt' (Pedro); and cf. *Tasso*, ll.245, 367.

³⁶ The writings on physiognomics, 1773-1775, are conveniently collected in FA 1.18:141-72.

the following year. Lavater's theory was essentially hermeneutics by a kind of empathy.³⁷ Our characters can be read off from our features, but since our features are largely, as we should now say, inherited with our genes, our characters, even individual moral qualities, must come from our parents (mainly in practice the same-sex parent).

This argument had clear implications for the defence of nobility, especially of noble theories of race,³⁸ but Goethe's first substantial contribution to Lavater's work, 'Von der Physiognomik überhaupt', was by implication a detailed attack on it.³⁹ Physiognomics draws conclusions from our exteriors about our interiors. But what are our exteriors? Certainly not merely our physical features. What Goethe is here objecting to is the genetic determinism of Lavater's project. For Goethe, the future morphologist, our social status ('Stand'), habits, possessions, clothes are all indications of inner forces, but also interact with them. Nature forms the human being, but he transforms himself, a transformation which is part of nature.

This characterisation of personality as malleable, something subject to our wills and distinct from our *facticité*, tends to stress self-improvement. It also tends to an alliance with one of the strongest theoretical challenges by the Enlightenment to nobility as racial mystique, the *tabula rasa* of Locke, which was quite incompatible with the blood lines of noble descent. By firmly refusing to endorse Lavater here, Goethe in effect aligns himself with the opponents of nobility. But of course this applies only to nobility as a kind of caste, wholly closed to access by aspirational outsiders, not the nobility which interested Goethe, who would soon submit, at the age of twenty-six, to a prolonged period of study with Charlotte von Stein, including, but not ending with, his own ennoblement.

By a further paradox, Lavater tended to a kind of universal sympathy, although he was quite clear that his work helped to validate the *Bürgertum* against the brutish masses. Goethe showed himself much more willing to accept implications for lower-class inferiority than for unattainable upper-class superiority. At least one of his contributions illustrates this,⁴⁰ and when Lavater announced an intention to write a mild, tolerant section

³⁷ Richard T. Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004). Goethe's involvement is discussed, pp.137-76.

³⁸ Pierre Serna, 'The Noble', in Michel Vovelle, ed., *Enlightenment Portraits*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp.30-84, here at pp.73-7.

³⁹ FA 1.18:142-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.153. Cf. a letter to Lavater of 31.7.1775 on the head of Fettmilch, a rebel executed after a social revolt against the Frankfurt council in 1614: 'Das kurz und starrsinnige drückt sich auf

stressing the need for all human faces to be regarded with respect, he reacted with angry impatience: ‘Die Toleranz gegen die Menschen Gesichter! – schreib du das, ich mag nichts davon wissen. Gestern tief in dem Geschwirre des Messgeleits Zerimonien, fiel mir Ariostens Wort vom Pöbel ein: Werth des Tods vor der Geburt.’⁴¹ It would be wrong to attach excessive importance to a passing mood, but it is curious that the context of this violent repudiation of Frankfurt values was the ‘Messgeleit’ ceremony, the subject of an outburst of civic patriotism in *DuW*.⁴² Goethe’s deep ambivalence towards the carnivalesque here takes the form of disgusted rejection, in a context where it is strongly class-based.⁴³

The main contribution to the *Physiognomische Fragmente* was a group of moralised fantasies on five Roman classical busts. The entry on Brutus is especially significant. Here we have the great man in all his awful solitude, lonely in a world where he looks in vain for his equals, like the cedar tree. Like Götz or Prometheus he cannot have a master or be a master.⁴⁴ How is he to interact with a world which is unworthy of him, but which needs his intervention? ‘Unter Gesellen muß’ er leben, unter Gleichen und Freien. In einer Welt voll Freiheit edler Geschöpfe würd’ er in seiner Fülle sein’, but he knows this is not such a world. Goethe is notably less enthusiastic towards Julius Caesar, who among other qualities shows ‘eine eherne, übertyrannische Selbstigkeit’, but perhaps this merely reflects the influence of Plutarch or Shakespeare. At any rate Goethe’s central figure is certainly an aristocrat,⁴⁵ but one almost entirely without routine social function, and who will, like Götz and Egmont, sacrifice his life for an unworthy ‘Pöbel’ in an attempt to

dem schlechten Kupfer wovons genommen ist noch stärker, hat auch zugleich etwas thierisch niedriges das der Umriss nicht hat’, HaBr, i.187.

⁴¹ Lavater to Goethe, 1.9.1775, Heinrich Funck, ed., *Goethe und Lavater: Briefe und Tagebücher* (Weimar: Goethe-Gesellschaft, 1901) (Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft, 16), p.52; reply, [8].9.1775, WA 4.2:286-8, here at p.286. The quotation from Ariosto is identified in *DjG*, v.456: at the siege of Paris the fury of Rodomonte had fortunately been directed not against the regular Christian troops, but against the vulgar populace, ‘ma vulgo e popolazzo voglio dire, / degno, prima che nasca, di morire’, *Orlando Furioso*, 16.23. ‘Pöbel’ is a very strong word, common enough in Goethe, but more exceptional at this early period, where it is almost always either ironical, from characters such as Olearius (twice), Adelheid, Haman or Faust (*Urfaust*, 239), or heavily qualified. Werther, for example, despises anyone ‘der glaubt nöthig zu haben, vom sogenannten Pöbel sich zu entfernen’, 15 May [1771], FA 1.8:18.

⁴² *DuW*, HA 9:22-4.

⁴³ The ‘Messgeleit’ passage in *DuW*, but not the above letter, and related texts including ‘Das Römische Carneval’, are discussed in the context of Goethe’s reaction to saturnalian disorder in Gerhart von Graevenitz, ‘Das Frankfurter Carneval: Goethes Bilder des Fremden’, in Waltraut Wiethölter, ed., *Der junge Goethe: Genese und Konstruktion einer Autorschaft* (Tübingen: Francke, 2001), pp.25-37. See also Eckart Oelenschlager, ‘Goethes Schrift *Das Römische Carneval*. Ein Versuch über die Formalisierbarkeit des Tumults’, in Willi Hirdt and Birgit Tappert, eds., *Goethe in Italien* (Bonn: Bouvier, 2001), pp.221-39.

⁴⁴ FA 1.18:165-7. On the Brutus entry see Braemer, *Goethes Prometheus*, pp.167-70.

⁴⁵ Brutus is a man ‘der unter großen Menschen geworden ist. Nur ein Jahrhundert von Trefflichen konnte den trefflichsten durch Stufen hervorbringen.’

preserve for them their liberties.⁴⁶ Goethe was clearly fully aware of, even attracted to, the paradoxes this involved. Indeed Brutus is a perfect symbol at this stage in his career for his conflicted loyalties between Frankfurt and the values of the Sturm und Drang.

Thus far the works of the *Geniezeit* have shown a tendency, not very pronounced, for the Sturm und Drang to move towards sympathy with aristocratic attitudes. We have rather a kind of oscillation arising from a quarrel of Goethe with himself. All that is constant is an attitude of questioning, sometimes satirical, sometimes regretful, of flight from society, which has become identified in *Claudine*, as in *Werther*, with a rejection of routine productive work.

From the Tessin reference onwards (above, p.32), consideration of the public aspect of aristocracy has been dominated by two aspects, *Hofkritik* and public service. *Hofkritik* has been consistent, from <Die königliche Einsiedlerin> through *Götz*, *Werther*, *Clavigo* and the *Urfaust* (the 'Flohlied') to *Claudine*. Its intensity has varied, and it is sometimes relativised by context (Mephistopheles, obviously, but also *Werther*), but we can hardly speak of an evolution. This was rather an aspect of Goethe's paternal inheritance, which loyalty made him slow to outgrow, but which threatened to become a cliché.

The opposite applies to the other, more important half of the Tessin reference, that of public service. In *Götz* a real historical development, the early sixteenth-century trend towards an increased involvement of the aristocracy in law and public administration, had been treated with dismissive contempt. By *Werther*, the direction of the critique has been reversed. Werther sets himself half-heartedly to master a serious discipline and abandons it almost at the first setback. He then proposes to become an army officer, which we are presumably to regard as a hair-raising prospect for someone likely to be incapable of giving orders, as he is of taking them. He is tactfully dissuaded, and indeed military service is usually less favourably portrayed than its civil counterpart. Fernando has served on what he comes to believe was the wrong side by helping to suppress Corsican independence,⁴⁷ and much the same may later be true of Eduard.⁴⁸

The treatment of administration varies, but after *Götz* is never disrespectful. For Clavigo it is something to be embraced as a process which, given his abilities, will certainly advance

⁴⁶ For the nobility as bulwark against despotism, see also above, p.36, and below, Chapter 8.

⁴⁷ *Stella*, HA 4:333.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Boyle, 'Goethe, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*', in Peter Hutchinson, ed., *Landmarks in the German Novel (1)* (Oxford: Lang, 2007), pp.49-66, here at pp.52-4.

him towards power, wealth and aristocratic status. For Werther it is the direction of one of his many attempts at flight. For Pedro it is a challenge he has faced despite the difficulties of his own temperament (for younger sons, it had long been an alternative to the more traditional military career). He speaks of his work with patriotism,⁴⁹ and takes pride in his own professional competence, although since he will marry an heiress, the happy ending presumably includes a farewell to his desk in Madrid. Crugantino thinks work of any kind a servitude which is beneath the nobility of his nature, but we are hardly to regard this with sympathy. In all these cases the task is some form of royal or princely service, the delegated exercise of absolute power. There are no predecessors of Werner, the protagonist of bourgeois self-enrichment.

The 'Genie', whether as aristocrat or otherwise, has a private as well as a public face. Aristocracy is performance, but performance may only be an aspiration, and so in one sense hypocritical. If I suffer from acrophobia, I can overcome it simply by repeatedly behaving as if I did not,⁵⁰ but during the process I shall be acting a part, presenting myself falsely to myself, and potentially to others. This conflicts with sincerity, the self-validating nature of emotion, which is also a Sturm und Drang value. But the same applies to any planned, strategic behaviour, for example courtship, whether consciously aimed at seduction or not. Not until *WML* does a Goethe hero apply this heuristic process to aristocracy itself, to portraying an aristocrat as an alternative to becoming one, but the principle is the same. So too are the anxieties over authenticity, rather than sincerity, which the process arouses in Goethe, and which are a lasting part of his Sturm und Drang identity. If aristocracy is seeming rather than being, even seeming with a view to becoming ('So laßt mich scheinen, bis ich werde'), it must be morally ambiguous, whatever virtues may otherwise inhere in it.⁵¹

Typically, however, the 'Genie', whether as artist, aristocrat, or merely as outcast from society, must present himself as void of self-doubt, and as fully formed, rather than in a state of development. He cannot be objectively presented in private, bourgeois society without an element of irony. Some aspects of the social reaction to nobility are

⁴⁹ 'Wenn ich meine Tage den Geschäften des Vaterlands gewidmet hatte' (224).

⁵⁰ *DuW*, HA 9:374. On this passage, see Paul Bishop, *Analytical Psychology and German Classical Aesthetics: Goethe, Schiller, and Jung*, vol. 1, *The Development of the Personality* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp.22-4. For psychoanalytical comparisons between acrophobia and both a son's challenge to the father and the challenge of the Sturm und Drang to existing society, see C. Jagella, 'Bürgerlicher Schwindel und seine medizinische Fassung: Goethe und das Strassburger Münster', *Schweizerische Medizinische Wochenschrift*, 130 (2000), 209-21.

⁵¹ Cf. *Hanswursts Hochzeit*, 'Nichts Schei<nen>, aber alles sein', FA 1.4:578, and Borchmeyer's note on p.1013.

conveniently woven together in what is only superficially an artless train of thought in the mind of an early character:

Ich gäb was drum, wenn ich nur wüßt,
Wer heut der Herr gewesen ist.
Er sah gewiß recht wacker aus
Und ist aus einem edlen Haus,
Das konnt ich ihm an der Stirne lesen.
Er wär auch sonst nicht so keck gewesen. (*Urfaust*, 530-5)

The strands here include the confident male presentation of self (arousing admiration and mild resentment), sexual attractiveness, nobility (in at least one of its senses), outsider status (it is presumably exceptional for her to see a stranger on the street), physiognomics, as the art to find the mind's construction in the face (and the wishful thinking that commonly accompanies it), sincerity (in the Sturm und Drang sense of the heart's right to self-expression), courtship behaviour and the possibility of betrayal.

Since the *Geniezeit* is usually dated to the period between his arrival in Strasbourg in April 1770 and the move to Weimar at the end of 1775, it is natural to look for signs of linkage in Goethe's mind between the concept of the artist as hero and the contemporary aristocracy. The Sturm und Drang itself, and especially the concept of the 'Genie', clearly had social causes in the weakness of the bourgeoisie, and socially subversive implications in its defiance of literary and ethical norms. Contemporaries were perfectly clear about this, as the attacks on *Werther*, in particular, show.⁵² A distinction must be made here. The 'Genie' concept was aristocratic in its implications, if by 'aristocratic' we mean no more than exclusive and inegalitarian. But it was anti-aristocratic in its content, in the sense of positing a rival to the ruling class (the definitive statement of this is the 'Spottlied' in *WML*). It was also an anti-social assertion of the radical autonomy of the subject,⁵³ with roots in Rousseau, and as such was deliberately devoid of social reference. In this form it could only be a phase which its protagonists would have to outgrow, if they were to continue to flourish. But if, as in Goethe's case, the Sturm und Drang was never to be wholly repudiated, in what direction could it be developed?

In theory Goethe might have developed a social critique, in the form of attacks on social abuses. In fact explicit social protest is rarely to be found in his work of this period, published or unpublished. In the mildly subversive 'Katechisation', published in October

⁵² On the social implications of the 'Genie', Sturm, *Goethes Weg nach Weimar*, pp.40-49 (on *Werther*, pp.46-7).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.45.

1773, Eibl hears an echo of Rousseau on the origins of private property, no doubt rightly;⁵⁴ and in Strasbourg the tone at least once became socially critical, as he waxed lofty and sarcastic about the preparations for the reception of Marie Antoinette in May 1770 and the excited state of the populace. Goethe clearly felt that his Pietist background ought to have, but had not, protected him from the indignity of sharing popular thrall to the glamour of absolutist monarchy.⁵⁵ He even wrote a satirical poem in French comparing her arrival to Christ's entry into Jerusalem. The poem does not survive, but the few fragments in the surviving works are unlikely to have been remnants of a much larger body of material, certainly to judge from the comparative absence of political or social comment in his contemporary letters.

The obvious alternative to a radically political development would have been the overcoming of solipsistic isolation through a search for allies, that is, by making common cause with the (literal, contemporary) aristocracy. To do this, the 'Genie' concept would have to have its polarity reversed, a disruptive process which may have contributed to the painful disorder of Goethe's life in 1775. It is consistent with this that until the end of 1774, we find only a very partial rapprochement between the contemporary aristocracy and the Sturm und Drang ideal, never amounting to an actual fusion.

The literary texts under consideration here are *Götz*, *Werther*, the *Urfaust* and *Clavigo* (*Stella* and *Claudine von Villa Bella*, in which the approach to fusion is closer, are from 1775). Otherwise there are only semi-mythical figures as far removed as possible from direct, or even allegorical contemporary reference (Mahomet, Prometheus, Caesar, even Götz), on the one hand, and on the other, satires, mild or vitriolic, on the official sentimental culture, the cult of Rousseau, or other topics of personal concern. The plays occasionally reinforce the stereotyped attitudes we have already encountered. For example, the classical world turns out to be allied to the Sturm und Drang in its contempt for bourgeois timidity;⁵⁶ but elsewhere there is a danger of either inferring social attitudes

⁵⁴ FA 1.1:216-7, and note, 937-8. The link with *Götz* and the 'Faustrechtszeiten' is even closer. 'Vor Gericht', HA 1:85, is only indirectly social protest, and in any case seems not to be dateable. The same applies to 'Ein Reicher', FA 1.1:218-9.

⁵⁵ Letter to Langer, 29.4.-11.5.1770, HaBr, i.106-8, and on its Pietist vocabulary, p.568. The tone is almost one of self-contempt: 'Wie sehr verläugnen wir unser ganzes Herz vor den drapdornen Kleide Majestät [...] Und doch, wenn wir gerührt sind, ist unser Stolz unwürcksam, das wissen unsere Fürsten und unsere Mädchen, und machen mit uns was sie wollen', p.108.

⁵⁶ In *Götter, Helden und Wieland* Götz makes a re-appearance, disguised as Herkules: 'Und mich dünkt, bei uns wohnte sie [die Tugend], Halbgöttern und Helden. Meinst du, wir lebten wie das Vieh, weil eure Bürger sich vor den Faustrechtszeiten kreuzigen? Wir hatten die bravsten Kerls unter uns', HA 4:213.

in the texts from the artistic ones associated with the *Geniezeit*, or vice versa, in either case leading to misinterpretation, or at least exaggeration.

The heroes of the *Geniezeit* are diverse but, without having any single trait in common, they share family resemblances, in Wittgenstein's sense. They can be placed in overlapping groups, like a Venn diagram. One group would certainly be the aristocrats, actual or potential: Götz, Clavigo, Prometheus (if a Titan can be so called), Fernando, Crugantino, the Brutus of the *Physiognomische Fragmente*, Egmont. Even Werther belongs in high society, at least on his own showing. There is also an artist group: the eagle of 'Der Adler und die Taube', Prometheus, arguably Mahomet, the cedar tree, Crugantino, Meister Erwin, Shakespeare. Werther again is an artist of some sort. There is a group of outcasts, including three or possibly four suicides: Werther, Fernando, Brutus, and perhaps Clavigo.⁵⁷ Among the less radical outcasts are the benefactors or potential or actual liberators of society, in some cases of a society unworthy of them: the cedar tree, Prometheus, Mahomet, Brutus, Egmont, possibly Götz. Satyros and Mahomet are reminders that charisma may be ambiguous. The 'ewige Jude' is untypical, but is obviously the ultimate outcast, and also a reminder that criminality is one form of outcast status, as we see from the recurring ambiguous gypsy characters.

The criminals are linked with the aristocrats through defiance of the middle-class conscience: Götz, but also Weislingen and Adelheid, Prometheus, Werther (as suicide, perhaps also as heretic or blasphemer), Clavigo (who enters into a criminal conspiracy against Beaumarchais), Fernando, Crugantino, Brutus (assassin as well as suicide). A number of these are also in the artist group, typified by a kind of amoral elemental force, like a river (Pindar, Mahomet, the 'Genie' in Werther).⁵⁸ The crimes are mostly crimes of violence, and in several cases against women. This is consistent with the anti-bourgeois strand in the concept, as is the interest in violent outcasts at the margins of society.

The artist is a public character, at least in the sense of producing for public consumption, but also a world-creator (Shakespeare, Prometheus), which may place him in withdrawal from the real world. The 'Genie' is above all autonomous, like Brutus or the cedar,

⁵⁷ How far Clavigo is literally a suicide would depend on the individual production, but he certainly acquiesces in his own death, HA 4:305.

⁵⁸ Jonas Jølle, 'The river and its metaphors: Goethe's "Mahomets Gesang"', *MLN*, 119.3 (2004), 431-50, and see Braemer, *Goethes Prometheus*, pp.240-2.

creating a world out of his own ego, and may like Werther be in self-defensive flight from a society which threatens to collide or conflict with it.⁵⁹

The 'Genie' as aristocrat might seem to concentrate on the public role, but this is not necessarily the case. Götz performs aristocracy as a public function, although he will soon cease to do so as a result of degenerative changes in society. As it stands, *Egmont* strongly thematises the public role, but this may be in part a reflection of the Weimar experience. The modern paperwork of governance and administration was largely outside the thought-world of the Sturm und Drang until Goethe faced up to it in Weimar.⁶⁰

The critique of nobility, where present at all, is largely by means of private, individual characterisation. We infer from *Claudine*, for example, that the nobility is prone to sentimental excess on the one hand and anti-social grandiosity on the other, but it is not otherwise satirised, and Alcest has no successors. Stella, in particular, performs an idealised version of the role of baroness.

Part of the characterisation of the nobility reflects an ambivalence towards romantic love, viewed as *Frauendienst*, which as we know from *Faust* can make men feel, and behave, like poisoned rats. This had already been a factor in the Anakreontik. The reaction ranges from physical violence against women (Herkules, Satyros, Crugantino) to seduction (Alcest, Fernando, Faust, Crugantino). Even Pater Brey and Werther are decadent modern seducers, typical products of the 'schlappe Kastraten-Jahrhundert'. Werther's emotional dependence on Lotte, itself enough to scandalise the clerical reviewers, leads to, perhaps even originates in, the social isolation explored in detail by Barthes.⁶¹ It is occasionally varied by the adoption of an unconvincing gallantry of tone, for example in referring to the daughter of the 'Pfarrer', 'eine rasche, wohlgewachsene Brünnette, die einen die Kur<z>zeit über auf dem Lande wohl unterhalten hätte'.⁶² Although the exceptions are obvious, notably Götz, one link between aristocracy and the 'Genie' is obviously a privileged defiance of bourgeois standards of behaviour towards women. This is at its clearest in the cases of the bourgeois, but aspirational Werther, Faust and Clavigo, whose relationships with women comment ironically on their social pretensions.

⁵⁹ Thomas Metscher, 'Prometheus: Zum Verhältnis von bürgerlicher Literatur und materieller Produktion', in *Literaturwissenschaft und Sozialwissenschaften 3: Deutsches Bürgertum und literarische Intelligenz 1750-1800* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1974), pp.385-453, at pp.400-2.

⁶⁰ So Sturm, *Goethes Weg nach Weimar*, pp.25-6, but Clavigo and Pedro, even Werther, are exceptions.

⁶¹ Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).

⁶² *Werther*, 1 July [1771], FA 1.8:62.

This perspective tends to stress 1775-6 as a sharp change of direction. The attacks on *Frauendienst*, in particular, read curiously in the light of the correspondence with Charlotte von Stein, and violence against women will cease to be characteristic of the male 'Genie'. An important difference between Frankfurt and Weimar, in terms of Goethe's literary output, is one between the formation of imaginary worlds where women are subject to an unreal typification as *Machtweib* or victim,⁶³ and direct responses to a real, functioning society.

Weimar was, in comparison with Frankfurt, a heavily feminised, but also a courtly environment, and as such it had two key characteristics. Both in its public and private aspects, it seemed to offer unlimited possibilities for personal growth, but in both cases the necessary adaptations were a higher price than initially appeared, one which in the long run Goethe was unwilling to pay. Like Werther, he had a presumptive right to social acceptance, although in his case after a transitional phase in the comic role of naive outsider (Voltaire's Huron or Cumberland's West Indian).⁶⁴ The transition thereafter was intended to lead to integration into full membership of court society. How he came to reject that integration, and in part to decide he was incapable of it, must be considered separately.

⁶³ On the *Machtweib* as caricatured, negative female counterpart to the virtues of the male *große Kerl* or *Selbsthelfer*, see Huyssen, *Drama des Sturm und Drang*, pp.82-4.

⁶⁴ The actual context of this phrase from *DuW* ('Der quasi Fremde, angekündigt als Bär [...] als Hurone Voltaires, Cumberlands Westindier, als Naturkind bei so vielen Talenten [...]') is the lionising of Goethe and his reluctant socialising in Frankfurt in the aftermath of *Werther*, and in particular his introduction to the Schönemanns, HA 10:86. The reference to Cumberland seems to show its application also to Weimar, however.

Chapter 4: Weimar: The mutual impact

ACCORDINGLY, if it be objected against the above-mention'd *Practice*, and Art of *Surgery*, "That we can no-where find such a *meek Patient*, with whom we can in reality *make bold*, and for whom nevertheless we are sure to preserve *the greatest Tenderness and Regard*:" I assert the contrary; and say, for instance, *That we have each of us OURSELVES to practise on*. "Mere Quibble! (you'l say:) For who can thus multiply himself into *two Persons*, and be *his own Subject*?["...]" Go to the *Poets*, and they will present you with many Instances.

Shaftesbury¹

Parvenus sind teils von Natur teils aus Maxime redlich und uneigennützig
Dies gibt eine Art von Würde, welche alle übrigen balanciert

DuW (paralipomena)²

Leute, sagt das Sprichwort, machen Leute.

Christian Garve³

It might be expected that with Goethe's emergence on to the public stage, the first Weimar decade would see his personality and its development brought into much sharper focus. In fact the increase in comments by friends and enemies, and even the under-used record of his official labours, is a poor exchange for the virtual absence of autobiographical material, the later destruction of his in-letters,⁴ the loss of those from Frau von Stein, and his later reluctance to speak of this period in his life other than in terms of regret and rejection.

One serious gap in the sources concerns the nature of his hopes and plans in the early months of 1776,⁵ and this is a matter of importance, since it links to a debate, especially active around 1999, on Goethe as a reformer. The older view was that he had ambitious plans, especially for the reform of land tenure, which were frustrated by opposition from the aristocracy or by lack of support from Carl August. More recently it has been pointed

¹ Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 2 vols., ed. Philip Ayres (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), i.87. All emphases in this text are Shaftesbury's.

² FA 1.14:890. For Goethe as parvenu, and the importance of 'Uneigennützigkeit', see a conversation with Riemer and von Müller, 31.3.1823, WA, *Gespräche*, 4:223.

³ 'Ueber die Maxime Rochefoucaults: das bürgerliche Air verliehrt sich zuweilen bey der Armee, niemahls am Hofe' [1792], in C. G., *Popularphilosophische Schriften [...]*, ed. Kurt Wölfel, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1974), i.[579].

⁴ In 1797, Boyle, *Goethe*, ii.515.

⁵ See the comment of Gerhard Sauder in discussion following his own contribution, 'Pragmatische Verantwortung: Goethe in seinen amtlichen Schriften', to Wolfgang Wittkowski, ed., *Verantwortung und Utopie. Zur Literatur der Goethezeit. Ein Symposium* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988), pp.34-56, here at p.56: 'Sicher waren die Hoffnungen beim Amtsantritt groß. Wir haben dafür leider keine Zeugnisse, aber wir wollen es gerne annehmen. Sonst hätte er sich gewiß nicht auf das Ganze eingelassen.' It is indeed a reasonable assumption that Goethe and Carl August discussed reform plans in the initial months, but no such plans survive, either in the 'amtliche Schriften', to which Sauder primarily refers, or indeed anywhere else.

out how thin the evidence is for any of this, but whether lack of progress is to be ascribed to timidity, a sensible pragmatism, or a lack of real will for reform, is still unclear.⁶

The duchy had the normal social tensions, one of which, arising from the over-burdening of the peasantry with labour services ('Frondienste'), could not even be addressed, let alone reformed, because of the entire dependence on them of the precarious finances of the state.⁷ Goethe's acceptance of this impasse is a matter of course, although no direct references to it survive in his correspondence or elsewhere. Its significance can hardly be exaggerated, and it must have contributed to the feelings of futility over his public role, repeatedly expressed from 1779 onwards.⁸

The general gaps in knowledge place us in a heavy dependence on his correspondence. Goethe's letters are naturally presentations of self, expressions of what might be passing feelings, but are also much influenced by his relationship to the addressee.⁹ In some cases the intent is the straightforward presentation of one of his identities, to create a community of feeling. Thus expressions of sympathy with the peasants or the stocking-weavers of Apolda, routinely quoted when his political opinions are under discussion, are often to Knebel, who certainly shared these views and acted as a sort of safety valve. But similar expressions are to be found in letters to Charlotte von Stein, where they apparently serve as indirect challenges, possibly even dialectical fragments of an internal debate within Goethe himself.

The letters to Merck are particularly significant for his state of mind in the early months at Weimar, but once again, only if the relationship is allowed for. Here we have a Goethe ironically cool and detached, not unwilling to impress an older friend with his own good fortune, but determined not to sound impressed himself, as if he had undergone a sudden undignified conversion to court values: 'Wirst hoffentlich bald vernehmen, daß ich auch auf dem *Theatro mundi* was zu tragiren weiß und mich in allen tragikomischen Farcen leidlich betrage.'¹⁰

⁶ R. Goethe denied the existence of any substantial land reform in the 1780s and 1790s, 'Goethe, Carl August und Merck', p.215.

⁷ Wilson, *Das Goethe-Tabu*, pp.76-116, esp. pp.79-81.

⁸ See below on 'Das Göttliche', p.118, and for 'Proserpina' in this context, p.104.

⁹ Michael Maurer, 'Die Briefe des jungen Goethe. Selbstinszenierung, Ich-Spiegelung, Sakralisierung', in Klaus Manger, ed., *Goethe und die Weltkultur* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003), pp.159-72, here at p.165.

¹⁰ 5.1.1776, WA 4.3:15-16. For the distancing theatrical metaphor, cf. to Johanna Fahlmer, HaBr, i.207, and again to Merck, *ibid.*, p.205.

The social ambiguities of the correspondence can be illustrated from a single episode. In late 1779 Goethe travelled through Switzerland with Carl August, and visited various German courts on the way home. In October he wrote to Frau von Stein of his enthusiasm for Bern, its ‘Bürgerlich[e] Gleichheit’, its ‘egalitaet und Reinlichkeit [...] besonders da man fühlt, dass nichts leere *Decoration* oder Durchschnitt des *Despotismus* ist’.¹¹ Only a week later he was pouring scorn on an attempted gesture of egalitarianism by Jung-Stilling towards the duke of Brunswick: since they have been told they are related to lions, every tom-cat thinks he can and ought to extend a fraternal paw to lions and leopards, whom God has once and for all made a different kind of animal.¹² Here the addressee was Lavater, whose Christian refusal to take social distinctions as absolute more than once aroused Goethe to angry protest. But again, this was a complex relationship and on Goethe’s side one marked by occasional aggressive assertions of independence.

There is, of course, no question of insincerity here, still less of moral or mental confusion, merely a habit of using different audiences to perform different versions of a chameleon-like self, but the problems for any attempt to give a coherent account of his politics or his social attitudes are obvious. At the larger literary level these discrepancies play out as creative tension, either within or between individual works. The fictional ‘erste Abteilung’ of the later *Briefe aus der Schweiz* is the locus classicus for hostility towards conventional bourgeois society.¹³ On the other hand *Jery und Bätely* and his comments on it confirm his strong attraction towards Switzerland, and in 1779-80 return to Germany was marked by sharp comments on the tedium and discomfort of court life at Karlsruhe and elsewhere in another letter to Frau von Stein, which is full of protests at conventional social values.¹⁴ The same letter has the dramatis personae for a proposed, presumably satirical play on court life, which inevitably came to nothing.

The influences on the decision for his new career certainly included literary ones such as *Der redliche Mann am Hofe*. How far Goethe had exaggerated in his own mind the

¹¹ 9-14.10.1779, WA 4.4:76 (emphasis in original). Cf. his reference to the Leipzigers as constituting a ‘kleine moralische Republick’, 29.12.1782, HaBr, i.419, and, again to Frau von Stein, to republican Venice as ‘ein herrliches Monument, nicht *Eines Befehlenden* sondern eines *Volcks*’, 29.9.1786, FA 2.3:85 (emphasis in original). For the distinction, see also *Tasso*, II.54-5.

¹² To Lavater, 17.10.1779, WA 4.4:89-90. The expression of distinctions between *Stände* as species difference is itself a form of radical conservatism, above, pp.72-3. A little later, still in Switzerland, he recorded the sight of a young tame ibex among goats, ‘like the natural son of a great lord, whose upbringing has been quietly entrusted to a bourgeois family’, *Briefe aus der Schweiz*, FA 1.16:51.

¹³ *Briefe aus der Schweiz*, ‘Erste Abteilung’, FA 1.16:16-31.

¹⁴ ‘in der sogenannten grosen Welt’, ‘[d]en sogenannten Weltleuten’, ‘[w]as sie guten Ton heisen’, 1-3.1.1780, HaBr, i.290-1.

benefits of an alliance between a prince and an enlightened minister can only be estimated from his own later expressions of frustration and disappointment, but Loen's novel had been highly successful, and Wolfgang Martens has traced almost a whole genre of similar pipe-dreams.¹⁵ He cites as an example a novel by C. F. Sintenis, *Hallo's glücklicher Abend* (1783). The eponymous hero, now retired, has been the benefactor of his country by his service as minister to a grateful prince. He has reformed peasant tenure, improved agriculture, encouraged industry, built orphanages, rewarded useful inventions, rationalised church services, reduced the number of public holidays, and so on, in a comprehensive enlightened wish-list.¹⁶ Goethe was not unduly modest about the success of his public career in Weimar, at least within the limits of the possible, but naturally his achievements were not on this scale. Of its various social ills, it is certain that his deepest feelings were for the condition of the peasantry.¹⁷ There was no realistic prospect of improvement, however, and when modest reforms were carried out around the turn of the century, they were largely on the initiative of the peasants themselves.¹⁸

Much later, in *DuW*, Goethe recalled having been impressed by a letter from the humanist Ulrich von Hutten.¹⁹ This had been in the aftermath of *Götz*, when he had found himself much approved of by the nobility. Writing from his own noble viewpoint, von Hutten had stressed the need for the nobility to 'adopt morals suitable to itself'. Laws, learning and the arts had been their heritage, but they had neglected it and now saw themselves outstripped by their social inferiors. Goethe claimed to have heard similar sentiments from some of his more aristocratic friends and acquaintances ('von meinen vornehmeren Freunden und Bekannten').²⁰ Nobility, they agreed, had to be personally earned.

For the more socially aware members of the nobility, then, the problem was to live up to an ideal conventionally ascribed to them, but not often met with in practice. For the class

¹⁵ Wolfgang Martens, 'Der redliche Mann am Hof, politisches Wunschbild und literarisches Thema im 18. Jahrhundert', *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 124.3 (1987), 33-49; and on the historical importance of Loen's novel, id., *Der patriotische Minister: Fürstendiener in der Literatur der Aufklärungszeit* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1996), pp.105-19. See also Wilson, 'Young Goethe's Political Fantasies'.

¹⁶ Martens, 'Der redliche Mann am Hof', pp.42-4. Jung-Stilling had indulged in similar visions of himself as a public benefactor, *ibid.*, p.48. The young Herder had hoped for an influential role at the court of Catherine the Great. Wieland had been attracted to Weimar by the 'Magie des verführerischen Gedankens, viel Gutes, im Großen, auf Jahrhunderte zu tun', and thought this was at least part of its attraction for Goethe, to Lavater, 5.2.1776 (Wieland's emphasis), Bode, *Goethe in vertraulichen Briefen*, no.243.

¹⁷ Eberhardt, *Goethes Umwelt*, p.23.

¹⁸ Goethe, 'Goethe, Carl August und Merck', p.215; id., 'Adel und Bauern', p.42; Wilson, *Das Goethe-Tabu*, pp.80-81.

¹⁹ *DuW*, HA 10:117-19.

²⁰ No doubt primarily the very untypical Stolbergs. *Ibid.*, p.119.

immediately below them, ambition took the form of aiming to emerge from obscurity by pursuit of an ideal of their own, which must include ‘rechtliche und Staatsgelehrsamkeit’,²¹ but also a fitness to adapt to the existing power structures. This ideal would need to be constructed, partly by selective imitation. The end product would be a self split between real and ideal, as it already was for the nobility. ‘As they increasingly develop, all people of good quality sense that they have a double role to play in the world, a real and ideal one’, as Goethe put it elsewhere in the same text.²² Or, to quote Kant, ‘Die Menschen sind insgesamt, je civilisirter, desto mehr Schauspieler’.²³ The gap between a ‘real’ self and social performance, here imaged as theatrical, was, if not the creation of modern civilisation, at least set to widen as it advanced, and with the rise of Goethe’s class.

Literary influences may well have included items from the long tradition of wisdom literature on how to behave at court, but his acquaintance with such authors as Castiglione and Gracián at this period is uncertain, and in any case their blend of ethical precept and worldly advice would not have been well adapted to his situation. The theatre was for him, as it had been for well over a century, the main school of noble behaviour. This was furthered by a personal stream of consciousness which to an unusual degree was composed of imaginary internal dialogue.²⁴ Another source may be the Stoic tradition, mediated through Shaftesbury.

Whether to treat Shaftesbury as an influence on Goethe at this period, or simply as a large presence in the literary atmosphere, is problematic. On the one hand he was important to both of Goethe’s principal mentors, Möser and Herder, and Wieland’s enthusiastic reception had dated from the 1750s.²⁵ The *Characteristicks* first appeared in complete German translation in 1778, and it is safe to assume that at least his name was prominently before the reading public at that time. On the other hand there is no direct reference to him in the works before January 1813, immediately after the death of Wieland, and he may

²¹ Ibid., p.120.

²² He added that ‘in this feeling is to be found the basis of all nobility (der Grund alles Edlen)’. Id., HA 9:463.

²³ Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, i.14, in *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, 7.151. See also Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*, p.321.

²⁴ Boyle, *Goethe*, i.263-6, 338, and elsewhere. The habit persisted throughout his life.

²⁵ Herder’s interest seems to have been mainly theological. For Möser see Jonathan B. Knudsen, *Justus Möser and the German Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.59-60; and for Wieland, W. H. Bruford, *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp.26-39, and Karin Stoll, *Christoph Martin Wieland. Journalistik und Kritik. Bedingungen und Maßstab politischen und ästhetischen Rasonnements im ‘Teutschen Merkur’ vor der Französischen Revolution* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978), pp.125-9 and elsewhere. Merck was another enthusiast, and in 1772-3, including part of the time of his closest association with Goethe, was translating a large part of the *Characteristicks* into German, Bräuning-Oktavio, *Herausgeber und Mitarbeiter*, p.231.

never have studied Shaftesbury in any detail before preparing his memorial address.²⁶ This includes an extended comparison between Wieland and Shaftesbury, perhaps prompted by recollection of references by Wieland in his works, and no doubt also in conversation.

Karin Stoll stresses the importance for him of Shaftesbury's 'völlige Ästhetisierung der Moral', and his ideal of the 'Virtuoso', both moral and aesthetic.²⁷ This is very much to the point. For Shaftesbury, philosophy is above all a practical, social skill: 'Whilst PHILOSOPHY is taken (as in its prime Sense it ought) for *Mastership* in LIFE and MANNERS, 'tis like to make no ill Figure in the World [...]' (ii.205).²⁸ Society is full of falsehood, but Shaftesbury is severe towards 'habitual *Moroseness*', or social avoidance, no doubt because like Goethe he showed signs of being drawn to it himself (i.269).²⁹ '[T]he TASTE of Beauty, and the *Relish* of what is decent, just, and amiable, perfects the *Character* of the GENTLEMAN, and the PHILOSOPHER. And the study of such a TASTE or *Relish* will, as we suppose, be ever the great Employment and Concern of him, who covets as well to be *wise* and *good*, as *agreeable* and *polite*' (ii.206-7). Indeed, 'To *philosophize*, in a just Signification, is but To carry *Good-Breeding* a step higher' (ii.206). On the subject of manners, he is emphatic: 'There are few so affectedly clownish, as absolutely to disown *Good-breeding*, and renounce the Notion of A Beauty in *outward Manners* and *Deportment*.' It would be a waste of time to try to convince any such of the existence 'of a *Beauty* in *inward Sentiments* and *Principles*' (ii.214-15).

The concept of taste is firmly ethical as well as aesthetic, with a moral bed-rock derived from Stoicism, especially Epictetus. The crucial distinction from the English or French comic stage or the later English novel of manners comes with his insistence on our ability to operate on, and to form or reform ourselves. 'Tis *We our-selves* create and form our TASTE. If we resolve to have it *just*, 'tis in our power' (ii.218). Like Goethe, Shaftesbury was attracted by Stoical exercises,³⁰ and in the passage cited at the head of this chapter he

²⁶ Wieland died on 20 Jan. 1813. Goethe did not attend the funeral on 25 Jan., but from 28 to 31 Jan. he recorded in his diary the daily reading of Shaftesbury, in fact the only named references to him in his work apart from the memorial address itself. It was finished on 13 Feb. and delivered 5 days later, MA 9:945-65, 1416-17.

²⁷ Stoll, p.127, and in general, Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness: Moral discourse and cultural politics in early eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.27-47.

²⁸ Bracketed page references are to Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, in Ayres' edn.

²⁹ Cf. his reference to 'that excellent School which we call *the World*' (i.172). This is not a very original thought, but cf. Goethe on the young painter Philipp Hackert, whose residence for a time with a Baron Olthoff had been useful to him in more than one respect, 'da er ihm für die Welt und gute Gesellschaft zu einer vortrefflichen Schule diente', *Philipp Hackert*, FA 1.19:418.

³⁰ For Goethe and Stoicism see Paul Bishop, *The World of Stoical Discourse in Goethe's Novel Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1999), esp. pp.7-20.

recommends self-examination by soliloquy, an ‘Exercise of *Self-Converse*’ as a form of ethical training (i.91). Through this ‘Business of *Self-Dissection*’, the subject becomes ‘two distinct *Persons*’ (i.87), one morally on watch over the other as a ‘Daemon’ (his word), that is, as a ‘Counsellor and Governor’ (i.92-3). The rather sado-masochistic tone of this ‘surgery’ on the self may be compared with Goethe’s own image of himself as a transplanted and drastically pruned linden tree in two early letters to Frau von Stein.³¹

To quote Bruford, for the Goethe of the middle years ‘the duty of self-improvement’ was as a concept ‘quite central’.³² But this is only half of a familiar systole-diastole. The other half is the Goethe whom Thomas Mann called a ‘born pedagogue’.³³ To such a personality, the conscious moulding of the self in the direction of an ideal, filtered through Rousseau and the Sturm und Drang sensibility, naturally developed into a Promethean urge to instruct, to create around himself a race ‘das mir gleich sei’. This would require intense personal magnetism, but that was not a problem, at least in the short term. Friends and enemies were agreed on the overwhelming effect he had on the court, its manners and social tone. The difficulty was rather in the formation of himself, and thus determining the direction to be taken.

Uncertainty found partial expression in a strongly prescriptive conflation of the ethical, the aesthetic, the intellectual and the social, which is so normal a part of Goethe’s discourse in this period as to be almost imperceptible, and which has strong analogies with Shaftesbury. In 1781, for example, he wrote to Frau von Stein on a recurring theme, his disappointments with Carl August:

‘Das größte Übel hab ich auch bemerckt. So passionirt er fürs *gute und rechte* ist, so wirts ihm doch weniger darinne wohl als im *unschicklichen*, es ist ganz wunderbar wie *verständlich* er seyn kan, wieviel er *einsieht*, wieviel *kennt*, und doch wenn er *sich etwas zu gute thun* will so muß er etwas *Albernes* vornehmen [...]’

in this case shredding wax candles with his fingers (in company).³⁴ Goethe was ambitious for Carl August (the tone of the correspondence with Frau von Stein occasionally suggests anxious parents), in part for his acquisition of a level of manners higher than that of Weimar. But the duty of self-improvement mainly implied social and ethical ambitions for himself. If nobility is undefined, a mode of being rather than doing, can it be taught, other than perhaps by ostentation, or acquired, perhaps by a kind of osmosis? Was La

³¹ Both dated 8.11.1777, HaBr, i.239, and WA 4.3:184.

³² Bruford, *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar*, p.236.

³³ ‘dieser Pädagog von Geblüt, dieser leidenschaftliche Erzieher [...]’, Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Berlin: Fischer, 1929), p.240.

³⁴ HaBr, i.346-7 (emphases added).

Rochefoucauld right to believe that this was possible in the army, but not at court?³⁵

Goethe's answer to the second question would surely have been dismissive. The first, however, remained.

Goethe's own relationship with Frau von Stein, Wilhelm's with Serlo and others, that of the Weimar theatre troupe with Goethe, even that of Thoas with Iphigenie, all raise in different ways a question answered in the negative, but much later, and by one of Goethe's most unpleasant characters: 'Man leugnete stets, und man leugnet mit Recht, / Daß je sich der Adel erlerne.' The subject of the 'Ballade', Goethe said, had a peculiar importance for him over a long period. Along with a fragmentary dramatic version, *Der Löwenstuhl*, it develops a distinction between true and false nobility, which is given a contemporary, Napoleonic reference.³⁶ There is an inner nobility which the prince is unable to recognise through an outward disguise of poverty, in part because he belongs to a post-revolutionary, or Napoleonic nobility, not to the genuine one of the *ancien régime*. The odiousness of the prince's social aggression may reflect an occasional bitterness on Goethe's part at a sense of exclusion which is a later development, but the concern over the gap between ideal and real nobility was permanent.

Nobility is now strongly associated with action, and in the public sphere the main element of Goethe's self-moulding process was settling down to hard administrative work, eventually leading to his own ennoblement in 1782. Whether he regarded this at the time with all the indifference he later professed might be doubted, but certainly it was not something he had sought, and it did not much affect his relations with noble society in Weimar, other than in certain court formalities (predictably, it was in literary circles that the reaction was especially sardonic). In the private sphere the process of self-formation was carried forward by the relationship with Frau von Stein, idealised as the embodiment of court values. Various aspects of his private life at that time also form part of this *Entsagung*. The acceptance of duties towards Krafft, Plessing, Peter im Baumgarten, possibly even Fritz von Stein, contributed to a self-imposed moral burdening which in the end proved to be excessive. More publicly, what followed in Weimar was ultimately a

³⁵ 'L'air bourgeois se perd quelquefois à l'armée, mais il ne se perd jamais à la cour', La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, no.393.

³⁶ 'Ballade', HA 1:290-3, 631-2, here at ll.78-9, and *Der Löwenstuhl*, FA 1.6:773-7, 1176-86. For the politics of the 'Ballade', see Mathias Mayer, "Die Kinder sie hören es gerne": Politik und Poetik in Goethes "Ballade", *JFDH*, 1987, 60-84, and Rainer Hillenbrand, 'Goethes *Ballade*', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Goethe-Gesellschaft*, 111/113 (2007-9), 106-23. Goethe's involvement with this material is not thought to predate 1803.

disappointment, the partial failure of an attempt at recreating himself and those around him through a mutual heuristic process.

The relationship with Carl August naturally showed Goethe more as pedagogue than as pupil. Despite his youthful intellectual curiosity, Carl August was not the model German prince, even within his own local area. His enthusiasm for hunting, his irrepressible interest in military glory, patronage of the theatre, pursuit of actresses and the daughters of his subjects, even his selectively enlightened social outlook, were largely conventional. Goethe's project, as well as his obvious personal affection, committed him both to discreet attempts at improvement and to representing the duke to himself and others as at least the partial or potential embodiment of an ideal. At the same time, despite assurances to Merck and others of the excellent terms he was on with Carl August, he was aware of the caution needed in expressing divergence of opinion. Any divisive issue would need to be chosen with care, and at least once Goethe found a need to warn himself against excessive idealism, or even the appearance of it.³⁷ He also found it necessary to remind others, and perhaps himself, of the taboos surrounding the nobility, for example on physical contact. This certainly applied to males, but with added force to females, where it seems to have oedipal implications.³⁸

Hunting was one source of potential friction. Goethe's references to it are almost all dismissive, although initially he had taken part himself. It was physically dangerous, when organised on a large scale destructive and extravagant,³⁹ and also socially oppressive. The last point prompted him to a careful, but uniquely outspoken letter to Carl August, on the subject of wild boar on the Ettersberg. The firmness of tone was due to an instinctive sense that oppression of the peasantry might lead to serious civil disorder.⁴⁰

³⁷ See especially his record of a conversation with Carl August about order, civil administration ('Pol[izei]') and the law: 'Verschiedne Vorstellung. Meine darf sich nicht mit Worten ausdrücken, sie wäre leicht misverstanden und dann gefährlich', diary entry, 14.12.1778, FA 2.2:152. His private comment is on the importance of not wasting time trying to improve 'unverbesserliche Ubel [sic] an Menschen und Umständen'. These should be taken as given, and reforms should aim at counter-balancing them. For not forgetting the gulf between princes and other mortals, cf. a conversation with Frau von Branconi in 1779, *ibid.*, p.211, and Grumach, i.441-2.

³⁸ It extends to the non-noble Charlotte in *Werther*, to the Princess in *Tasso*, Helena in *Faust II*, and certainly to the dire consequences of physical contact between Wilhelm and the Countess in *WML*. For a deliberate infringement by Goethe, see Eckermann, 26.9.1827, FA 2.12:626-7.

³⁹ See, e.g., WA 4.3:247, HaBr, i.378-80 and 416. Obvious literary parallels include 'Ilmenau', ll.16-18, HA 1:107, and *Die natürliche Tochter*.

⁴⁰ To Carl August, 26.12.1784, HaBr, i.466-9. It was one of the causes of a widespread peasants' revolt in neighbouring Kursachsen in the summer of 1790. For the whole issue see Wilson, *Das Goethe-Tabu*, pp.97-100.

Part of the complexity of the relationship arose from an element of identification. In 1779 he had complained to his diary that ‘ausser dem Herzog ist niemand im Werden, die andern sind fertig wie Dresselpuppen, wo höchstens noch der Anstrich fehlt’.⁴¹ The phrase ‘im Werden’ is elsewhere strongly associated with Goethe himself, or with literary surrogates such as the Wilhelm of *WMTS* or the poet of *Faust I*.⁴² Identification of this kind is mildly subversive. Many an ‘honest man at court’ must sometimes have asked himself why fate had placed his master on a throne, when a worthier person was so close at hand. Goethe, by his own account ‘the most presumptuous of men’, who ‘would have thought it quite natural if a crown had been placed on [his] head’, is unlikely to have been an exception.⁴³

The dichotomy between teaching and learning from the nobility is expressed by a trajectory. Goethe had come to Weimar in the aftermath of a psychological crisis, and certainly hoped to acquire a new balance at court, but in the year between the first and second versions of *Lila*, from the analysand Sternthal he became the therapist Doktor Verazio, with a gospel of psychic health as a duty for those on whom the lives of others depend. The trajectory is also partly historical or morphological, from a degenerate nobility to one which approached the imagined, imposed ideal, by developing from caterpillar to butterfly, as in ‘Ilmenau’ (ll.130-5).⁴⁴ The caterpillar image is one of a natural growth or development, a recognition that Carl August had simply matured since Goethe’s arrival (from 18 years old to 26) and grown in self-confidence, but as a result had become more difficult to mould to the will of his would-be preceptor. The disjunction between nobility as attained fixed standard and as aspiration is at its sharpest here.

Goethe’s ideal was, or included a capacity for indefinitely prolonged development, but ‘Ilmenau’, despite its concluding optimism, is a recognition that in Carl August’s case, there would be an end to this childlike plasticity.⁴⁵ The new challenge would be exclusively moral (the need for *Entsagung*, for surgery, even amputation), again with self-command emerging as a special obligation on those who are to command others (ll.182-3). The ‘reward’ of the achieved ideal, however, would be very great (l.184). Carl August

⁴¹ Diary entry for 13.7.1779, FA 2.2:176.

⁴² *DuW*, HA 10:184, *WMTS*, FA 1.9:70, and esp. *Faust I*, ll.184ff, where the depth of personal feeling is obvious. Cf. to Eckermann, 13.2.1829, FA 2.12:308. On Goethe and ‘becoming’, especially the becoming of personality, see Paul Bishop, ‘Affinities between Weimar classicism and analytical psychology: Goethe and Jung on the concept of the self’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 36.1 (2000), 74-91.

⁴³ *DuW*, paralipomena, FA 1.14:932. Cf. to Eckermann, 26.9.1827, FA 2.12:627.

⁴⁴ HA 1:111.

⁴⁵ Cf. to Frau von Stein, 11.4.1782, HaBr, i.392.

emerges as one of Möser's peasants (l.15), and re-emerges in the final lines as the sower of the good seed, that is, as a symbol for Christ.

In the case of the court, and especially Charlotte von Stein, the impact was partly of an aesthetic performance or spectacle. The Goethe who had learned from Oeser that the ideal of beauty was simplicity and quietness ('Einfalt und Stille')⁴⁶ would not find it difficult to project this ideal on to aspects of Weimar, but any idealisation could only be partial, and the task would remain of moulding reality towards a developing ideal of his own.

Introduction to Frau von Stein had been initially by description, from Zimmermann, who had shown him her silhouette, prompting him to rhapsodise: 'Es wäre ein herrliches Schauspiel zu sehen, wie die Welt sich in dieser Seele spiegelt. Sie sieht die Welt wie sie ist, und doch durch's Medium der Liebe. So ist auch Sanftheit der allgemeinere Eindruck.'⁴⁷ Superficially this is merely fanciful, but an important mechanism is at work here, with applications beyond the future relationship, and even extending to his image of the nobility. The vision attributed to her (the perception of reality, and yet 'durch's Medium der Liebe') is of course Goethe's own. In a sense it is a presumptuous attempt to exercise a god-like perspective, and is open to the accusation of self-deception, a willed refusal to see imperfections or limitations. Carl August, who thought Frau von Stein a bore, also thought he saw her more truly than Goethe did, and some commentators seem to agree with him. It is, however, an unnecessary assumption that idealisation is delusional, and certainly one that leads away from Goethe, who believed that 'könntest du enthüllt das Innre sehen, / Es würden Ideale vor dir stehen.'⁴⁸

Zimmermann thought Goethe's response splendidly insightful, but does not give much information as to his own account of her to him, other than that the effect on Goethe had been such that he could not sleep for three nights.⁴⁹ Some at least of Zimmermann's account can conjecturally be taken from one he had sent to Lavater late the previous year.⁵⁰ Apart from physical description this stresses moral qualities ('Ernst, Sanftmut, Gefälligkeit, leidende Tugend und feine, tiefgegründete Empfindsamkeit'). She was extremely pious and virtuous, but touchingly impassioned, and 'quiet moonlight and midnight fill[ed] her heart with divine peace', but she was also the perfection of courtly

⁴⁶ Letter to Reich, 20.2.1770, *ibid.*, p.104 (perhaps a recollection of the 'edle Einfalt und stille Größe' of Winckelmann).

⁴⁷ Zimmermann to Frau von Stein, 22.10.1775, Grumach, i.360.

⁴⁸ 'An die Herzogin Amalia', MA 6.1:749.

⁴⁹ Boyle, *Goethe*, i.208.

⁵⁰ Letter to Lavater, Wilhelm Bode, *Charlotte von Stein* (Berlin: Mittler, 1910), p.53.

virtues, skilled for example at formal dancing: ‘Die Hofmanieren, die sie vollkommen an sich hat, sind bei ihr zu einer sehr seltenen hohen Simplizität veredelt.’ ‘Simplicity’ is repeated, but it is of course a higher simplicity (‘elegant mit Simplizität’). She embodied, but also transcended court values and social skills, possessing physical attraction, but set far above it by an age-gap, marriage, *Stand* and a melancholy, idealistic disposition.

She certainly did not idealise Goethe, at least initially. *Rino* (1776) is only a sketch, but with a sharply satirical portrait of the new arrival.⁵¹ He appears at a court ball, sneers glumly at the dancers (‘Scheinen alle recht adlich gänße dumm’), but later joins in and is heavily flirtatious, trading partly on his reputation as the celebrity author of *Werther*. The portrait is unappealing, but credible enough. The summary by the von Stein character, however, is more self-approving than acute: ‘So ist er gar nicht herr von sich, / Der arme Mensch, er dauert mich.’ Self-command in pursuit of a supposed noble ideal of conduct, which, as Serlo would later explain to Wilhelm Meister, consists more of things not done than of things done, would eventually be taken so far as to threaten paralysis.

Along with the basic tone of profound emotional dependence clear from his letters, Goethe’s relationship with Frau von Stein certainly began and continued as one of pupil and teacher. This was not, of course, a matter of Goethe’s attendance at a kind of *Ritterakademie* as a rather mature student. Indeed if that had been his purpose, he would have been an unusually unpromising one. As late as 1782, he was still assuring her that he was ‘trying out everything we discussed about behaviour, manners, decorum and gentility’, letting himself go, but ‘always being conscious of [his] actions’.⁵² What Goethe was seeking, and what the relationship enabled him to construct, was an ethicised version of the courtly ideal, an ethic of active and useful *bienfaisance*,⁵³ heavily dependent on noble manners, not only for their inherent value, but because mastery of them was a precondition of the hoped-for social and political usefulness.

For a number of years the instructional basis of the relationship held firm. Not only did he repeatedly stress what he had learned from her, especially in matters of decorum, but he wished this influence on others, notably the actress Corona Schröter, ‘a noble creature in

⁵¹ Charlotte von Stein, *Dramen (Gesamtausgabe)*, ed. Susanne Kord (Hildesheim: Olms, 1998), pp.[397-400].

⁵² To Frau von Stein, 31.3-3.4.1782, HaBr, i.386. Such expressions are not necessarily to be taken entirely at face value. See Hans-Jürgen Geerdts, ‘Goethes erste Weimarer Jahre im Spiegel seiner Lyrik’, *GJb*, 93 (1976), 51-9, here at p.58.

⁵³ See in particular his letter to her of 27.3.1781: ‘meine alte Wohlthätigkeit kehrt zurück [...] du hast mir den Genuß im Guts thun gegeben, den ich ganz verlohren hatte.’ WA 4.5:97.

her way', who would greatly benefit from six months with Frau von Stein, during which she would presumably lose her 'bourgeois air', to use the phrase of La Rochefoucauld, and acquire a courtly manner.⁵⁴ This would enhance not merely her professional competence, but apparently also her personal character. Nothing much came of this, nor of his later hopes that Countess Werthern would play a role in Carl August's life similar to that of Frau von Stein in his own, that is, by instructing him in sublimation.

The court in general did not remain a learning environment for very long. As early as March 1776 Goethe was telling Merck that he had taken its measure, and by implication had little more to learn from it.⁵⁵ This was over-confident, and thereafter there is much self-criticism of his difficulties in adapting to high society. On Weimar itself, however, his comments are almost uniformly negative, in the manner of Werther's 'glänzende Elend'.⁵⁶

His stay began with the carnivalesque period of the *Genietreiben*, which was clearly a deliberate strategy. From one point of view, it was an attack on formal manners, but the main purpose was certainly to detach Carl August from his upbringing. Frau von Stein found herself being lectured to by the reigning prince in March 1776 on the worthlessness of decorum ('Anstand'). No-one with decorum or manners was worthy of the name of an honest man. She assumed, certainly correctly, that this came from Goethe.⁵⁷

Especially when taken with the introduction of various sports, notably skating, hitherto confined to the lower-class inhabitants of the town,⁵⁸ the impression is of a campaign of embourgeoisement, but this is misleading. The victims of the various practical jokes were usually middle-class, and one account stresses the hostility of the young geniuses, and by implication of Carl August, towards respectability, viewed as stifling and conventional.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ To Frau von Stein, 26.3.1776, WA 4.3:47.

⁵⁵ 'Den Hof hab ich nun probirt nun will ich auch das Regiment probiren, und so immer fort', 8.3.1776, WA 4.3:38.

⁵⁶ For example, to Frau von Stein, HaBr, i.318, or in conversation with Knebel, diary, 7.10.1777 ('Viel geschwätzt über die Armuth des Hof treibens, überhaupt der Sozietät'), FA 2.2:105. See also A. Fuchs, 'La Philosophie Politique et Sociale de Goethe Administrateur (1776-1786)', in [no ed.] *German Studies Presented to Walter Horace Bruford* [...] (London: Harrap, 1962), pp.58-80, here at p.66.

⁵⁷ Grumach, i.410. The opinion is precisely that of Rousseau's Wolmar: 'la bienséance, reprimé, n'est que le masque du vice; où la vertu règne, elle est inutile; je n'en veux point', Rousseau, *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, p.425.

⁵⁸ Grumach, i.481.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, i.419.

When this phase was over, Goethe passed from defiance of manners to an excessive self-control, including the famous ‘stiffness’ which was much remarked on,⁶⁰ and by the early 1780s to a compromise made necessary, not only by the requirements of ordinary social life, but by the impossibility without it of having the beneficent effect he still hoped for from his administrative work.⁶¹ He began to show signs of believing he had learned all he could from her, while perhaps not being entirely clear as to what would remain beyond his grasp. To adopt the terminology of Pierre Bourdieu, the court was a ‘field’ and the skills of Frau von Stein a ‘habitus’ adapted to it.⁶² Such a ‘habitus’, for Bourdieu, consists in large part of what he terms ‘bodily *hexis*’, an instinctive feel for the game, expressed in her case by a perfect corporeal adaptation which Goethe would never attain.

The court itself must not merely be moulded towards an ideal, but must also be encouraged to enact or perform its own elevated status, hence the tradition of masquerades which Goethe established from 1781 onwards.⁶³ These show him accepting the role of public intellectual, consolidating court society by defining and expressing its norms. In the world of *Götz* it had been possible, he believed, to enact spontaneously and without self-consciousness a myth of society as unified, hierarchical order (above, pp.37-8). Now the nobility was in relative decline, and such an enactment would have to be artificial.

The masked ball (‘Redoute’) had existed as an institution in Weimar since the 1770s, with a mildly saturnalian atmosphere. It provided an enlarged, but controlled social space and an audience for a lesson in the symbolic formation of a harmonious community, at once

⁶⁰ This seems to have begun as a mannerism and was often regarded by others as an affectation, Boyle, *Goethe*, i.63, 303, but one embodying a trait of character (‘*toujours reide comme un homme de Bois*’, Grumach, ii.377). Later it was certainly the result of physical illness, although the diagnosis is uncertain, Herbert Ullrich, ‘Goethes Skelett – Goethes Gestalt’, *GJb*, 123 (2006), 167-87, esp. 176-80. In court circles suppleness (‘*Geschmeidigkeit*’), mental and physical, was especially important. See Goethe’s own comment on Kayser: ‘*ich hoffe sein Leben hier [in Weimar] soll ihn geschmeidiger machen*’, to Lavater, 19.2.1781, *HaBr*, i.344, and cf. to Carl August, 8.12.1787, *WA* 4.8:305.

⁶¹ To Carl August, 12.10.1781, *WA* 4.5:204 (‘*ich nach und nach lerne, offen zu seyn und mich bis auf gewisse Punckte gehen zu lassen, ohne die hergebrachten, und natürlichen Schicklichkeiten zu beleidigen [...]*’), *WA* 4.5:386-8. This and the letter to Frau von Stein of 31.3-3.4.1782 cited above, n.52, are from his diplomatic travels, which made him more aware of his defects in self-presentation.

⁶² Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Bodily Knowledge’ in *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), pp.128-63, esp. pp.162-3.

⁶³ On the masquerades, see Wolfgang Hecht, ‘Goethes Maskenzüge’, in Helmut Holtzhauer and Bernhard Zeller, eds., *Studien zur Goethezeit. Festschrift für Lieselotte Blumenthal* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1968), pp.127-42; Astrid Köhler, ‘Redouten und Maskenzüge im klassischen Weimar: Variationen zum Thema Chaos und Ordnung’, *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 23 (1998), 30-47; Gerhard Sauder, ‘Maskenzüge’, in *GHb*, ii.309-19; and Andrea Castillo, ‘*Immortalizing a transient splendor and the ‘beautiful totality’: Goethe’s occasional works for duchess Louise from 1777 to 1784* (Stanford, CA: the author, 2009), esp. pp.223-57.

cultivated, decorous and moral.⁶⁴ Goethe's contribution would be the ennoblement of the occasion through poetry ('durch dichterische Darstellungen zu veredeln'),⁶⁵ but also extreme care in direction and stage management.⁶⁶ Allegorical verse, music and dance, in some cases also improvisation, would be focused into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* by a single coordinating intelligence. The cost, both literally and in terms of spontaneity would be high, and the breadth of social scope much narrower,⁶⁷ but for Goethe authority must be performed, not merely as a political lesson for the subject, but for its own sake. Half a century later he still thought it wrong to praise the recently deceased archduchess for the simplicity of her appearance. Purple, ermine and jewels belong to a princess, and are things we even have a right to expect of them.⁶⁸ He was permanently opposed to the domestic austerity of Frederick II or Joseph II, which he associated with a loss of self-confidence on the part of the ruling class.⁶⁹

His own view of the value of these entertainments is not seriously in doubt, despite a caustic letter of 1781, frequently cited.⁷⁰ The letter is to Lavater, in republican Switzerland, refers to his own recent activities as 'the service of vanity' and as adorning the 'pageants of folly', and distances himself sharply from the 'court poets', for whom such tasks were presumably appropriate. In fact elsewhere he speaks more respectfully of them. They might be transient, like firework displays,⁷¹ but had the function of acting out court life as a partial transformation of life into art.

One court reform which Goethe consciously addressed was moralistic, and led to his stage output becoming explicitly didactic in a new way (*Lila, Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit, Elpenor, Die ungleichen Hausgenossen*). The critique was of noble *Empfindsamkeit*, and derived much of its force from personal and local reference. Goethe is above all severe on

⁶⁴ So Hecht, 'Goethes Maskenzüge', p.132.

⁶⁵ Letter to W. C. L. Gerhard, 27.2.1815, quoted in Sauder, 'Maskenzüge', p.309.

⁶⁶ For his attention to detail, see the account by Johanna Schopenhauer of the 'Maskenzug' in 1809: 'Da marschierten wir denn ganz gravitatisch durch, in der vorgeschriebenen Ordnung [...], Göthe im schwarzen Tabarro und Maske war überall und sorgte, daß wir ordentlich und in gehöriger Distanz gingen; so machten wir zweymal die tour um den Saal und begrüßten die Herzogin die vorne auf der Estrade stand', quoted by Köhler, 'Redouten und Maskenzüge', p.30.

⁶⁷ Essentially the court has to be accepted as a social microcosm. In *Aufzug des Winters* (1781) a single couple in domino costumes takes part in a 'Chor der Masken', to symbolise 'die Menge', but even this is exceptional. See Sauder, 'Maskenzüge', p.312. In the *Pantomimisches Ballett* of the following year, miners and peasants make an appearance, but the peasants are for comic relief, and are soon chased away.

⁶⁸ To Ottilie von Goethe, 23.3.1830, WA 4.46:281.

⁶⁹ His comments on loss of morale in the paralympomena to *DuW* are well known, FA 1.14:890-1, and cf. *DuW*, HA 9:77. This is probably a later development, however.

⁷⁰ To Lavater, 19.2.1781, HaBr, i.344. Hecht established conclusively the seriousness of their purpose for Goethe himself, 'Goethes Maskenzüge', pp.128-30.

⁷¹ The comparison occurs in a letter to Knebel, 26.12.1818, HaBr, iii.442.

the tendency of courts to become detached from society,⁷² and of the effect of *Empfindsamkeit* in encouraging the cultivation, not of selfish pleasures, but equally anti-socially, of selfish neuroses. The important texts here are *Lila* and *Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*.⁷³ Asked by the Magus how she feels, Lila replies that the very possibility of happiness horrifies her. His answer is that mental or spiritual health is, for one with her privileged status, a duty:

MAGUS: Du sollst nicht fröhlich sein, nur Fröhliche machen.
LILA: Kann das ein Unglücklicher?
MAGUS: Das ist sein schönster Trost. Vermeide niemand, der dir begegnet.
Du findest leicht einen, dem du hilfst, einen, der dir helfen kann.⁷⁴

This is from an addition in version 3 (Jan.-Feb. 1788), and so belongs to Italy rather than Weimar, but the message is already implicit in version 2. The redrafting spells out an important moral lesson which it had previously been left to readers to infer, and which is addressed at least partly to Goethe himself as well as to Duchess Luise.⁷⁵

The relevance to Oronaro and Proserpina is clear, but here the corrective is more sophisticated, dramatic rather than sententious. The link between play and monodrama is controversial,⁷⁶ but one aspect appears to be Proserpina as antitype. Despite problems rather greater than Oronaro's or Lila's, one of her main laments is her inability to help others.⁷⁷ The noble duty of *Wohltätigkeit* will go on being stressed, but it has limits. Proserpina, queen and goddess, is helpless before a still higher power. This message might well have had a consolatory element for a courtly audience, and perhaps for Goethe himself. The futility of general attempts to better the human condition is a familiar theme from eighteenth-century conservatism, as is the modern accusation that indulgence in this feeling promotes a mood of fatalism with political implications. The main point, however, is the condemnation of *Empfindsamkeit* as a narcissistic retreat from social reality.

⁷² See also the 'Sebastian Simpel' poem, HA 1:106-7. Carl August is reminded by a peasant (traditionally Goethe himself in costume) that they are 'Euer bestes Gut' (l.16), and that he should make himself better known to them (ll.10-12).

⁷³ On Lila see in particular Gottfried Diener, *Goethes Lila: Heilung eines 'Wahnsinns' durch 'Psychische Kur': vergleichende Interpretation der drei Fassungen [...]* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1971), and Castillo, pp.100-66.

⁷⁴ *Lila*, Act 2, FA 1.5:849. For the significance of helpfulness in this connection, see also below, pp.112-13.

⁷⁵ The addition of the second couple to version 3 also has the effect of stressing the social consequences of Lila's disorder, Diener, *Goethes Lila*, p.110. He aptly quotes Friedrich in Act 1: 'Ach! daß an diese geliebte Person die Schicksale so vieler Menschen geknüpft sind!'

⁷⁶ For a survey of the literature, see Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, 'Proserpina im *Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*. Goethes Selbstmaskierung', *Euphorion*, 93.2 (1999), 139-67.

⁷⁷ *Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*, Act 4, FA 1.5:99-100.

The same is partly true of a neglected opera buffa fragment, *Die ungleichen Hausgenossen*.⁷⁸ Here the reference to Weimar reality is once more dangerously close, with baron and baroness representing respectively grossness of manners and retreat into sickly sentimentality. Both tendencies are promoted by their respective favourites, the huntsman Pumper and the poet Immersüß, and the aim of the plot is to discredit them by demonstrating their absurdity. Again, as in *Werther*, we have manners as a partly manipulative social resource of the nobility, but in conformity with Goethe's anti-German feelings of these final years before Italy, the tensions are expressed not merely socially, but also as national difference. The situation is rescued by the arrival of the countess, the baroness's worldly-wise sister, who significantly lives in Paris. Social clumsiness and heaviness are German, and both favourites are given to a self-deceived German nationalism. Thus Pumper's jealousy of a French rival in love and his own German honesty compel him to be sincere, in the sense of boorishly rude ('Nein ein Deutscher soll nicht lügen, / Mich verdrießt ihn hier zu sehn'),⁷⁹ making him a precursor of characters like the 'Polterer' in *WML* and proverbially, the Baccalaureus in *Faust II* ('Im Deutschen lügt man, wenn man höflich ist'). The class basis of this satire is clearly a 'noble' reaction on Goethe's part from his youthful enthusiasm for texts such as *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

The English parallel is significant here. In the course of the eighteenth century English national self-identity gradually came to include an antithesis to France and politeness. Masculinity, in particular, was now defined as blunt, rugged, sincere, even ungracious, certainly hostile to politeness and formal manners, personified by the ubiquitous character of the fop (Johnson versus Chesterfield).⁸⁰ The social relevance of this to Germany, where the nobility was considerably more French than in England, is obvious. Here the influence of Rousseau combined with the anglophilia of the Sturm und Drang to create anxieties about a general mental and physical *Weichlichkeit* affecting boys and men, especially in the upper ranks of society.⁸¹ However much this may recall the relationship between Götz

⁷⁸ FA 1.5:413-33, 1184-1207. For a detailed reconstruction, see Max Morris, 'Die ungleichen Hausgenossen', *Chronik des Wiener Goethe-Vereins*, 18 (1904), 43-8, and 19 (1905), 1-9.

⁷⁹ FA 1.5:425. With Flavio's 'Läßt sich treu und grob nicht scheiden?', *ibid.*, this is a recurring theme in Goethe.

⁸⁰ Michèle Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England', in Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen, eds., *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (London: Longman, 1999), pp.44-61; Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

⁸¹ Teresa Sanislo, 'Protecting Manliness in the Age of Enlightenment. The New Physical Education and Gymnastics in Germany, 1770-1800', in Ulrike Gleixner and Marion W. Gray, eds., *Gender in Transition: Discourse and Practice in German-Speaking Europe, 1750-1830* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), pp.265-81. Goethe's friend, the educationalist J. B. Basedow, was a prominent member of this movement. For *Werther* in this connection, see above, p.40.

and his son, by now (1785-6), both the nationalism of this trend and its implied social critique would have been deeply antipathetic to Goethe.

His diplomatic travels gave him opportunities for more advanced study of noble manners. In 1785, for example, he extolled the cleverness and subtlety of Wilhelm von Edelsheim, minister of the Margrave of Baden ('I wish I could spend three months with him'). In particular, he had helped Goethe a great deal with the characteristics of the *Stände*, a subject of importance to him.⁸² The tone here almost suggests a scientific interest, but of course his fascination was also practical, arising from a search for a model who could take his studies a stage beyond Frau von Stein.

Edelsheim was a diplomat, and diplomats are a paradigm of the duality between noble politeness and authenticity, with which Goethe himself was still struggling.⁸³ There is a similar tone in his later account of a meeting in 1774 with Klopstock, who also had 'something of the diplomat' about him.⁸⁴ Diplomacy was, and remained, more of an aristocratic monopoly than general administration.

There are not many of these encomia in the Weimar decade, and almost all are of members of the nobility. Literary figures are conspicuously absent, with the partial exception of Baron Grimm.⁸⁵ Much the most elaborate is of Countess Werthern,⁸⁶ in a letter to Frau von Stein in 1781.⁸⁷ The two themes combined here are praise of the countess's behaviour in ordinary social life as unselfconscious artistry, even artistic performance,⁸⁸ and social contact with her as a learning experience. The countess has a kind of certainty of her own worth and of the rank she occupies. Words such as 'Delikatesse', 'Aisance', 'Leichtigkeit' accumulate. She possesses the equivalent of genius in the art of living. This is connected with the breadth of her acquaintance with 'den größten Teil vom vornehmen, reichen,

⁸² To Frau von Stein, 20.9.1785, HaBr, i.485.

⁸³ For politeness versus authenticity (Shaftesbury versus Rousseau), see also Karl Heinz Götze, 'Edelstein oder Stachelschwein: Aspekte der Höflichkeit in der Goethezeit', in Dorothea Kimmich and Wolfgang Matzat, eds., *Der gepflegte Umgang: Interkulturelle Aspekte der Höflichkeit in Literatur und Sprache* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008), pp.19-32.

⁸⁴ *DuW*, HA 10:62-3. He was impressed by Klopstock's avoidance of matters of personal importance, in this case literature (they seem to have talked mostly about skating). He thought this an 'Eigenheit der Weltleute', *ibid.*, p.62. To 'talk shop' would be to offend against the anti-professional ideal of the 'honnête homme' defined in the 17th cent. by French writers including the Chevalier de Méré and Pascal, Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, pp.34-5, 105.

⁸⁵ To Frau von Stein, 9.10.1781. Even here the stress is on the social advantages of the meeting ('ich lerne endlich der Welt gebrauchen'), HaBr, i.370.

⁸⁶ Jeanette Louise Gräfin von Werthern-Neunheiligen, geb. Freiin vom und zum Stein (1752-1816), sister of the future reformer of Prussia. See also Borchmeyer, *op. cit.*, pp.55-9.

⁸⁷ 11.3.1781, HaBr, i.347-9.

⁸⁸ The analogy of her ordinary actions with performance is perhaps an echo of Florizel in *The Winter's Tale*, 4.4.135ff.

schönen, verständigen Europa'. She is able to give to everyone his or her social due, without seeming to parcel out her attention strictly in accordance with rank. At the same time she has firm moral principles, and refuses to socialize with anyone of bad or doubtful character.

She is, of course, more than a mere collection of attributes. Indeed, in a literal example of Curtius's 'inexpressibility *topoi*' we are told that 'dead words' are incapable of describing the 'unique living picture' which she presents.⁸⁹ Her company is both aesthetic pleasure and moral and social exemplum; he has learned from her through 'Irradiation' (illumination, insight), especially the meaning of a phrase such as 'Welt haben';⁹⁰ words such as 'begreiflich', 'Begriff' recur; she will be his 'Pensum' (task, homework) for the rest of his visit: 'Ich habe noch drey Tage und nichts zu thun als sie anzusehn in der Zeit will ich noch manchen Zug erobern.'

The letter illustrates more than one of the paradoxes of his attitude towards the nobility during the decade. The works, apart from the *Maskenzüge*, are often satirical and adversarial, but the critique rests on a fundamental assumption of acceptance, and in any case is being made by an author who is not publishing, but confining himself to criticism within a court circle.

The other side of the coin is an occasional profound anxiety. The most emphatic evidence for Goethe's sense of the inherent value of the nobility during this decade is the affair of Marie Antoinette's necklace, to which he responded in 1785 with real anguish, by his own account almost a minor breakdown, certainly a stronger reaction than that prompted by any of the events of the Revolution itself, as far as we know.⁹¹ That France should fall into anarchy and revolution was no doubt one of the disasters of history. But the issue raised repeatedly by Goethe's works in the 1790s is the almost intolerable possibility that an aristocracy, or even the French monarchy, did not deserve its privileges.

⁸⁹ For 'Unsagbarkeitstopoi', see Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* [1948], 8th edn. (Bern: Francke, 1973), pp.168-71. He defines the figure as 'Betonung der Unfähigkeit, dem Stoff gerecht zu werden', p.168, and gives classical and medieval examples.

⁹⁰ Significantly, a denaturalising Gallicism ('avoir du monde'). 'Irradiation' is a hapax legomenon, with similar heightening, rhetorical effect.

⁹¹ *Tag- und Jahres-Hefte*, 1789, FA 1.17:16-17; *Campagne in Frankreich*, HA 10:356; Boyle, *Goethe*, i.380.

Another paradox derives from the ideal of self-development. To such a temperament perceived superiority is a challenge to emulation.⁹² On the other hand, ‘self-acceptance’ is the very definition of ease, and depends on unselfconsciousness.⁹³ But no-one would describe Goethe in such terms, certainly in this decade. Again, how could an ethic of self-development cope with an achieved ideal? At most the countess could serve as a kind of proto-Gretchen, leading Goethe ever onwards and upwards, but even this depended on his continuing to take an unrealistic view of his own potential.

Goethe repeatedly portrayed himself in *DuW* as having difficulty in adapting to prevailing social norms. He had responded by flight or withdrawal as in Leipzig, or by retreat behind masks or incognitos, as at Sesenheim and elsewhere. The complaints to Frau von Stein about his difficulties with ‘Anstand’ continued, and eventually, as part of the general stock-taking in Italy which led him to abandon his ambition to become an artist and his self-imposed celibacy, he admitted that he was not destined to become a ‘Weltmensch’:

Die letzten Tage in Neapel wurde ich immer mehr unter die Menschen gezogen [...]. Auch kam [Marchese] Lucchesini noch an, um dessentwillen ich den 1. und 2. Juni noch in Neapel blieb. In ihm hab ich einen rechten Weltmenschen gesehen und recht gesehen warum ich keiner sein kann.⁹⁴

Any reference to the ‘world’ must contain Christian overtones of contempt, but here they are very faint, if audible at all. Goethe would never deny or repudiate the noble ideal in the manner of the fox and the grapes; indeed he believed he had met embodiments of it in social life, and obviously he owed this to Weimar. But he was now almost forty and himself no longer as much ‘im Werden’ as in 1776. The need now was to focus, and to write off losses. One of these was the goal of full membership of a caste which he would continue to idealise, but now in a personal, almost fully internalised form.

For Frau von Stein, too constant to her own standards to be herself ‘im Werden’, the case was simply one of a collapse from these standards, which, in a way that Shaftesbury would surely have understood, she saw as demanding loyalty to social norms as well as to moral and aesthetic ones. Her account of a meeting in February 1796 at the Schillers’ is well-known:

⁹² As we know from Otilie, everything perfect in its own kind thereby transcends it into a separate higher kind. The nightingale is sometimes merely a bird, but then ‘steigt [...] über ihre Klasse hinüber’ and seems to want to teach other birds what singing really is, *Wahlv.*, HA 6:427. Excellence, that is, is there not merely for our admiration, but for our instruction and emulation.

⁹³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p.211.

⁹⁴ To Frau von Stein, 8.6.1787, HaBr, ii.58 (Lucchesini was a highly skilled diplomat in the Prussian service). A few weeks later he wrote to Carl August, admitting, surely not by coincidence, that he would only ever be an amateur artist, 6-7.7.1787, WA 4.8:235-6.

Er war entsetzlich dick, mit kurzen Armen, die er ganz gestreckt in beide Hosentaschen hielt. Schiller hatte seinen schönen Tag und sah neben ihm wie ein himmlischer Genius aus [...] Ich möchte nur wissen, ob ich dem Goethe auch so physiognomisch verändert vorkomme als er mir.
Er ist recht zur Erde worden, von der wir genommen sind. Der arme Goethe, der uns sonst so lieb hatte!⁹⁵

The injustice of this is as obvious as its painful emotional origins, but it was not unfair that Goethe should pay some price for his well-known talent for flight, avoidance and metamorphosis. The passage is precise in its incomprehension, however, for from the first fantasy interpretation of her silhouette onwards, he had been as much developing an internal ideal of nobility as admiring or emulating a real one.

⁹⁵ Bode, *Charlotte von Stein*, p.366. His waist-line also features strongly in her tragedy *Dido*, dating from the previous year, Stein, *Dramen*, pp.[495-6]. On *Dido*, see Ortrud Gutjahr, 'Charlotte von Steins *Dido* – eine Anti-Iphigenie?', in Ortrud Gutjahr and Harro Segeberg, eds., *Klassik und Anti-Klassik: Goethe und seine Epoche* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), pp.219-46, and Boyle, *Goethe*, ii.453-5.

Chapter 5: Obligations of nobility: ‘Das Göttliche’

The tendency of Weimar was not to lead to radical change in Goethe’s social outlook, but to accelerate developments already in progress. These included an attempt to adapt nobility to a personal mythology, and thereby some further distancing from Christian orthodoxy. The two combine in ‘Das Göttliche’, but the poem is systematically ambiguous and needs closer attention, since previous approaches to it have stressed other features. It will be seen to equivocate both socially and theologically, but also to have a social subtext which has been somewhat neglected. The secondary literature is extensive,¹ and since the aim is merely to bring out a single aspect, what follows is only a partial *explication de texte*, but the opening and closing lines are cited for convenience.²

In its current form the poem almost certainly dates from 1783,³ but much earlier, in April 1775, Goethe had written to Johanna Fahlmer enclosing an unidentified ‘ode’ with the comment: ‘Wie gefall ich Ihnen auf dünnen Prophetenstelzen, Fürsten und Herren ihre Pflicht einredend?’⁴ There is no other extant poem to which this can plausibly apply, and Eibl concludes that it was ‘perhaps’ ‘Das Göttliche’. I hope it will emerge from what follows that the letter to Fahlmer is indeed a possible account of the poem, although in a different earlier version, presumably with more overt *Fürstenermahnung*.

Older commentators tended to take it as a kind of elevated lay sermon, and deprecated or ignored the suggestion of any reference to the social or the political. More recently, however, there have been references to the social background. Inge Wild has pointed out

¹ The following have been referred to: James Boyd, *Notes to Goethe’s Poems*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948, 1949), i.203-7; Karl Otto Conrady, ‘Zwei Gedichte Goethes kritisch gelesen: “Grenzen der Menschheit”, “Das Göttliche”’, in K. O. C., *Literatur und Germanistik als Herausforderung: Skizzen und Stellungnahmen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp.154-85; Walter Dietze, *Poesie der Humanität: Anspruch und Leistung im lyrischen Werk Johann Wolfgang Goethes* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1985), pp.118-42; Kurt Christ, “Der Kopf von Goethe, der Leib von Spinoza und die Füße von Lavater”. Goethes Gedichte “Das Göttliche” und “Prometheus” im Kontext ihrer Erstveröffentlichung durch Jacobi’, *GJb*, 109 (1992), 11-21; Wolfgang Wittkowski, ‘Hexenjagd auf Goethe. November 1783: Hinrichtung einer Kindsmörderin und “Das Göttliche”’, *Oxford German Studies*, 31 (2002), 63-102; id., *Goethe: Homo homini lupus. Homo homini deus* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2004), pp.13-106 [an expanded version of the above], and *ibid.*, pp.180-2, 213-14; and Mareike Müller, *‘Das Göttliche’ von Johann Wolfgang Goethe – eine Gedichtsanalyse* (Munich: GRIN, 2010). The last of these is a more or less uncontroversial *explication de texte*. The readings closest to what follows are those of Renato Saviane, ‘Numinoso, natura, società. Goethe a Weimar (1775-1786)’, *Annali. Studi tedeschi*, 25.3 (1982), 315-56, and Michael Titzmann, ‘Vom “Sturm und Drang” zur “Klassik”: “Grenzen der Menschheit” und “Das Göttliche” – Lyrik als Schnittpunkt der Diskurse’, *JDSG*, 42 (1998), 42-63.

² The text of ‘Das Göttliche’ is taken from HA 1:147-9.

³ The precise terminus ante is 19.11.1783. See in general Eibl’s commentary in FA 1.1:1047-8.

⁴ WA 4.2:254.

correctly that ‘edel’ for contemporaries would always have overtones of ‘adelig’, but goes on to suggest, more doubtfully, that Goethe has extended his ‘Tugendkatalog’ in the last stanza to include the ‘bourgeois’ virtue of ‘unermüdlich[e] Tätigkeit’.⁵ More radically, the articles by Wittkowski referred to above closely relate the poem to Goethe’s life in Weimar in November 1783, and restore it to a social, even political context.

Edel sei der Mensch,
Hilfreich und gut!
Denn das allein
Unterscheidet ihn
Von allen Wesen,
Die wir kennen. (1-6)

Heil den unbekanntem
Höherm Wesen,
Die wir ahnen!
Ihnen gleiche der Mensch!
Sein Beispiel lehr’ uns
Jene glauben. (7-12)

Denn unführend
Ist die Natur:
Es leuchtet die Sonne
Über Böses und Gute,
Und dem Verbrecher
Glänzen wie dem Besten
Der Mond und die Sterne. (13-19)

The opening risks empty moral uplift but avoids it, partly by distinguishing later between the three initial adjectives, and partly by the immediate paradox that certain virtues are enjoined upon us (ll.1-2), which we appear already to possess as a defining characteristic (ll.3-6). It will of course emerge that it is our potential for these virtues that so distinguishes us. The paradox is analogous to that of the ‘Adel-Tugend topos’ (above, p.17): precisely because we are humanity, we must be enjoined to be humane, just as those who are noble must be enjoined to be so.⁶

Taking the adjectives in turn, in the opening stanza ‘edel’ is used in two principal senses: (1) that in which man as such is ‘edel’, in contrast to the lower creation; (2) the morally attributed sense, in which only some of us are ‘edel’, and no doubt in differing degrees. A

⁵ Benedikt Jeßing and others, eds., *Metzler Goethe Lexikon* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), pp.204-5.

⁶ For the same paradox, cf. Herder, *Ideen*, part 3: ‘der Mensch sei Mensch! Er bilde sich seinen Zustand nach dem, was er für das Beste erkennet’, *Werke*, xiv.209. He calls this ‘das Hauptgesetz der Natur’. See also Hans Adler, ‘Herder’s Concept of *Humanität*’, in Hans Adler and Wulf Koepke, eds., *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp.93-116, esp. p.102.

third sense ('adelig') is largely absent at this point. How far it is present later will be considered below.

Equally significant is 'hilfreich', a word with a curious history in Goethe. Overall it is naturally quite frequent, often in purely social and polite usages, but it does not occur at all before Weimar.⁷ The relevant instances evoke an ideal of active benevolence (*bienfaisance*, *Wohltätigkeit*). In the Weimar decade we have a group of these which are symptomatic of a real change in Goethe's social and ethical attitudes. Their relevance for 'Das Göttliche' lies in strong associations with both the nobility and with the supernatural or allegorical. To be 'hilfreich' is the prerogative either of the nobility towards those beneath them, or of higher beings towards humanity.⁸ The origin of this strong connection with nobility seems to be Spinoza's *Ethics*, where 'generositas' (usually translated 'nobility', 'Edelmut') is defined as the desire of each one 'to help other men and join them to himself in friendship'.⁹

Spinoza's direct influence here is debatable, but is asserted strongly by Saviane in the article cited above.¹⁰ He also claims for it an element of anti-bourgeois critique.¹¹ This too is controversial, but part of Spinoza's personal attraction for Goethe seems to have been his outsider status as a heretic from his own community, and a resulting occasional tone of superior social defiance which may have resonated with Goethe.

Where the ideal of the 'hilfreich' is attributed to Goethe characters or to his contemporaries, it is often heavily feminised. It is applied, for example, to the Charlotte of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, to Dorothea (twice), and repeatedly to the Amazon of *WMTS*,¹²

⁷ There are 144 occurrences of *hilfreich** in the Chadwyck-Healey database, almost all in his usual spelling, *hülffreich**. Probably the earliest instance is in the second version of *Lila*, FA 1.5:54, that is, in late 1777 or early 1778. It does not occur in the correspondence until 1784, and thereafter not until 1792. The more neutral word for Goethe in ordinary social contexts was 'behülflich'.

⁸ The above database is referred to for the numerous examples. Of particular significance are those from *WMTS* and from two contemporary poems, 'Einsamkeit' (1782) and 'Herzog Leopold von Braunschweig' (1785), FA 1.1:337 and 335 respectively (see below).

⁹ 'Cupiditatem [...] quâ unusquisque ex solo rationis dictamine conatur reliquos homines juvare, & sibi amicitia jungere', E3p59s. In classical Latin, 'generositas' was already 'nobility' in both the literal and morally attributed senses. The same is true of classical French 'généreux', 'générosité', e.g. Corneille, *Cinna*, 1539, among innumerable examples. There is, of course, no suggestion that this social implication is actually present in Spinoza, merely that it may well have formed part of Goethe's reception of him.

¹⁰ Above, n.1. Saviane believes that the poem 'sia interpretabile dalla filosofia di Spinoza, non certo d'uno Spinoza "stürmeriano" ma d'uno Spinoza recepito dal Goethe maturo, politico e scienziato', *ibid.*, p.352.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.335, n.51.

¹² Of the Baroness in the *Unterhaltungen*, we are told that she 'wünschte vielen zu dienen, und ihre ausgebreitete Bekanntschaft setzte sie instand, es zu tun', HA 6:125.

and is evidently an aspect of the 'Ewig-Weibliche' which draws us upwards. This is explicit in the memorial address for Anna Amalia (1807). Noble natures, once they have departed this earth for higher regions, continue to exercise an influence, so that 'sie uns von dorthen, gleich Sternen, entgegen leuchten, als Richtpunkte', to guide us in our own course through the storms of life. In this way, 'diejenigen, zu denen wir uns als zu Wohlwollenden und Hülfreichen im Leben hinwendeten, nun die sehnsuchtsvollen Blicke nach sich ziehen, als Vollendete, Selige.'¹³ Goethe long continued to think of morality as having come into the world by a divine origin, through exceptionally gifted individuals, perhaps normally women, and as having spread downwards through mankind by imitation and emulation.¹⁴

Whether to refer the concept of the 'gut' (l.2) to Christianity or once more to Spinoza, or to neither, is uncertain. Titzmann sees 'gut' as a passive virtue, a matter of refraining from offending against norms, whereas 'hilfreich' is active benevolence, and 'edel' a kind of generalised excellence, not necessarily moral.¹⁵ This is a possible formulation, but only one among others. It does, however, receive support, as far as 'gut' is concerned, from the parallelism 'wicked' / 'the criminal', 'good' / 'the best man' (ll.16-18). It is also certainly the case, as he and others point out, citing ll.55-6, that it is possible to be 'edel', but neither 'hilfreich' nor 'gut'. Some of those who are 'edel' possess the other two qualities; others do not, hence the analogy with the 'Adel-Tugend topos', referred to above. At any rate the three adjectives, as developed, do not so much define as evoke an idealised version of nobility, a personal ideal which Goethe was developing, in part from the Weimar experience. How far the literal *Adel* is present would in part depend subjectively on the social attitudes of the individual readers of the *Journal von Tiefurth*, themselves predominantly noble, but not exclusively so.

Titzmann is also plausible on the relationship of the poem to Christianity, comparing it with the ring parable of *Nathan der Weise*, that is, with an enlightened monotheism not dependent on any one revelation. In his view it is concerned to establish values and norms 'deren metaphysische Begründung variieren kann: die "Götter" des Textes können allen beliebigen Religionen angehören, solange und insofern sie nicht mit der Wert- und

¹³ 'Zum feyerlichen Andenken der durchlauchtigsten Fürstin und Frau Anna Amalia [...]', FA 1.17:426.

¹⁴ To Eckermann, 1.4.1827, FA 2.12:595, where the context, significantly, is the *Antigone*. The theme is already strongly present in the prose *Iphigenie*.

¹⁵ Titzmann, 'Vom "Sturm und Drang" zur "Klassik"', pp.58-9.

Normsetzung des Textes in Opposition stehen.¹⁶ The final proviso is important, however, since a wholly impersonal deity is excluded, and this places a strict limit on the presence of Spinoza. Christianity, similarly, although incompatible with the opening lines, is given a privileged status by the repeated use of Christian imagery. The theology of the poem was from the start intended to be debateable, not to say evasive. Goethe was clear that it challenged orthodoxy, whereas its first (unauthorised) publisher, Jacobi, thought he was saving Goethe's credit by offering it as an antidote to the accompanying 'Prometheus'.¹⁷

Christian implications are strengthened by dependence on a metaphysical speculation strongly associated with Christianity. The word 'kennen' (l.6) is picked up by 'unbekanntem' (l.7). Mankind is placed between a known lower creation and an invisible higher one. This is the well-known Great Chain of Being,¹⁸ originating with Plato, systematised by Plotinus, and after centuries of scholastic support further heavily endorsed by Leibniz. For the present purpose its essential feature is 'fullness' or 'plenitude', as Lovejoy calls it, following Leibniz. Each stage of creation is linked to the one adjacent to it by minute degrees of similarity ('natura non facit saltum'). The clear implication, if we are almost to touch both the animal kingdom and the lowest rank of the invisible ones above us, is that there must be gradations within humanity itself.

The Chain seems not to have been directly discussed by Goethe, although it may be alluded to as early as *Werther*,¹⁹ and it is consistent with his view of the kinship between man and the lower animals, confirmed for him by the discovery of the inter-maxillary bone in March 1784.²⁰ Herder was a strong adherent, however,²¹ and Wieland dealt with it in

¹⁶ Ibid., p.48, n.8.

¹⁷ See the art. by Kurt Christ cited above (n.1).

¹⁸ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936); and for Germany, Thomas P. Saine, *The Problem of Being Modern, or The German Pursuit of Enlightenment from Leibniz to the French Revolution* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997), esp. pp.77-86. The significance of the Chain of Being here is pointed out by Titzmann, art. cit., p.56, but he does not pursue social implications.

¹⁹ *Werther* thinks it natural that our imagination 'bildet sich eine Reihe Wesen hinauf, wo wir das unterste sind, und alles ausser uns herrlicher erscheint [...]', 20 Oct. 1771, FA 1.8:124. For another possible instance, see the *Urfaust*, 94-7.

²⁰ Cf. also his account to Frau von Stein of the presentation of (imitation) Native Americans at the court of Brunswick, 21.8.1784. They did not disgust him as they had 'personnes du beau monde', but 'me faisoit plustot voir les efforts de l'espece humain pour rentrer dans la Classe des animaux' (by painting, tattooing, etc.). Their dances and their manners, in particular, closely resemble those of monkeys, WA 4.6:341-2. If we have a natural tendency to degrade towards the sub-human, this would increase the value of models for upward striving and imitation. For face-painting in this connection see also *Farbenlehre*, no.835, HA 13:506-7, *It. Reise*, HA 11:205-6, and 'Aphorismen', 1.26, FA 1.13:13.

²¹ See, e.g., the first part of his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, published in 1784: 'Wenn also der Mensch die Kette der Erdorganisation als ihr höchstes und letztes Glied schloß: so fängt er auch eben dadurch die Kette einer höhern Gattung von Geschöpfen als ihr

some detail in his 'Platonische Betrachtungen über den Menschen' (1755).²² Here the implications for mankind are developed by a grouping into five classes. The lowest, who make up the majority, are closest to the animals (p.78). They are a 'Mittelgattung zwischen Menschen und Yahoos' (p.80), coarse in their tastes as in their morals. They have a low, animal-like way of thinking, 'dass sie sich niemahls über die Erde, wo ihr Futter wächst, erheben können' (79) and they must be ruled, or the world will sink into chaos (80). Clearly these are the peasants. Wieland will not allow his moral classification simply to endorse the social order, however, and most of what we usually call high society ('die grosse und die schöne Welt') is assigned to his second lowest class (pp.80-81).

His fifth, or highest class consists of the 'Genien', those of unusual capacities, the teachers, lawgivers and rulers of the human race (p.89), who resemble the angelic guardian spirits believed by the ancients to watch over the world and fulfil the commands of the Creator on this side of heaven (p.90). They are, as far as this world allows, 'vollständige Menschen [...] grosse und majestische Geschöpfe' (p.93), in other words humanity with its full potential realised, but at the same time partaking in the nature of the invisible beings next above us in the Chain.

For Goethe, we might compare a much-cited phrase in a letter to Frau von Stein of 14.5.1778: he was gradually coming to understand 'wie die Gosen mit den Menschen, und die Götter mit den Gosen spielen'.²³ The great, that is, seem almost to be an intermediate category between (common) humanity and the gods. How literally this is intended appears from a later passage in *DuW*. For some, the sight of kings worshipping in church might be an almost egalitarian reminder that they share our common humanity. Goethe, precisely to the contrary, thought that the sight of earthly majesty bowing the knee to heavenly majesty, in this case at the coronation of Joseph II, 'brings home to us through our senses the common nature of both.'²⁴ The tendency of this perspective, then, whether in Wieland or Goethe, is to blur the dividing lines between humanity and the beings above and below us.

The importance of the Chain for 'Das Göttliche' is partly that without it, we may be led astray into thinking of the 'higher beings' either as a poetic fiction, or as being morally

niedrigstes Glied an', *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877-1913), xiii.194.

²² C. M. Wieland, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur and others, 14 vols. (Hamburg: the Stiftung, 1984), vol.14 (Supplemente 4), pp.65-100. Individual page references are given in brackets above. See also Saine, *The Problem of Being Modern*, p.83.

²³ HaBr, i.249.

²⁴ *DuW*, HA 9:202.

criticised, as in the prose *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (below, p.165). Dietze, in particular, proceeds from the correct assertion that the existence of the ‘higher beings’ is not explicitly asserted, to the dubious conclusion that the poem is ‘die Verkündung einer humanistisch-irreligiösen Position’.²⁵ He quotes Korff, perhaps the origin of this line of argument, but Korff’s point is that the gods have been created by us in the image of the ‘noble ones’ amongst us, and that we in turn have been created, or modified, by our own concept. This seems to go beyond the text, although it may have represented Goethe’s view at the time. It receives some support from ll.7-12, taken with ll.49-60, especially if we assume that our ‘Ahnungen’ are solely derived from the ‘noble ones’.²⁶

T. J. Reed, commenting on ll.7-12, proposes a similar view of the gods here as ‘ein Provisorium, ein Stimulans, eine Aufforderung des Menschen an sich selbst’.²⁷ This leads in his view to a ‘virtuous circle’, or rather an upward spiral of virtue, with belief in a humane and ethically superior religion giving rise to superior ethical behaviour, which in turn encourages belief (and so on). Apart from its inherent interest, this raises the question of the relationship between this ode and ‘Grenzen der Menschheit’, which however cannot be entered into in full. Clearly, if we accept Reed’s proposal, the two odes are complementary polar opposites, respectively enjoining on us a (potentially unlimited) upward striving, and warning us against ‘titanic’ presumption. These are not necessarily incompatible. Both the warning, certainly, and the call to ethical aspiration, at least by implication, are also present in the prose *Iphigenie* and arguably share its social subtext.²⁸ Significantly, the contrast between Goethe and the more orthodox Wieland, the members of whose fifth, highest group are ‘vollständige Menschen’, is one between an apparent social (and ethical) stasis and possibilities for personal growth. The capacity to be or become ‘edel’ seems to be present in all of us, no doubt in differing degrees, with the potential itself constituting the ethical challenge (Reed’s ‘Aufforderung’).

The role of the ‘noble ones’ in acting as models for our imitation is expounded in ‘Das Göttliche’ from the second stanza onwards. They are now to act as guarantors of the existence of higher beings, of whom we have inklings, but whom we also infer from the Chain of Being. We need this, because nature is bleak and morally empty. Its inability to supply us with moral nourishment is depicted exhaustively in ll.13-36 (not quoted in full).

²⁵ Dietze, *Poesie der Humanität*, pp.132, 134 (his emphasis).

²⁶ H. A. Korff, *Goethe in Bildwandel seiner Lyrik*, 2 vols. (Hanau/M: Dausien, 1958), i.294.

²⁷ T. J. Reed, *Mehr Licht in Deutschland: Eine kleine Geschichte der Aufklärung* (Munich: Beck, 2009), p.46-7. He compares this with Kant’s conception of God as a ‘regulative idea’, *ibid.*

²⁸ For *Iphigenie* in this context, see below, ch.7, esp. the Borchmeyer references at p.162, n.3.

The feeling here is related to the strong distaste with which Goethe and his circle in Strasbourg had reacted to the cold, mechanistic universe of Holbach's *Système de la nature* (1770).²⁹ It is typical of the theological equivocation of the poem that its imagery now becomes explicitly Christian, or at least biblical (ll.15-16, cf. Matt. 5:45, Ecc. 9.2-3). Classical (perhaps stoical) ethics serve only to remind us of the blindness of Fortuna (ll.26-31). The poem continues:

Nur allein der Mensch
 Vermag das Unmögliche:
 Er unterscheidet,
 Wählet und richtet;
 Er kann dem Augenblick
 Dauer verleihen. (37-42)

Er allein darf
 Den Guten lohnen,
 Den Bösen strafen,
 Heilen und retten,
 Alles Irrende, Schweifende
 Nützlich verbinden. (43-48)

In ll.37-42, the focus returns, as in ll.3-6 (and picking up 'unterscheidet', l.4), to man himself as noble, in the tradition of the chorus from the *Antigone*. Man can do the impossible: he can distinguish, choose, judge (ll.39-40). These are mental operations, and refer almost solely to nobility as a characteristic of mankind as a species.

In the next stanza, however (ll.43-8), subdued allusions to 'edel' in the sense of 'adelig' seem to appear. Rewarding the good and punishing the wicked are functions of power, in Goethe's world functions of the nobility or their delegated officials. In any case, fluidity of movement between the general, humanistic sense and the social and ethical senses continues, and is managed partly by a technique of synonymous echoing. In l.40, for example, 'richtet' will be echoed by the judicial functions of ll.44-5. In fact the whole stanza (ll.43-8) moves smoothly from the noble ones to the 'Unsterblichen' of l.50, in part by traditional Lutheran parallels between the divinity and the powers that be, whom He has ordained (God as our judge, ll.44-5, where 'Guten' and 'Bösen' must be explicitly Christian, Christ as *Heiland* and *Retter*, l.46, and as the good shepherd, ll.47-8).³⁰

Und wir verehren
 Die Unsterblichen,
 Als wären sie Menschen,

²⁹ *DuW*, HA 9:490-2.

³⁰ In the case of l.46, we should probably also think of Iphigenie. Both *heil** and *rett** are common in *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, and in Goethe 'heilen', in particular, often refers to the healing of mental ills. Both 'irren' and 'schweifen', l.47, continue the implied reference to mental error, or even pain and disturbance.

Täten im großen,
Was der Beste im kleinen
Tut oder möchte. (49-54)

Der edle Mensch
Sei hilfreich und gut!
Uermüdet schaff' er
Das Nützliche, Rechte,
Sei uns ein Vorbild
Jener geahneten Wesen! (55-60)

Social ambiguities continue in these last two stanzas. Whom do 'we' choose as our model of the divine? In ll.53-4 it is 'der Beste', who 'im kleinen / Tut oder möchte' what the immortals can do on a large scale. There is a clear connection here with the two contemporary 'hilfreich' poems referred to above (p.112, n.8), one of which was linked with this ode by Goethe himself. 'Herzog Leopold von Braunschweig' (1785) is a memorial inscription for a brother of Anna Amalia, recently drowned while taking part in flood rescue work on the Oder.³¹ He will become a river god:

Sei dann hülfreich dem Volke, wie du es Sterblicher wolltest,
Und vollend' als ein Gott, was dir als Menschen mißlang.³²

As Eibl says, the duke clearly exemplifies the ideal of 'Das Göttliche', set out in its opening stanza, but the reading 'wolltest' was apparently an amendment of an earlier 'warest'. The duke's efforts, that is, although no doubt heroic, had been unsuccessful. This poem shares with 'Einsamkeit' (1782) a negativity of tone, a loss of confidence in the ability of the administrative mandarin, even of the prince, however well-intentioned, to be of real benefit to society. 'Tut oder möchte' (l.54), like 'warest'/'wolltest', expresses this ambiguity.

In ll.55-6 we have once more 'edel' and 'hilfreich', but now in an implied opposition. In the ethical, rather than the social sense, to be 'hilfreich' is to act in a certain way; to be 'edel' is to have a disposition to will in a certain way, irrespective of the ability to perform what is willed. The ability might depend on circumstances, but must also depend in part on social status. To will the 'Nützliche, Rechte' is excellent, but the ideal ('der Beste') would surely be someone in a position actually to bring them about ('tun', 'schaffen'). All of this confirms the subdued presence here of the *Adel*.

³¹ FA 1.1:335 and commentary, 1049-50, on Goethe's later insistence that this poem be printed together with 'Das Göttliche'.

³² Eibl gives 'wolltest' as a later correction for 'warest', perhaps exemplifying Goethe's uncertainty.

A final ambiguity is the identity of the first-person speaker. In ll.10-11, he is obviously distinct from the ‘der Mensch’ (that is, the ideal). In ll.49-54, ‘wir’ seems to be humanity in general, not necessarily excluding ‘der Beste’ (l.53). In the final stanza, the ‘Mensch’, now the ‘edle Mensch’, is once more distinct from ordinary humanity, ‘hilfreich’ as Duke Leopold had been, at least in intention, and a ‘Vorbild’ for the rest of us, like his sister Anna Amalia.

A key point of Wittkowski’s articles, cited above, is the importance for the poem of the case of the infanticide Joanna Catharina Höhne. Wittkowski indeed goes so far as to refer to it as one which Goethe ‘damals schrieb, aus Anlaß eben jenes Falls’, that is, the Höhne case. This cannot be proved, but seems plausible.³³ Assuming that this part of the text dates from just before the letter which forms the terminus ante, it was written between the submission of Goethe’s opinion in favour of the death penalty (dated on the day Carl August signed the death warrant) and her execution. Goethe must have been aware, even defiantly so, of the burdens placed on those who feel called upon to rule with a strong hand. The ruler, whether as judge or administrator, must accept guilt, or if not guilt at least the burden of responsibility for unintended consequences, error or simply *raison d’état*. ‘Tat steht mit Reue, Handeln mit Sorge in immerwährendem Bezug’, he remarked grimly later, precisely in connection with his first Weimar decade,³⁴ and one of his last maxims makes a similar point with what seems almost bitterness: ‘Der Handelnde ist immer gewissenlos; es hat niemand Gewissen als der Betrachtende.’³⁵

The rhetorical effect of ll.55-56, then, is to enjoin upon those who are ‘edel’ (a word with subdued, but definite social connotations) that they should be ‘hilfreich’ (as argued above, a word with pronounced social connotations) and ‘gut’ (no inherent social connotations, but perhaps Christian or perhaps, following Titzmann, largely passive, almost minimalist). The social connotations of ‘edel’ must remain subdued, or the lines resolve into a banal reminder that ‘Adel verpflichtet’, and unlike the Fahlmer letter, the poem cannot be read in any such simple sense. It falls in part into the tradition of admonition to princes, but as the commentators mostly agree, its originality is rather in the reasons for these exhortations to the ‘noble’, however defined.

³³ Goethe, p.46.

³⁴ Paralipomena for *DuW*, FA 1.14:890, quoted Wittkowski, *Goethe*, p.103, q.v., on ‘Sorge’ in general.

³⁵ HA 12:399.

One way of putting the problem would be to say that the image of religion had changed from the emotionalism of the garden scene in the *Urfaust* to ethical abstractions derived in part from Spinoza. The distance from the lived religion of Gretchen had if anything increased, and the need now was for visible symbols to give flesh and blood to the speculations of an intellectual élite. The nobility, at least, were intensely visible actors on the stage of the world, and as such could be the bearers of values; on the other hand care would be needed to keep the play entirely edifying.

They are thus *obligés* in a new sense. They are the closest thing to supernatural beings which we can perceive in this life, whether or not these beings have any real existence, and they can act as a symbol for the divine – can, but therefore must. The very possibility imposes upon them a semi-religious function, and a requirement to provide moral leadership.³⁶ The result is a tone which is elusive, certainly, but permits the making of social and moral points without recourse to orthodox Christianity, in which we can no longer be assumed to believe. At the same time the distance from orthodoxy is partly veiled by a profusion of biblical imagery.

There is thus a withdrawal from the rebellious titanism of ‘Prometheus’. On the other hand, Goethe is not yet ready for the overt social challenge of the ending of *WML*. In both respects the poem is transitional, even equivocal. But if the nobility is to play its part in the Chain of Being by linking us to the unseen world, our conception of that world will have to change, as will the nobility itself. An attempt has been made, above, to distinguish between the social and ethical senses of ‘edel’, but in the final analysis Goethe is not forcing the distinction. The distinct presence of the *Adel* in ‘Das Göttliche’ has been argued for, but as a carefully calculated added implication. Indeed, if the hypothesis as to the Fahlmer letter is correct (above, p.110), it is in part a substrate allowed to remain from an earlier version. If the above interpretation is accepted, the injunction is to form our own internal ideal of the ‘edel’, as Goethe had, and to strive progressively to refine it and conform to it. To what extent the literal nobility will be of use to us in this process will perhaps ultimately depend on the individual temperament.

³⁶ For a comparison between this poem and the ‘menschenbildnerische Funktion’ ascribed to the theatre in *WMTS*, at least by Wilhelm, see Edith Braemer, ‘Zu einigen Problemen in Goethes Roman *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*’, in Hans-Günther Thalheim and Ursula Wertheim, eds., *Studien zur Literaturgeschichte und Literaturtheorie* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1970), pp.147-8.

Chapter 6: 'Actions that a man might play': Wilhelm Meister and his mission

During the first Weimar decade Goethe obviously found difficulty in reconciling his public duties with large-scale creation. Two of its most important productions, *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* (*WMTS*) and the prose *Iphigenie*, are superseded first drafts. Their survival, especially that of the former, enables an estimate to be made of the impact of court life on Goethe, not only in retrospect, but as current lived experience, in a way which is less true of the final versions of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*WML*), *Iphigenie*, or *Tasso*. All of these, however, are in different ways responses to Weimar and to reflections on nobility, its meaning and its place in public life. Of the two fully contemporary texts, *WMTS* is naturally the more direct in its treatment, and can be regarded as the key statement of Goethe's social attitudes as they developed during the decade.

WMTS was apparently begun in 1776 or 1777 and virtually abandoned in 1786.¹ Neither span date can be ideally confirmed, but the suggestion that a novel, or rather novels, known to have been in progress in 1773 had some connection with it has found little support.² Progress was slow, but in December 1785, with six books completed, Goethe drew up a schema for the second half of a complete text in twelve books. Work began on the seventh book in early 1786, but it was not completed and is now lost, as is the schema itself. Thereafter Italian experiences seem to have separated him from *WMTS* almost entirely, although he is known to have been collecting materials for Mignon's background in Vicenza in September 1786,³ and there are occasional references to it throughout the Italian period. Work on what was to become *WML* was resumed in 1791, but only taken up seriously in late 1793 or 1794. After drastic revision, deletions and the addition of much new material, it was published in 1795-6. A single manuscript copy of *WMTS* survived, surfaced in Zurich in 1910 and was edited for publication in the following year.

It has become usual to treat *WMTS* almost, or even literally, as a separate novel from *WML*, partly as a result of what are often profound stylistic changes and partly because

¹ For a convenient summary of the *Entstehungsgeschichte* of *WMTS* and *WML*, see FA 1.9:1133-41, 1247-73. In this chapter bracketed numbered page references are to *WMTS* in this vol., unless specified as being to *WML*, which is in the same vol. The full text of *WMTS* is not in HA.

² Boyle, *Goethe*, i.162, 289. The suggestion seems to have originated with Hans Matthias Wolff, *Goethes Weg zur Humanität* (Bern: Francke, 1951), pp.5-65. There is still support for the view that some of the text pre-dates Weimar, e.g. Hellmut Ammerlahn, *Imagination und Wahrheit: Goethes Künstler-Bildungsroman "Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre": Struktur, Symbolik, Poetologie* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), p.421, n.609.

³ Herman Meyer, 'Kennst du das Haus? Eine Studie zu Goethes Palladio-Erlebnis', *Euphorion*, 47 (1953), 281-94.

prominent themes such as the Turmgesellschaft seem to have been absent from the original conception. In a useful corrective, Thomas Saine stressed continuity between the two texts, and reminded scholars that the lost schema of 1785 may have resembled *WML* much more closely than is commonly thought.⁴ Nevertheless, for the present purposes *WMTS* is best regarded as a half-way stage between *Werther* and *WML*, showing the gradual development of a personal conception of nobility from being a characteristic of the actually existing *Stand*, or at least of an element within it, to the beginnings of the utopian ideal of an exclusive 'Reformadel'. In *WML* this ideal would take shape as a movement intended to supersede social reality, or at least drastically to recreate it in a form suitable to ensure the survival of nobility in the new, revolutionary world.

Theatre, nobility and artistic inspiration are linked in the text by related methods of treatment, whereby each is 'mystified' or 'defamiliarised'.⁵ Much of what follows will be concerned with the techniques used for this purpose. They include various forms of irony, as well as the direct presentation of plot developments from which, by a further irony in the title of *WML*, Wilhelm persistently fails to learn, or learns the wrong lessons.⁶ The techniques of mystification include manipulation of the narrator, who is in the early books reliable and omniscient, in the sense that he accesses the consciousnesses of all the (middle-class) characters, even very minor ones, but who then gradually ceases to do so as the habitus becomes first theatrical and then noble. This applies also to the artists (especially Mignon and the harper), and becomes a fixed rule in Book 5 (the castle).

Mystification can also proceed by relative complexity of characterisation. The count, for example, is in part a cliché of theatrical comedy (the bumbling, would-be authority figure, easily outwitted and circumvented by his cleverer womenfolk). But we are also carefully told that he is unusually well versed in all the arts (254), has an excellent memory (261), and shows good taste and inventiveness in his contributions to the prologue (262). The treatment of Jarno shows similar features on a smaller scale. It also illustrates the mystification of the nobility by means of the 'hermeneutic code' of Barthes, the direct or

⁴ Thomas P. Saine, 'What Time is it in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*?', in Hannelore Mundt and others, eds., *Horizonte: Festschrift für Herbert Lehnert zum 65. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990), pp.52-69, here at pp.60-61, 68-9.

⁵ 'Defamiliarisation' is the word normally used to translate Shklovsky's *ostranenie* ('making strange'), which he saw as a defining characteristic of all literary language. As I hope is clear, it is used above in a more restricted sense. For its original use, see Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp.60-66.

⁶ The main form of irony is 'dramatic' or 'situational irony', or what Hass, in a thorough study of its forms in *WML*, calls 'Ironie der Erzählstruktur', Hans-Egon Hass, 'Goethe. Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre', in Benno von Wiese, ed., *Der deutsche Roman: Vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart: Struktur und Geschichte*, vol. 1 (Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1963), pp.132-210, 425f.

indirect positing of enigmas. What is Jarno's parentage? Why does he have such an odd name? Is he the author of the 'Spottlied'? – and so on. The same technique will be applied to the Amazon. What is her name? What is the purpose of her journey? Are she and her party travelling under an assumed name, and if so why? Is she the new member of Serlo's troupe whose arrival he promises to Wilhelm (351-2)? – and so on.⁷

Other techniques include exclamation and use of a special vocabulary implying the inability of the narrator to be more precise, and hinting at subtleties possibly beyond his social competence. One such word is 'gewiss', naturally quite frequent, but used also to evoke a quality which the narrator is refusing to define, thereby drawing attention to a mystery. For example: 'das Theater tingiert den Schauspieler mit einem gewissen Glanz' (33); 'Ein Fremder [...] bedauerte, das ein gewisses Kind nicht mehr bei der Truppe sei', the first reference to Mignon (131); or, more specifically as to nobility, Mme Melina rehearsing *Belsazar*: the tenderness of the queen is not in her character – 'es war ein gewisser Ton, eine gewisse gesetzte Rührung', which she cannot express (164).

This relationship between actors and their roles, and in particular the question of how far they can express qualities not in their natures is a recurring theme, and the narrator is perhaps unreliably repeating one of Wilhelm's illusions. In *WML*, certainly, but to a lesser extent here also, the idea of a link between actor and character is later undermined by our introduction to a really talented actor, Serlo, whose skills are simply those of a brilliant mimic. Other forms of mystification, including association with biblical, mythological and literary figures, are considered below.

One possible approach to *WMTS* is a 'structuralist' one, using binary oppositions between groups of characters. The hope here is that this will connect with an actual aspect of Goethe's mind, an ideal of balance and justice, certainly not incompatible with satire, but at the same time showing a determination to view his major characters from a constantly varying perspective. It also connects with an aspect of his technique, the *Spiegelung* by

⁷ The answer to the last question will be assumed to be yes. The newcomer is clearly of superior social status, has like Wilhelm been practising her art in secret, and speaks an excellent accent-free stage German ('eine reine bestimmte Aussprache'), FA 1.9:351, which itself points to nobility. The need for this is not an issue in Wilhelm's own case in *WMTS*, but in *WML* he tells Werner: 'Eben so habe ich meine Sprache und Stimme ausgebildet, und ich darf ohne Eitelkeit sagen, daß ich in Gesellschaften nicht mißfalle' (*WML*, 659), that is, he has been trying to lose a local accent. Actors in tragic roles had to acquire 'eine vollständige reine Aussprache' and avoid any suggestion of dialect, <Regeln für Schauspieler>, FA 1.18:861.

which, as he put it, deeper levels of meaning were conveyed to the reader not directly, but by playing off events (and surely also characters) against one another.⁸

In one respect *WMTS* is better adapted than *WML* to such a treatment, since it will be assumed that Goethe's technique as a novelist was at an earlier stage of development. In particular, the entirely ironic surface of *WML*, as F. Schlegel put it, with Goethe's later approval,⁹ is less consistently applied in the earlier text. Where the irony fails, as often here, and indeed occasionally even in *WML*, we have authorial statements of personal attitudes which are of interest for their own sake.

Commentators are agreed that the bourgeois habitus is much more strongly asserted in *WMTS* than in the later text, from the opening page onwards, although Goethe clearly does not wish this to imply a bourgeois ethical norm.¹⁰ At any rate there is a top-level opposition between bourgeois and non-bourgeois, which is constantly reverted to. At the next lower level we may identify five groups of characters, representing the bourgeoisie, the nobility, theatre (or rather performers in general, including acrobats), a separate group symbolising *Lyrik* (including music and dance, that is, Mignon, the Harper, Wilhelm himself and the anonymous poet of the 'Spottlied'), and a fifth group of 'outsider' characters. The classification is not intended to be rigorous, and its limitations are obvious. Mignon and the Harper are very radically outsiders, for example, but both are also performers, and probably also members of the nobility; moreover, apart from his primary bourgeois identity, Wilhelm has links to all five groups. The last of the five categories includes allusions or characters in second-level fictions, rather than those at the primary narrative level. It comprises Jews, Turks and other pagans, gypsies, historical personages such as Nero or Cato, and characters in meta-fictions of Goethe's own, notably <Die königliche Einsiedlerin> and *Belsazar*, and in other fictions, most thematically those of Tasso and Shakespeare. Of these the Jewish and Shakespearian characters are much the

⁸ Hans Vaget, 'Goethe the Novelist. On the Coherence of His Fiction', in William J. Lillyman, ed., *Goethe's Narrative Fiction: The Irvine Goethe Symposium* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982), p.7.

⁹ HA 7:670 ('die Ironie, die über dem ganzen Werke schwebt'). For Goethe's approval, *ibid.*, p.677.

¹⁰ As discussed above, p.21, the word 'bourgeois' seems inescapable here. Wilhelm's family is 'bourgeois' ('bürgerlich') in the primary social sense, but also in values, which are prominently thematicised. These distinguish this character group both from the nobility and the players. Much of the focus of the social comment is on the players, who are entire social outcasts (the 'original' of Mme de Retti was refused burial in consecrated ground), but also noble, in the sense of having learned to imitate, and unconsciously to parody, noble manners. They also have recognisably 'bourgeois' traits, however, in that they talk up their own professional competence and the value of theatre to society, and they could be described as socially aspirational.

most important, several of them being figures of fantasy identification on Wilhelm's part, but the treatment of the whole group justifies the separate category.

The five groups give ten binary pairs, as follows:

- 1 Nobility/bourgeoisie
- 2 Nobility/theatre
- 3 Nobility/outside
- 4 Nobility/*Lyrik*
- 5 Theatre/outside
- 6 Theatre/*Lyrik*
- 7 *Lyrik*/outside
- 8 Bourgeoisie/theatre
- 9 Bourgeoisie/*Lyrik*
- 10 Bourgeoisie/outside

All of these oppositions could be shown to be thematic, with the possible exception of the last, since at the upper level all the non-bourgeois characters are outsiders, in the limited sense of being defined by opposition to a partly ironised bourgeois norm. For the present purpose we are only concerned with the first four pairs.

Nobility and bourgeoisie

The predominance of this opposition hardly needs stressing. It is one of the two main subjects of a set-piece debate between Wilhelm and Werner in Book 2 and dominates Book 5. There are elements of an anti-bourgeois critique in *WMTS*, but they are much less prominent than in the final version. The most obvious, and conventional, example is the satire on small-town respectability and hypocrisy in the scenes with Melina and Mme Melina in the cart and later before the magistrate (103-8). Even here, however, the treatment is relativised by the thoroughly bourgeois ambitions of Melina himself, and possibly also by a parody relationship to a similar scene in *Manon Lescaut*.¹¹ In the latter case the undercutting would derive from the contrast between the genuine nobility of Des Grieux and the exaggerated, theatrical nobility of Mme Melina.

Werther had already shown elements of anti-bourgeois critique, partly but not totally undermined by the unreliable perspective of the hero, and bourgeoisie itself had been

¹¹ As suggested by the ed., FA 1.9:1198.

sympathetically characterised by the experience of social limitations or restrictions. This had extended to the issue of manners. In *Werther* the word ‘bürgerlich’ had not been used in a pejorative sense except in one very ironical case.¹² Here it is explicitly ‘bürgerlich’ of Wilhelm to be too shy to speak to Mariane and clumsily to burn his coat backstage, presumably on the lighting cart (nobles are confident in their social address and have learned grace of movement) (37). As a theme manners lead to the question of whether nobility can be learned or acquired. This would later develop into the letter to Werner in *WML*,¹³ but manners are already an issue in *WMTS*, as they had been in *Werther*.

The relationship with Werner defines the debate in the first half of the text. In his conversation with Wilhelm in Book 2 Werner gives an idealised account of trade (118-21). The rich, by whom he means the princes, have ‘taken possession of the earth’, originally by force, and this justifies their various exactions, for example of tolls. In fact he goes further and refers epigrammatically, and mildly subversively, to the tolls exacted by the nobility as profits, and to the profits of trade as tolls. The intended effect is at once to glorify trade, and to demystify the nobility, to strip them of their non-natural aura, even to confer it instead on commerce (‘Das Glück ist die Göttin der lebendigen Menschen’, 120).

Werner’s tone is defensive, almost apologetic, as if from awareness of the long tradition of anti-mercantile rhetoric in Germany, but he is entirely uncompromising. To champion art, in this case the muse of tragedy, against the goddess of Commerce, as Wilhelm has done, is to champion literature, especially drama, and thereby aristocracy, and thereby heroic violence and warfare, against peaceful trade, and so to prefer exaction by force to profit by consent. We are to infer that war is the bad conscience of nobility, possibly even the bad conscience of art, since so much past literature has glorified the warrior. Wilhelm has no real reply, and can only reflect that Werner has as much right to champion his occupation as he himself has. This qualified attack on nobility, however circumspect, needs to be seen against the background of Goethe’s halving of Weimar’s defence budget, and acting at least as a drag on Carl August’s interest in military glory.¹⁴ Naturalising and demystifying the nobility will re-emerge as a theme in Book 5.

Werner’s critique is confirmed by an ironic linkage of Wilhelm’s rebellion to the adolescent’s impatience at introduction to the world of work. His father is grieved by signs

¹² Above, p.63, n.94 (*Werther*, the aunt).

¹³ Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, pp.9-53.

¹⁴ See Hans Reiss, ‘Goethe on War: Some Reflections on *Campagne in Frankreich*’, *PEGS*, 53 (1984), 98-123.

that his son is not a born merchant. He lacks the instinctive feel for arithmetic, for the calculation of small profits ('Aufmerksamkeit auf kleine Vorteile', 34). Attention to business is beneath Wilhelm, 'an oppressive burden on his soul', a kind of 'pitch', which constrains his growth and limes the wings of his spirit (ibid.). This is the 'Genie' as nobleman, with the nobleman's contempt for commerce as *dérogance*.

The first specifically noble character to appear in the text is Herr von C, although from his rank the (unnamed) 'Oberforstmeister' might be assumed to be one (126-7). The two are linked, in that both intervene to protect a theatrical performance from clerical censorship (170). Herr von C. is of exceptional interest, since he is treated entirely without irony, and structurally is intended as a counterpoise to the castle in Book 5. He is clearly a Prussian, and so can be presented as being a victim of his noble status.¹⁵ He is well informed about German literature, without having an exaggerated view of its merits, which he expects will increase in the next generation. His view of *Belsazar*, in particular, is obviously intended to be authoritative, allowing for the social demands of politeness towards the author. He gives it a very high place, with the reservation that it contains only one character who both feels and acts. This is obviously Darius, and the criticism echoes that of Wilhelm himself, that his dramas were peopled by characters who felt too much and acted too little (89-90). Herr von C. attributes this in part to Wilhelm's ignorance of the world, a recurring theme in the text, and he tries to remedy it by introducing him to noble society in the town.

Helpfulness is stressed: he provides travel books to help with costumes (168) and pulls strings to overcome clerical opposition arising from the biblical subject (170), but significantly he is satisfied with this secondary role.¹⁶ In particular, he seems to have absolutely no literary ambitions of his own. He is unshocked both by Wilhelm as playwright and even as actor, although the latter involves him in a duel, in which he is seriously wounded. He is free with what is presumably excellent advice on Wilhelm's future career, making no attempt to dissuade him from the stage, for which he clearly has a talent, but warning him against excessive expectations of theatre itself. He bases this significantly on the limitations of audiences, who will only respond to what is powerful and obvious. His manners are exemplary, and the narrator draws attention to the tact with which he smoothes over any embarrassment on Wilhelm's part arising from the duel.

¹⁵ 'Sein Stand, der ihn zu einem harten trotzigem Geschäfte verdammt [...]', 165. The narrator is markedly unenthusiastic about military life, and by implication about Prussia, ibid.

¹⁶ For helpfulness on the part of the nobility, cf. Jarno's introducing Wilhelm to Shakespeare (271); 'Kann ich Ihnen hilfreiche Hand leisten [...]' (280); and Wilhelm's earlier bitterness towards noble dilettantism, which is such that 'der Einfluß des Höhern und Angesehnen, der nützen und helfen sollte, schadet' (237). See also above, pp.112-13.

Finally, he is at pains to correct Wilhelm's glamorised view of war, which breaks out at this point. Soldiering is his trade ('Handwerk', 212),¹⁷ and he will hope to do his duty and set a good example to others within the limitations of his rank. He has no ambition to become a hero for the newspaper readers, and the overall tone is sombre. Commentators agree that the war must be the Seven Years' War, and Ewald von Kleist, whom some identify as a real life counterpart of Herr von C., would die in 1759 of wounds received at Kunersdorf.¹⁸ If there is irony in the presentation of Herr von C., it is certainly not directed at him, but at a society which places him in a rather lowly setting, misuses him and will perhaps throw away his life on a war which we are given no reason to regard positively.

Herr von C., then, is ethically normative, 'edel, hilfreich und gut', and there are indeed faint echoes of 'Das Göttliche', including a reference to the wind, the stress on 'das Glück' and on the importance of setting a good example to others, and the generally aristocratic tone.¹⁹ His influence on Wilhelm, although not long-lasting, ought to be entirely positive, both socially and in matters of taste. Despite his relatively humble status, he stands for the broader sense of life which Goethe would later hope to acquire in Italy.²⁰ At the same time, although his virtues are in some unexplained way connected with his *Stand*, they are entirely individual, and indeed place him at odds with conventional noble society in the town (his refusal to be shocked by Wilhelm's acting, for example, or the duel). What we hear of that society is uninviting. Its female circles are defined by a superficial literary culture and some mild piano playing, and its male ones, the garrison officers, by loud heartiness and intemperance (169-70). Neither Herr von C.'s culture nor the grace of his manners seems to owe much to his schooling in noble society. We had been told earlier that both in the theatre and 'in der großen Welt' people direct their eyes meaningfully at objects they are hardly aware of, just as women habitually use their eyes to attract others (37). This associates 'high society' with theatre as a place of social falseness, and there is no question here or anywhere else in the text of validating it as such.

Herr von C. is most exemplary in his view of duty as 'die Forderung des Tages', as Goethe later put it. One of Wilhelm's besetting sins is the confusing of inclination ('Neigung')

¹⁷ Contrast Wilhelm to the players in one of his less realistic moments, on '[a]lle die Kleinheiten die diese edle Kunst [acting] zu einem Handwerke erniedrigen' (292).

¹⁸ Herr von C. is no doubt a composite figure, and has also been linked to Knebel, Boyle, *Goethe*, i.367. One important difference from Kleist, or indeed Knebel, is that Herr von C. is not himself a writer of any kind. There is no room in *WMTS*, or in *WML*, for a German nobleman with real literary talent.

¹⁹ Cf. his reference to 'der Ruf' as 'eine ohnmächtige Gottheit', which 'gleich an Willkür dem Winde und hält sich hart an den Zufall', and the references in the same speech to 'der niedrigste im Pöbel' and 'die Menge' (212-13).

²⁰ *It. Reise*, HA 11:429-30.

and duty, and the invention, sometimes through a false scrupulosity, of duties conflicting with those which should be plainly evident (315). At one point this is directly illustrated by an implied contrast with Herr von C. (200). Wilhelm has been inventing obligations for himself towards the actors, and compares himself to an incompetent army officer who has allowed his men to be surrounded by the enemy (*ibid.*, and cf. 205, 318).

Typically Wilhelm's indecisions are forms of self-indulgence, and so of weakness of will. *Akrasia* has already been referred to as a well-known theme, both in the pre-Weimar Goethe and later.²¹ Some of the 'akrates' characters had been noble (Weislingen, Fernando), and Eduard was still to come. In *WMTS*, however, it is exclusively bourgeois, or at least non-noble. Both Wilhelm, and more seriously Mariane (e.g., 42-3), are studies in wishful thinking, and failure to decide is a theme discussed at some length, with sophisticated psychological analysis and a surprising, almost Sartrean interest in self-deception (for example, 237), in thinking one is still undecided when in fact 'les jeux sont faits'.²² Some of these debates are internal, but in two cases, placed structurally at the ends of Books 3 and 6, they are acted out in formal theatrical tableaux, as a way of pointing up their psychological falseness. The military service of Herr von C. is governed by a goddess, iron necessity ('die eherne Notwendigkeit'), harsh and cruel in her demands, but representing a fixed standard of conduct (165). For Wilhelm, as for Werther, necessities are what he calls the promptings of his inclinations.²³ Thus at one point Wilhelm cannot make up his mind between duties:

- (1) to his family. In part these are duties of ordinary commercial honesty, but also of ordinary courtesy (he has failed to write home for so long that his parents are in doubt as to whether he is still alive, and in the event he continues to procrastinate).
- (2) to the players. He has in fact no obligations towards them at all, but is indulging in anxieties about the well-being of the 'badly-led troupe'.
- (3) to Mignon and the Harper, for whom he can do little or nothing. Indeed in Mignon's case he risks doing harm which in *WML*, and quite possibly in the planned continuation of *WMTS*, will be fatal.

²¹ Above, p.72.

²² His final decision to join Serlo is a classic instance of *mauvaise foi*: he decides 'daß er dazu genötigt sei' (353).

²³ Mignon makes herself 'notwendig' to him (163), although he later admits it will be a 'Notwendigkeit' eventually to abandon her (238); so earlier had Mariane ('notwendig [...] unentbehrlich', 48). The urging of the Melinas that he should stay with the troupe makes it, not socially awkward, but impossible ('ohnmöglich') for him to leave (142). At one point he is trying to decide whether or not to accompany the troupe to the castle, but can already see he will have to do so (237). Since he has not yet even been invited, we might wonder why. The narrator's presentation of his state of mind ('er schwankte zwischen Zweifel und Notwendigkeit', *ibid.*) is logically absurd and presumably ironical.

- (4) At the same time he is hoping to meet up once more with Mariane, perhaps in H[amburg], although
- (5) he is also fantasising about the Amazon (314-15).

There is nothing psychologically implausible in all this, but the effect is clearly intended to be critical.

The relevance of *akrasia* to nobility is that the nobility is above all decisive, a theme developed at the end of Book 4 and in Book 5. The central figure, the count, is characterised by a series of confident decisions. He will invite the troupe to the castle; he can tell at a glance which is the most talented of the actors; he has a clear idea of the form of the prologue to be performed to welcome the prince, and so on. These decisions are of course mostly wrong, thereby introducing the theme of noble dilettantism. Nevertheless the ability to make a decision and abide by it is clearly intended as a contrast to Wilhelm, and has class implications. One way of satirising the bourgeoisie is to associate it with an elaborate inner life which favours self-deception and paralyses action: to satirise the nobility is to show it promptly and confidently doing the wrong thing.²⁴ This is expanded in *WML* into a discussion about the active (noble) hero of drama and the (usually bourgeois) 'retarding' hero of the novel (*WML*, 675-6), but is already present here. Wilhelm remarks to Werner in apparent puzzlement that his early dramas had suffered from heroes who seemed mysteriously unable to act, even though he was quite clear that action was of the essence of drama (89-90).

The importance of this theme, perhaps occurring here for the first time, can hardly be exaggerated. In the first place it has obvious links with *Hamlet*. Wilhelm's Shakespeare reception is largely outwith the present subject, but its phases are significant. He begins, as he had done with Corneille and Racine, by confusing Shakespeare with reality; then he identifies with confident noble actors and doers such as Prince Hal; finally, inevitably, he fixes on Hamlet, a bourgeois novel hero who has somehow wandered into a play (very much on Wilhelm's view).²⁵ The bourgeois is a conscientious, anxious, Kantian figure: the nobleman has an instinctive, or rather learned, tropism towards action, which presents

²⁴ The point is developed in *WML* (930): 'Es sind nur wenige, die den Sinn haben und zugleich zur Tat fähig sind. Der Sinn erweitert, aber lähmt, die Tat belebt, aber beschränkt.' The contrast between noble 'Tat' and bourgeois 'Bewußtsein' was taken up by Hegel, Heinz Schlaffer, *Der Bürger als Held: Sozialgeschichtliche Auflösungen literarischer Widersprüche* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), pp.15-50 (the context is Jean Paul, but see esp. pp. 28-32 on *Hamlet* and *WML*).

²⁵ Stephan Wolting, *Des Suchens sei kein Ende: Säkularisierung und Sendung in Goethes Romanfragment 'Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung'* (Aachen: Shaker, 1996), pp.169-73.

itself as duty, thus absolving him from any need to agonise over ultimate consequences. This characterisation has inevitably suggested Nietzsche to later readers, especially in view of the treatment of Lothario in *WML*.²⁶ The line of influence, through Nietzsche but also direct from Goethe, extends as far as Weber, although in his case it would be the bourgeois heroic Puritans who had an inner sense of autonomous authority, leading to an active involvement in public life.²⁷

Decisiveness is an essential military virtue, and links to the theme of nobility and warfare, touched on already by Werner and Herr von C., but more fully developed in Book 5. It is also necessary in civil administration, however. We see comparatively little of this in *WMTS*, but enough to suggest an input from Goethe as *Geheimrat*. Commentators usually treat the chaotic reception of the players in the castle as a satire both on the count's incompetence and on the gap between the players' view of their own importance and the reality of noble patronage. No doubt the second point is true, but after all the count has delegated responsibility to a subordinate who suffers an unforeseeable injury. Again, we are perhaps to be impressed by the conscientiousness with which the count provides a detailed itinerary for the troupe's journey to H[amburg], when he presumably has many other demands on his time. If we pursue consequences far enough, the itinerary leads to disaster, even loss of life (Mme Melina's miscarriage), but as the narrator stresses, this is partly due to a later decision by Wilhelm and partly to very bad luck (314).

The military aspect of nobility is reverted to in the castle, once more apparently in a Prussian context. This is significant, since the Seven Years' War opened with a campaign by Prussia against neutral Saxony which was regarded elsewhere in Europe with considerable moral outrage, and the figure of the prince needs to be set against this background. It is however tactfully evaded in the final meta-fiction, the theatrical prologue, which presents him not as a conquering hero, but through the standard baroque topos of the ruler as creator of an arcadian realm of peace, where sheep may safely graze. Here we have the 'Volk' as it should be, a happy pastoral, with games, dancing and songs praising loyalty, peace and tranquillity (259). The Harper is prominent, since he has already been associated with songs in praise of peacemaking, and expressing hatred of discord (217). Suddenly there is an irruption by soldiers, who commit various acts of

²⁶ Lothario was, of course, originally developed as a foil to Wilhelm in precisely this respect. Hence Goethe's working note for *WML* in 1793, in which the two are contrasted as respectively the 'heroisch aktiver Traum' and the 'aesthetisch sittlicher Traum', MA 5:709.

²⁷ Weber was specific about his debt in this respect to Goethe, Isher-Paul Sahni, "The Will to Act": An Analysis of Max Weber's Conceptualisation of Social Action and Political Ethics in the Light of Goethe's Fiction', *Sociology*, 35.2 (2001), 421-39.

violence. A goddess appears, puts the soldiers' leader in chains, and announces the imminent arrival of the prince, which in itself at once suffices to restore calm. It brings 'Friede, und Ruhe unter dem Volke' (262), that is, among shepherds and soldiers alike.

The 'Volk' thus includes elements which, if properly led will naturally be proponents of order, but who may be led astray by a trouble-maker, get out of hand and themselves need to be pacified by police action. Wilhelm seems slightly ill at ease in his role as court poet, not for any reason connected with the political message, but because it requires him to subordinate his taste to that of the count. In the end the bourgeois artist loyally puts his talents at the service of a rather ambiguous entertainment. One of the two main *Lyrik* characters participates; the other, Mignon, adamantly refuses to do so in any way.

Nobility and theatre

Theatre and the nobility are both models: they set higher standards before us for our admiration and possible imitation, but both are problematic. Taking the view of Herr von C. as authoritative, theatre is compromised by only being able to inculcate broad, simple lessons (213). Because of its expense it dare not lose contact with a mass audience with different levels of taste and experience, a repeatedly recurring theme stressed by Wilhelm himself, the narrator and others, notably Aurelie. The problem with nobility is simply that many of its members are incapable of embodying any ideal, and that those who are so capable, like Herr von C., may be in a comparatively lowly station and barely visible as models to society at large.

On the other hand, both theatre and nobility enjoy massive public acceptance and popularity. As social forces, setting aside the political issue, both might be described as having enormous unfulfilled potential, and the key question is how far this potential can be realised. Goethe's eventual answer, as we know from *WML*, was an entire rejection of theatre as far as this social role is concerned, and the replacement of the existing nobility, to its furious indignation, by an imaginary one including such figures as Mignon and the Harper (by birth) and Philine (by marriage), in other words a church so broad as to be almost entirely free from political or social reference. What the answer was to have been in *WMTS* is unknown, although the treatment of both nobility and theatre suggests that it might have lain in an alliance between them which would raise Germany's cultural and moral level, and also improve its manners, by bridging the gaps between Wilhelm and the Amazon on the one hand, and between Aurelie and Lothario on the other.

The lessons we are to learn from nobility and theatre are discussed from Book 1 onwards. The narrator intervenes more than once to implicate theatre in the formation of a false, unnatural conception of nobility as liberation. The young Wilhelm is constrained by his social circumstances: '[i]n eine Stadt gesperrt, in's bürgerliche Leben gefangen, im Häuslichen gedrückt, ohne Aussicht auf Natur, ohne Freiheit des Herzens'. For Goethe 'Natur' at this period means not merely, as here, the physical world, but also the social and psychological world, even reality in a higher sense.²⁸ Hence the inevitable attraction of theatre, which however is now presented in a much more ambiguous series of metaphors. It is a 'place of refuge' (Heilort), a 'nut', in the sense of a microcosm, a 'mirror', in which he can see his own feelings and his future actions, the figures of those round about him, and the 'shining splendours of nature, in all weathers, under a roof', as the narrator adds, with some calculated bathos. No wonder Wilhelm, like so many others, finds himself 'fettered' (gefesselt) to theatre, a place where every unnatural feeling for nature is concentrated in a kind a focus ('alles unnatürliche Naturgefühl auf diesen Brennpunkt zusammen gebannt ist', 35). Partly by exploitation of the multiple senses of 'Natur', and partly by the choice of metaphors (a nutshell is a trap as much as a place of refuge, as we know from *Hamlet*), theatre has been established as anti-bourgeois, certainly, but also as an escape from reality into another trap.

Despite a reference to *Miß Sara Sampson* (40), theatre is overwhelmingly aristocratic, first French classicism, both genuine and as imitated by Wilhelm himself, and then Shakespeare, always in very aristocratic contexts. Unlike his successor in *WML*, who is from the outset at a more elevated social level, he does not show any serious signs of himself aspiring to rise socially to the level of his heroes. It is a natural question, however, how far Wilhelm, by incorporating noble values into himself sufficiently to portray them and embody them on stage, can rise above his family background in manners and morals, or whether his theatrical abilities in themselves connect him in some sense to the nobility.

In the play of David, Wilhelm had 'shown a good, faithful and courageous soul' in challenging Goliath, and 'modesty' in appearing before Saul (23). The wording is ambiguous here, as between performance and possession of a quality, between seeming and being. But is there a real difference? And if there is, is it possible to enact certain qualities without possessing them? The common-sense answer to the second question would be that if it were not, then acting would hardly be possible, but perhaps nobility is an exception. This theme will recur in various forms, not only in connection with actors

²⁸ Edith Braemer, 'Zu einigen Problemen', p.147.

(44-5, 164), but also dramatists. Werner sensibly remarks, in connection with Corneille, that to be magnanimous and to give away kingdoms is easier on stage than in real life.²⁹ Wilhelm insists, not that the nobility of Corneille's characters evinces the nobility of his soul, but more cautiously that a writer with a mean soul would inevitably go astray in portraying greatness, and be led into exaggeration and bombast (76). Werner's point is later underlined by the baron's plays. His heroes are models of nobility, renouncing every desire, forgiving every insult and indifferent to worldly possessions (265-6), but the result is dullness and absurdity, and this does not refute Wilhelm's position.

The child actors in Wilhelm's troupe decide to play tragedy, partly because they have been told tragedy is easier than comedy. In any case, they see themselves as sublime beings ('sie sich selbst als erhabne Wesen vorkamen', 30), who will therefore find it easier to be noble than to be amusing. This 'seeing of one's self as' is clearly fantasy identification, which had been a part of Wilhelm's reaction to the play of David almost from the outset, and is here treated as a kind of original sin. It had been an important theme in Rousseau's attack on the theatre in the *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*. Why should the sight of noble, disinterested characters on the stage incite us to virtue? By identifying with them, we have performed their actions already.³⁰ In his argument with Werner Wilhelm even gives one standard refutation of Rousseau: we both identify, and do not identify with the characters of Corneille. One participates, 'und wagt doch nicht sich selbst in die Lage zu denken, man ist und bleibt Zuschauer, und erwartet von den höhern Wesen wie sie sich benehmen werden' (75). To borrow an image from later in the text, we watch them as we would high-wire performers: we both share their danger and at the same time are repelled by it from entirely placing ourselves in their situation. Corneille's Auguste (in *Cinna*) or Wilhelm's own Darius serve us as models of noble conduct, for our admiration and at least partial aspiration, but their moral elevation reminds us that they are higher beings, 'Halbgötter'. Their problems are not ours, precisely because created by their nobility, which in context means by the higher ethical standards they set themselves. Thus a virtuous circle is created, further exalting them in our estimation, and usefully reinforcing mystique and thereby subordination.

²⁹ For the gap between theatre and reality, cf. Herr von C. on the more serious stage for which he is setting out, 'wo jeder seine Rolle nur einmal spielt', Wolting, *Des Suchens sei kein Ende*, pp.240-1.

³⁰ Justus Möser was another who thought that claims for the moral value of theatre were mostly hypocrisy. Even tragedy 'schmeichelt unsrer Eigenliebe mehr, als es sie bessert', 'Harlekin oder Verteidigung des Groteske-Komischen', *Sämtliche Werke*, ii.315-16.

Werner hints that this requires us to believe that the noble characters of Corneille corresponded with social reality, but this is not a problem for Wilhelm, whose confusion of theatre and reality is systematic. Even in the castle, he is still convinced that Racine's plays were realistic accounts of behaviour at the court of Louis XIV (270). Later Shakespeare will provide him with models for identification who are princely, but less intimidatingly elevated than those of French classicism. In the short run at least, this will only deepen his confusion.

None of this is to deny the renewed importance of French classicism for Goethe himself, in precisely those aspects of his personality where he was consciously distinguishing himself from Wilhelm. Auguste's most famous lines connect with a familiar theme:

Je suis maître de moi comme de l'Univers.
Je le suis, je veux l'être. Ô Siècles, ô Mémoire,
Conservez à jamais ma dernière victoire (1696-8)

He demonstrates his worthiness to rule the universe by the perfection of his self-command, shown by triumphing over any desire for revenge on Cinna. We might compare Goethe's own private reflection: 'Ich will doch herr werden. Niemand als wer sich ganz verläugnet ist werth zu herrschen, und kan herrschen.'³¹ Theatre, and especially French classicism, played a key role in the first part of Goethe's task, the construction of an ideal conception of a ruling class. How far theatre could help in the second part, the moulding of Weimar closer to that ideal, is already in question, but *WMTS* would become entirely incoherent if he admitted this within the text itself. The role of theatre, if it had one for this purpose, must be moral and pedagogical. It will teach, if at all, by showing its audience the aesthetic/ethical charm of certain attitudes, forms of behaviour, even personality types.

An Italian critic, arguing with Lukács, insisted that for Goethe society was not composed of classes in the Marxist sense, nor of politically constituted *Stände*, nor even of sociological strata, but of 'psychological structures',³² an important point, even if the antithesis is partly false. Goethe does deal in *Stände*, and at least sometimes in sociological strata, even, if we wish to use the term, in classes. But membership of these groups is in itself strongly associated with psychological determinants, not, of course, with an individual stereotyped personality, but with groups of characteristics associated with each social level.

³¹ Diary entry for 13.5.1780, FA 2.29:262.

³² 'Non bisogna dimenticare che la società per Goethe non è fatta di classi (economiche) né di stati (politici) e nemmeno di ceti (civili), ma di strutture psicologiche', Morpurgo Tagliabue, *Goethe e il romanzo*, p.126.

The child actors are led by attempts at tragedy into exaggerated and affected behaviour, especially because they see adults round about them trying to make themselves look important 'durch steifes Betragen und fremde Grimassen' (30). Adults also encourage them in the belief that this is how tragedy should be acted (32). What completes their artistic downfall, however, is the arrival in town of a troupe of actors. The professionals have much in their performances which is natural and good, but also much that is affected, conceited and false (32-3, repeating some of the wording above). What is easiest to imitate is the false, the insincere, the narrator tells us, and so this is what is immediately picked up by the children. The origins of these false conceptions are thus partly innate, and partly bad example and precept from those around them.

Theatre then is not inevitably unnatural or a school of unnatural behaviour, but in practice it will certainly become so, if it is not at the highest level. Wilhelm has now acquired a false conception of the relationship between theatre, manners and nobility, however defined, and despite much later experience which should enlighten him, it proves very difficult to eradicate. He is drawn to passages of emotional exaggeration and soon is play-acting and dressing up in fantasies of oriental magnificence. The narrator moralises that this misconception is all too common:

ist's doch in der Welt hergebracht, daß man sich die Majestät kaum anders als im Schlepp und Prachtmantel denken kann, daß das Hohe des Standes das Edle der Tat nur in pausbäckiger Repräsentation dem Menschen sichtbar und nachahmbar wird, und daß man sie nicht fühlen machen kann, daß das Große und Erhabene nur das Reinste und Wahrste des Natürlichen ist, und daß sich's eben drum weder vorzeigen noch nachahmen läßt. (44)

Two relationships have by now become thematic, between nature and nobility, and between nobility and (tragic) theatre. Central to both is Wilhelm himself and his relationship to the natural. He is, of course, repeatedly satirised for theatricality. The conventional antithesis 'half natural, half theatrical' occurs at one point (42). But we are never allowed to think of him as entirely unnatural. The narrator assures us that his efforts are not always unsuccessful, because he is 'gut gebaut und von beweglichen Gliedern' (grace of movement is repeatedly identified as noble),³³ and has a nobility apparently conferred by nature herself.³⁴

Wilhelm is in fact 'a darling of nature' (67), which intervenes to prevent his succumbing under his miseries in Book 2. He dramatises his own feelings, and succumbs to coffee-

³³ Contrast Melina, a small, dull, limited person 'ohne die Grazie des Adels in seinen Bewegungen und Betragen' (108-9).

³⁴ He has 'von Natur einen edeln Anstand' (36).

drinking and other dissipations, but his own nature continues to strive towards what is upright and pure (69). His oriental play-acting, however absurd, does very little harm to his natural character (44). In his letter he tells Mariane that theatre and the church or, as he significantly puts it, the pulpit, have long been at odds, although they ought not to be, and would not be if in both places 'nur die edelsten Menschen stünden' (60). Since he has already told her he of his own intention to join a theatrical troupe, these obviously include himself, but if he is sure of his own fitness in this respect, he is less clear, or at least entirely unspecific, as to the gospel he will be preaching. We can only infer from his repertoire that the main content will be moral lessons drawn from French classical conceptions of nobility, applied directly to German bourgeois reality. As the church glorifies God, so the theatre will glorify Nature. This has been ironically discounted in advance, but the narrator continues to insist that Wilhelm is in some sense 'natural', and even 'noble', and from the passage quoted above it is clear that the noble is merely the acme of the pure, truthful and natural. It seems, then, not to be excluded in principle that he might become unambiguously 'noble', if he can be purged of certain specific delusions and affectations.

The key delusion is a false, theatrical view of what constitutes nobility. Monarchy is necessarily in part exoteric role performance, and since this is what we, the public, see, we are prone to assume this to be its essence. But greatness and sublimity are in fact, like nobility, merely the highest form of the truthful and natural. This is not to assert that nobility is essentially inward or psychological. On the contrary, what is stressed is behaviour ('das Edle der Tat'), and in part surely manners, which are truthful in the sense of sincere, that is, not in conflict with inferred mental contents. At any rate this greatness cannot be imitated, precisely because it is sincere, and to 'act' is to be insincere by definition. We are not being told that theatre is somehow inherently a mistake, since it can only depend on 'representation'. But we are warned that theatrical presentation of nobility must always be defective, as omitting a crucial element. Even at its most superficially accurate, it will be partly false (44).

Manners are of course learned behaviour, and we might expect the text to consider how far noble manners can be successfully acquired by imitation. This is indeed a theme in *WMTS*, although much less prominently than in *WML*. Without aspiring to nobility himself, Wilhelm is in as little doubt as Werther as to his own innate fitness for noble society. Once there, however, his experience is equivocal. He performs creditably in the circles to which he is introduced by Herr von C., but finds the doors very firmly closed

after his appearance on stage and the ensuing duel. His social performance in the castle is passable but by no means flawless, and he has to be helped out by Jarno and Philine (271, and for Philine, e.g., 284). In neither case is he aware of having been rescued from, or even of having been in, a false position, but as Erving Goffman says, one excellent strategy for coping with an embarrassing situation is to be unaware of its existence.³⁵ His adaptability is perhaps an aspect of his theatrical talent, but he is significantly outdone in this respect by Philine, whose success in the castle, to his indignant surprise, is much greater than his (263, 277). Hers is based in part on flattery and hypocrisy, attributable to her 'leichten nachahmenden Natur' (263), but it is clearly a critique of noble society that it can be infiltrated in this way, 'auf eine geschickte Weise sich in einem gewissen vornehmen Ansehen zu üben'.³⁶

WMTS is, as its title suggests, primarily concerned with theatre, and with the emergence of an actor-manager who hopes to exert a beneficial influence on German cultural life. How it was to have ended is entirely speculation, since the 1785 schema, referred to above (p.121), is lost. Inconclusive discussion has not been helped by a failure always to distinguish between the questions of whether Wilhelm has a genuine theatrical talent, whether theatre itself is a pure and uncompromised art form, whether it is capable of exerting a beneficial effect on society, for example by promoting noble values, and whether in the actual circumstances in Germany there was the remotest prospect of such a programme being implemented. In *WML*, as we know, all four questions are firmly answered in the negative.

In *WMTS* it is now generally agreed that the denial of any real talent to Wilhelm can never have been intended.³⁷ The question of the inherent value of theatre as an art form is much more doubtful, since the existing text is full of ironies. The simple technique of cutting directly from the rise of the curtain on Wilhelm's triumph in *Belsazar* to 'Kennst du das Land' is an example. And *WMTS* certainly repeatedly satirises or directly criticises

³⁵ More precisely: 'people who lack awareness of the symbolism in minor events may keep cool in difficult situations, showing poise that they do not really possess', Erving Goffman, 'On Face-Work', in *Where the Action Is: Three essays* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), p.20n. Part of the social comedy of Wilhelm derives from his ability to move through disasters unaware, like a comedian of the silent screen. Immediately after his blunder with the prince, for example, we find him congratulating himself on the degree of polish ('einen leichten Anstand'), which he is already acquiring from contact with the great world (271-2).

³⁶ For 'gewiss', see above, p.123.

³⁷ After an interminable debate, it seems now to be accepted that Goethe changed his mind over Wilhelm's talent for the theatre between *WMTS* and *WML*. See Reiss, *Goethe's Novels*, p.139, and Liisa Saariluoma, *Die Erzählstruktur des frühen deutschen Bildungsromans: Wielands "Geschichte des Agathon" und Goethes "Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre"* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1985), pp.184-6.

excessive hopes or expectations for the beneficial moral or social effects of theatre. Much of this is directed against theatre audiences, however, and it is not necessary to assume that Goethe was preparing an entire repudiation of theatre, as in *WML*. The final question, as to practicalities, is also left unresolved, and even partly evaded by setting the events almost thirty years before the date of writing.

One suggestion as to the intended plot, apparently first made by Max Wundt, is that the Amazon was to re-appear, take to the stage herself and eventually marry Wilhelm. The symbolism here would be radically different from that of *WML*: theatre would be established as a force for the dissemination of aristocratic manners and values in bourgeois society.³⁸ This is perfectly compatible with Goethe's later aesthetic views, even if he lost faith in the theatre as a possible means to the end.

In a well-known theoretical passage in Book 11 of *DuW* we are warned of the risks of theatrical naturalism ('ein gemeines Wirkliche'): 'Die höchste Aufgabe einer jeden Kunst ist, durch den Schein die Täuschung einer höheren Wirklichkeit zu geben.'³⁹ There is no doubt whatever that he regarded aristocratic manners as a form of this heightening, with aesthetic as well as social implications. He believed that at the time under discussion (around 1770), French actors had attained the peak of artistic truth in comedy. In part this was due to their residence in Paris, where they had been able to observe courtiers, and to the resultant 'Verbindung der Akteurs und Aktrizen durch Liebeshändel mit den höheren Ständen'. This in turn had brought to the stage 'the highest decorum and propriety of social life', while at the same time not offending against the tenets of naturalism.⁴⁰ Goethe never visited Paris, but he goes on to speak of a contemporary debate there, which he had obviously followed closely, between the elevation of tragic style and naturalistic truthfulness of expression. He praises a Parisian tragic actor whom he had seen in Strasbourg, precisely as Auguste in Corneille's *Cinna*, and who had deeply impressed him by his ability to transform nature into art and vice versa.⁴¹ We are left in no doubt as to the artistic value of importing aristocratic manners to the stage, as a means of combining elevation of style with the avoidance of affectation.

³⁸ Max Wundt, *Goethes Wilhelm Meister und die Entwicklung des modernen Lebensideals* (Berlin: Göschen, 1913), p.161. He offers literary parallels and even a historical one, *ibid.*

³⁹ HA 9:488.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* ('die höchste Gewandtheit und Schicklichkeit des geselligen Lebens').

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.489.

If the heightening characteristic of art is similar to the elaboration of manners to be found among the nobility, the introduction of these manners as an ethical norm must be of aesthetic value to theatre. And if noble society is an aesthetic spectacle, can theatre, by imitating this spectacle, improve middle-class manners? Of course, theatre had always been where the socially unconfident learned to imitate noble behaviour. The question is rather how far Wilhelm, or indeed Goethe himself, Mann's 'born pedagogue' (above, p.95), could use it to preach an ethical/aesthetic message to an audience not enrolled for this in advance.

The most ambitious formulation of an aesthetic attitude towards society comes later, in *WML*, where art, in this case architecture, is compared to good society: 'Ist doch wahre Kunst, rief er [Wilhelm] aus, wie gute Gesellschaft; sie nötigt uns auf die angenehmste Weise das Maß zu erkennen, nach dem und zu dem unser Innerstes gebildet ist.'⁴² We distinguish between the 'vornehm' and the 'grob' by an instinct like aesthetic judgement in Kant's third *Kritik*. The good is characterised partly by undefined positive qualities, but partly also by *Entsagung*, that is, by limits which resonate within us, as we recognise them in ourselves. We seem in fact to be approaching a Kantian question as to how judgements of the goodness and badness of different societies are possible, but if so the point is not pursued, certainly not in *WML*, nor in any works preceding it, and I am not aware of any similar speculation elsewhere in Goethe, as applied to society and social manners.

Goethe's position on the aestheticisation of society developed as part of his social attitudes as a whole. The obscenity of *Götz* asserts his virtuous authenticity, and thereby his distance from court values, themselves contemptible. A year later, however, in *Werther*, good and bad manners are already problematic. During the Weimar decade, if we set aside the texts, his account of the social skills and *Selbstdarstellung* of the nobility was, as ideal, almost entirely positive, despite occasional impatience with Weimar reality.

The texts, especially *WMTS*, *Tasso* and *Iphigenie*, qualify this impression, but at no point during this period did he address directly the question of the theoretical value of courtly manners. He would have taken this as unnecessary, because self-evident, like the need for improvement, both in his own case and in that of Carl August.

It is usual to remark on the extraordinary variety of forms of theatre in *WMTS* (and *WML*), but not on the way in which these are used to convey coded political and social comment,

⁴² *WML*, FA 1.9:896.

sometimes almost as political history through theatre. Thus Wilhelm and the puppets correspond to an Old Testament theocracy: he 'broods' over his characters, manipulating them like a *deus absconditus*, by means of hidden wires, on one occasion performing a miraculous direct intervention, to pick up Jonathan (22-3). We then move on to the children's theatre and to the director as Roman emperor (30-32).

The most fully developed case is Narciß and Landerinette, rope dancers who are elevated above the common people, and obviously belong to the upper classes. They are in fact a conventional princely couple from the *Kleinstaateri*, deliberately delaying and stage-managing their public appearances, 'sich dadurch ein vornehmeres Ansehen zu geben, und größere Neugier zu erwecken'. When they eventually appear, it is with 'leichten Bewegungen, kühnen Sprüngen und seltsamen Posituren'. Their subjects are so delighted with the spectacle that they forget they will be expected to pay for it, and ought to steal away before the collecting plates are passed round. Later, Narciß is more than willing to convert public adulation into sexual success and to expatiate on the subject to the prudish Wilhelm, who has to stop him from giving names and addresses. The climax of this carefully veiled political satire is a living pyramid formed by the troupe, with a child at its apex (129-33).

With Mme de Retti we proceed to enlightened absolutism. She has a proud, masculine manner and is surrounded by courtiers ('Hofleute', 144), but her favouritism leads to financial failure and political collapse.⁴³ There follows a regression to the baroque (the troupe as court entertainers), and then a further reaction, a disastrous experiment with republican democracy leading to military defeat, collapse into anarchy and absorption into a larger political unit. The lesson is clear. We have already been told that for inexperience to be subordinated to experience is a natural law (46). That had been in a different, erotic context, but is obviously of more general application. The implication is that for born leaders to fail to lead, or to lead selfishly and badly, is inherently unnatural.

The castle episode in Book 5 is of course the main interface between nobility and theatre. At the surface level, its function is simply to examine and reject court patronage as a possible future for theatre in Germany. Accordingly it opens with a blast of heavy

⁴³ It seems not to have been noted that she has a certain amount in common with Catherine the Great. She is intelligent and can act decisively, is a moderately enlightened reformer, and is even talented in literary matters, if rather out of date (140-1). She takes pleasure in the company of literary intellectuals like Wilhelm, but in general likes her men rough, leading to favouritism and over-promotion.

rhetorical irony against the aristocracy, beginning with Goethe's congratulations to himself and his readers on our natural pleasure at moving into more select company (242-3).⁴⁴ The event will amply justify this implied scepticism. As patrons, the aristocracy will turn out to be eccentric in their judgements, their interest in the actresses is harmful to discipline and their favourite theatrical form is the pastoral eulogy. They prefer French literature to German, and have short attention spans and various agendas of their own.

This at least is the conventional account, and is substantially correct, although as usual Goethe provides elements for a partial defence. For example, the absence of proper provision for the players' reception is due to unforeseeable circumstances. And if they fail to hold the attention of their audience, this is partly because, as Wilhelm has already admitted to himself, they are in fact not very good (238), and at least the count and the prince may be used to better. Setting aside a possible duty of patronage towards a fledgling native theatre, a preference for French plays over German ones would not have been irrational in 1756, the presumed date of the episode, and a taste for Racine might be temporarily outmoded, but could hardly be ridiculous. Wilhelm and the players complain of the bad taste at the castle, but not that it is behind the times. On the contrary, it is they who have not caught up with the very latest fashion.⁴⁵

The question of period becomes important here, since the setting of the plot almost thirty years before the time of writing is misleading as to contemporary *Hofkultur*. The pre-Weimar Goethe had himself been largely dismissive of French drama, once he had discovered Shakespeare.⁴⁶ Wilhelm's view, in his debates with Werner, is considerably more nuanced, and in places surely authorial, even if his glorification of Corneille's nobility is undermined by irony. Now in Book 5 it seems that the castle's preference for French culture is misguided, but all too natural, in the sense of being socially self-serving. This is not anachronistic in itself, given the time-frame. *Miß Sara Sampson* (1755) had to be translated into French for performance at the court of Brunswick as late as 1767.⁴⁷ By the time of writing, however, French theatre at German courts was a thing of the past, and

⁴⁴ The entire chapter (5.1) has been much misunderstood, and deserves close textual analysis. Goethe dropped the first two paragraphs from *WML* and converted the remainder into an internal monologue by Wilhelm (*WML*, 512-3). The whole seems to be an unsuccessful (or at least unprepared) exercise in unreliable narration.

⁴⁵ Since the Shakespeare Wilhelm is introduced to must be Wieland's translation, which began appearing in 1762, this is anachronistic, but the chronologies of *WMTS* and *WML* are both vague. See Saine, 'What Time is it in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*?', p.59.

⁴⁶ Woo-Young Lim, *Experimente der Selbst-Darstellung: Dramaturgien des jungen Goethe (1765-1786)* (Münster: Lit, 1994), p.256.

⁴⁷ See the commentary on the play by Karl Eibl in his edn. (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1971), p.102, n.15.

the impression of court culture as hopelessly outdated, exclusive and even unpatriotic, would have been unfair if intended as social criticism.⁴⁸

In one respect the castle is not being accused of indifference towards German literature, but of a misplaced and amateurish involvement in it. This is the introduction of a new theme, aristocratic dilettantism, on which Goethe later, with Schiller, planned a substantial essay.⁴⁹ Goethe was too conscious of his own ‘vermanichfaltigten Thätigkeit’ to be excessively censorious on the subject,⁵⁰ and occasionally applied the term ‘dilettante’ to himself,⁵¹ but in the case of the theatre his attitude was uncompromisingly severe. Dilettantism is at its worst in any art which is not regulated by accepted standards (‘kein rechtes Regulativ hat’), the worst of all such cases being ‘Schauspielkunst’.⁵² The dilettante has an incurable propensity to lay down laws;⁵³ he is instinctively drawn to bad taste and inclined to applaud it, because it is on his level.⁵⁴ He is of some use, but only if he remains firmly on the sidelines, and is well aware of the gulf separating him from the artist.⁵⁵ By no means all dilettantes are aristocrats, but in the surviving schema we are promised a section on the ‘Dilettantism der Vornehmen’, for which pens would presumably have been specially sharpened.⁵⁶ The strength of Goethe’s feelings on the subject is illustrated by the clumsiness with which two would-be amateur dramatists are included in castle society, the secretary and the baron.⁵⁷ Aristocratic dilettantism occurs as a minor theme in *Werther* (the prince), and repeatedly in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Eduard, Charlotte, Luciane, the architect).⁵⁸ In *WMTS* its classic expression is of course the ‘Spottlied’, whose very anonymity seems to point the more firmly to the expression of an authorial opinion.

⁴⁸ According to Iffland, writing in 1785, ‘So wurden nach und nach, an allen Höfen, theils aus Oekonomie, theils aus Patriotismus, oder aus kleinen Nebenursachen [...] die französischen Schauspiele abgeschafft und die deutschen eingeführt.’ Quoted in Peter Höyng, ‘Was ist Nationalschaubühne im eigentlichsten Verstande?’ – Thesen über die Nationaltheater im späten 18. Jahrhundert als Ort eines National-Diskurses’, in Nicholas Vazsonyi, ed., *Searching for Common Ground: Diskurse zur deutschen Identität 1750-1871* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), pp.209-25, here at p.213.

⁴⁹ <Über den Dilettantismus>, FA 1.18:739-85, 857-83. The literature on the subject is extensive, but see esp. Hans Rudolf Vaget, *Dilettantismus und Meisterschaft: zum Problem des Dilettantismus bei Goethe: Praxis, Theorie, Zeitkritik* (Munich: Winkler, c.1971).

⁵⁰ Letter to Knebel, 3.12.1781, quoted in Vaget, *Dilettantismus und Meisterschaft*, p.7.

⁵¹ E.g., *DuW*, HA 10:172.

⁵² The whole subject is discussed in Vaget, *Dilettantismus und Meisterschaft*, pp.177-83.

⁵³ <Über den Dilettantismus>, FA 1.18:747: ‘Sie wollen erstens konstituieren, d.h. ihr Beifall soll gelten, soll zum Künstler stempeln.’

⁵⁴ Id., p.778.

⁵⁵ Id., p.781: ‘Der Künstler wird geboren. [Par.] Er ist eine von der Natur privilegierte Person.’

⁵⁶ Id., p.780.

⁵⁷ The redundancy was removed in *WML*.

⁵⁸ Werner Schlick, *Goethe’s Die Wahlverwandtschaften: A Middle-Class Critique of Aesthetic Aristocratism* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000). Schlick stresses the association in Goethe’s mind with the nobility. For the architect, see p.5, n.19.

Acting on stage is a form of presentation of self, and the link between character and actor was much stronger than now. Not only theatre managements and critics, but also the public expected most actors to have, and to remain within, a specialised 'Rollenfach'. An audience used to seeing a particular actress in comic bourgeois roles would be offended by seeing her play a baroness, regarding this as a breach of decorum.⁵⁹ When Wilhelm supposes the domestic life of an actor to be a 'noble' continuation of his stage identity, this is obviously absurd (44-5), but Goethe himself would later expect his Weimar actors to maintain in private life a dignified manner which would not conflict incongruously with their stage roles.⁶⁰

The closer relationship between actor and character led to paradoxes which clearly interested Goethe. The count assumes that the Pedant must be a brilliant comedian because he so convincingly performs this role (a recognised 'Rollenfach') in ordinary life (233). In fact he plays idiots so well, because he is one. Is the count's error due to an unconscious refusal to admit that he himself is only an actor performing a role? Indeed, is aristocracy itself merely role-play? But Herr von C., in particular, can hardly be merely performing. His insistence that he will not be a 'hero' is in part because the hero is a role, and he has no role discontinuous with himself. The question of his sincerity does not arise, any more than with those other exemplary aristocrats, the patriarchs of the Old Testament.⁶¹ In the latter case this is due to the historical accident of the objective literary technique which presents them. In the case of Goethe's nobles, the technique is fully conscious. Entirely external presentation, as here, has the effect of mystification, especially after the total freedom with which the narrator has accessed, as a matter of course, all the consciousnesses of the bourgeois characters in Book 1.

The relationship between acting and character is pursued much further in *WML*. Here we have a new character, the 'Polterer',⁶² another recognised 'Rollenfach'. The 'Polterer' always plays a certain type, characteristically German we are told, the man who does good by stealth and covers it up with rudeness and bluster.⁶³ By exclusively playing such parts,

⁵⁹ Bernhard Diebold, *Das Rollenfach im deutschen Theaterbetrieb des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Voß, 1913) (Theatergeschichtliche Forschungen, 25), esp. pp.15-16.

⁶⁰ 'Auch im gemeinen Leben zu bedenken, daß man öffentlich zur Kunstschau stehen werde. [Par.] Daher alles Gemeine und Rohe abzutun und sich eines edlen ruhigen Betragens zu befleißigen', <Regeln für Schauspieler>, FA 1.18:857, and cf. pp.879-81.

⁶¹ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p.2.

⁶² Usually translated 'blusterer', but better 'curmudgeon'.

⁶³ 'Denn da es der Charakter unsrer Landsleute ist, das Gute ohne viel Prunk zu tun und zu leisten; so denken sie selten daran, daß es auch eine Art gebe, das Rechte mit Zierlichkeit und Anmut zu tun, und verfallen vielmehr, von einem Geiste des Widerspruchs getrieben, leicht in

‘er darüber eine ähnliche Art sich zu betragen im gemeinen Leben angenommen hatte’ (*WML*, 465). Specifically, he had helped Mariane when she had been pregnant and out of work. He curses her and all such ‘liederliche Dirnen’ (*WML*, 467), but we note that he has repeatedly given money and taken trouble, in circumstances where he might be credited with saving a life (although we are not told this). At any rate the possibility is left open that by playing characters of a certain type, an actor might improve his own moral character. On the more important question of whether the theatre can exercise a beneficial moral effect on its audience, Goethe, or at least the ‘Turmgesellschaft’, had by now become as incredulous as Rousseau (*WML*, 954-5), but as is clear from his hopes for *Iphigenie*, in particular, this was a later development.⁶⁴

The treatment of the ‘Polterer’ stresses manners in an important way. To thematicise manners at all was already to adopt a certain attitude towards the differences between the *Stände*, because of a tendency in the bourgeois sentimental tradition to deprecate them by contrasting unpolished bourgeois benevolence with ‘mannered’ aristocratic villainy. Goethe’s comments, cited above, are his nearest approach in *WML* to a kind of anti-sentimental ethical radicalism. They amount to saying that Germany already has enough rough diamonds and that what we need is not more virtue, but a more gracious exercise of our existing good qualities. This explicit refusal to take a sentimental pleasure in plain-spoken honest benevolence is a flagrant heresy against a bourgeois literary norm and a partial alignment with an aristocratic position.⁶⁵ Goethe is consciously repositioning himself along a ‘heart versus head’ bourgeois-aristocratic continuum which in literature stretched from the vicar of Wakefield and the ‘Man of Feeling’ at one end to the titled libertines of de Sade at the other.⁶⁶ At any rate he is deploring, very much in his own voice, a current sentimental trend, and associating it with a regrettable aspect of the national character. The clear implication is that if we had fewer ‘Polterer’ held up for admiration on our stages, we might have fewer of them in society. If theatre currently exerts a bad influence, however, in this respect at least, it could presumably in theory

den Fehler, durch ein mürrisches Wesen, ihre liebste Tugend im Kontraste darzustellen’ (*WML*, 465).

⁶⁴ See the quotations assembled by T. J. Reed in his essay on the play in the *GHB*, ii.195-228, at pp.226-7, esp. the diary entry for 6.4.1779. These show hopes for a lasting effect on human actions, but also doubts and fears.

⁶⁵ We may even suspect a direct allusion to *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and the contrast between the blunt-spoken but benevolent Burchell and the polite but unprincipled squire, Thornhill.

⁶⁶ For de Sade in this connection, see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.63-93, esp. the quotation on p.85 from *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*. ‘I don’t know what it is – the heart. I simply use that term for weakness of mind.’

exercise a good one. But such an influence would apparently be rather in the field of manners than morals.

No doubt this goes beyond his position in *WMTS*, although here too conflicts of manners play a part. The question of how far theatre is, or ought to be, a force for disseminating aristocratic values or manners is significant, because of a curious gap in the text. Both Wilhelm, and even more emphatically Aurelie, are clear that Germany needs theatre, and that they could use it to preach a message. What is not so clear is the content of the message. It is, of course, in large part cultural, to raise the general level of taste and introduce the public to French classicism or Shakespeare. Equally, it is important that the German language should have its own vibrant theatrical tradition. This is certainly not because Germany needs a national theatre for nationalistic reasons, to assist it to become a nation. On the contrary, from the outset references to this theme are dismissive.⁶⁷ The question is rather whether Wilhelm's mission is also to improve Germany's manners or morals, or both, and if so, in what direction.

The significance of the national theatre theme at this point is clear from the various initiatives in contemporary Germany. The usual view is that despite the support of enlightened rulers like Joseph II, they were primarily bourgeois attempts to improve public morals. These initiatives looked promising in 1777, when Goethe is presumed to have begun *WMTS*, but much less so at the time of its abandonment.⁶⁸ In fact, an initial belief in theatre as a source of moral uplift, later regarded with scepticism, is consistent with the text as it survives, as well as with Goethe's abandonment of it. It must be significant that the best, perhaps the only clear example of his profoundly serious hopes for a positive moral effect of theatre is contemporary, in his various comments on the prose *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1779). Early in the text of *WMTS*, we have vague, elevated moralising from Wilhelm (60), but later, doubts arise, especially as to the moral utility of French classicism. Perhaps we are more awestruck by the elevation of Corneille's heroes than prompted to imitate them, either in their moral code or their manners. This might be socially useful if Goethe were concerned about a decline in respect for the German nobility, but there is as

⁶⁷ The actors like to talk about 'der große wichtige Einfluß des Theaters auf die Bildung einer Nation und der Welt' (46); Mme de Retti had hoped to make the Germans the 'treffliches Geschenk' of what would grow into a national theatre (151); and Aurelie had begun her career with idealistic nationalist sentiments, but these are all falsified by events. For Goethe's scepticism over a national theatre, see most recently Johannes D. Kaminski, *Der Schwärmer auf der Bühne: Ausgrenzung und Rehabilitation einer literarischen Figur in Goethes Dramen und Prosa (1775-1786)* (Erlangen: Wehrhahn, 2012), pp.187-90, and the references there cited.

⁶⁸ Hans Reiss, 'Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung – Ernst oder Ironie?', in his *Formgestaltung und Politik: Goethe-Studien* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993), pp.12-37, here at pp.33-4.

yet no sign of this. Nor is it clear what beneficial influence, if any, Shakespeare is likely to have on German manners and morals. His influence, it seems, will be purely cultural. In fact the loss of faith in theatre as an ethical mission is already emerging in the later books of *WMTS*.

What further complicated Goethe's attitudes towards theatre was its development around 1780 in directions which he not only deplored, but for which he might well have felt a certain responsibility. Both theatre and the novel, certainly since Richardson, had been engaged in the negotiation by a rising bourgeoisie of its own ethical position with respect to the aristocracy. The outcome would be an attempt to appropriate much of aristocratic manners as a new bourgeois norm, and in morals, a compromise involving a strictly partial appropriation of values, combined with elements of values previously attributed to themselves by the bourgeoisie. The Sturm und Drang had been an idiosyncratic episode in this development, much of it centring on the 'Genie' as fantasy alternative to the nobility.

Now, however, theatre, under English and French influence, was developing away from noble values and towards a bourgeois public, in new forms which could accommodate elements of the Sturm und Drang, but were at the furthest possible remove from Goethe. His reaction is clear from *DuW*, but especially from his notes for a continuation on the Weimar years. Here we find his distaste at the '[a]ntiaristokratische Motive' steadily gaining the upper hand, from *Emilia Galotti* (1772) onwards.⁶⁹ He mentions Brandes and Großmann, and as the extreme of this tendency Gemmingen's *Der deutsche Hausvater* (1780), 'for many years the favourite play of the *Mittelstand*'.⁷⁰ Goethe's bitterness is very natural, since the play, with its mixture of German nationalism and calculated flattery of a middle-class public, illustrates the hopelessness of Wilhelm's mission in the Germany of the 1780s.

Goethe could hardly have complained of the attempted negotiation of a compromise in values between nobility and bourgeoisie, since that was in some respects what he was engaged on himself, although at a very different level and from entirely different premises. The most deeply depressing aspect of Gemmingen's play from his perspective might well

⁶⁹ FA 1.14:979.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.978-9. The text is in Adolf Hauffen, ed., *Das Drama der klassischen Periode*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Union, 1891), vol.2.1, pp.2-83. For comments, see Markus Krause, *Das Trivialdrama der Goethezeit 1780-1815: Produktion und Rezeption* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1982), and Jutta Greis, *Drama Liebe: Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der modernen Liebe im Drama des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), pp.156-7. Its nationalism is insistently an opposition to France and (aristocratic) formal manners.

have been, not its nationalism, nor its clumsy *hommages* to his former, outgrown self, but the insistence of the newly confident middle-class audience on not being lectured to, but rather on hearing and applauding statements of its own attitudes and prejudices, like the audiences of modern situation comedies. Thus we have, for example, denunciations of modern education, of aristocratic casualness towards divorce, of the purchase by the nobility of legal offices for their untrained offspring, of capital punishment for infanticide, of courtly insincerity, and of various forms of *Standesdünkel*. The future of theatre was not to be the pulpit of Wilhelm's letter to Mariane, instilling the elevating lessons of classicism, but a mirror reflecting back to the bourgeoisie a flattering self-image. There would be ample opportunities for Serlo (his Hamburg 'original', F. L. Schröder, was one of those who were quick to take up the play), but no room for the uplift aimed at by Wilhelm and Aurelie.

One deeply cynical, but possibly authoritative outlook on theatre and the nobility is provided by Jarno. Theatre should simply be treated as a stepping-stone to provide social access to the nobility, where the real prospects of personal growth lie. These prospects are certainly open to Wilhelm, but only if he is willing to drop his lower-class associates. As in *Werther*, the nobility are characterised by serious flaws, but they contain positive elements, including Jarno himself, who makes Wilhelm an advantageous offer of personal advancement (280-1). On the one hand Wilhelm will give up the troupe, Mignon and the Harper, and presumably acting. On the other hand Jarno, like Herr von C., does not expect him to give up his ambitions as a dramatist, which are entirely respectable socially, although of course not to be taken seriously as a primary avocation. Jarno's cannot be the last word (especially not at this point in the novel structure), but the only alternative must be a merger between theatre and nobility, which given existing novel conventions must mean marriage, in other words, Wundt's alliance between Wilhelm and the Amazon (above, p.139).

Goethe may have rejected with dismay the 'anti-aristocratic' forms of compromise of Gemmingen and his type, but that is not to deny that Wilhelm's reception of Shakespeare is in some respects itself a compromise. No Shakespeare character embodies the semi-divine elevation of Corneille's heroes. More importantly, Shakespeare introduces a further compromise between theatre and reality. Wilhelm is not, any more than his creator, a convert to theatrical realism, but Shakespeare certainly plays a part in persuading him of what is obvious to others (the narrator, Herr von C. and Aurelie are agreed on the point): his serious ignorance of the real world. On Wilhelm's own account, Shakespeare

encourages him not to literary emulation, but to engage more deeply in reality. The raw material he will acquire will enable him at some future date to contribute something to the theatre himself, that is, as a dramatist.

How are we to evaluate Jarno's offer of advancement? Is he, like Werner, a philistine encouraging Wilhelm's artistic interests as though they were a hobby, to be pursued part-time, and therefore compatible with a commercial or other career? In fact what he proposes is to be an episode in Wilhelm's life, initially for the duration of the war. There is considerable personal risk involved (in *WML* the offer is of an army commission, and something of the sort seems to be intended here). He will have to abandon the troupe, but perhaps he should anyway, since the obligations he feels towards them are illusory and he certainly has nothing more to learn from them. Even the advice to drop Mignon and the Harper, although brutally and unfairly expressed, is not unambiguously bad, in view of the fatal consequences of loyalty in *WML*, and possibly in Goethe's intention here also. Nevertheless, Goethe's critique is clearly of the process of social advancement itself. Like Clavigo, Wilhelm can only rise by cutting himself free from what he, at least, regards as already formed loyalties, without which he would not be in the castle in the first place. And whatever ironies remain in his refusal and its consequences, it is impossible to imagine any positive, unironic treatment of acceptance.

Similarities of treatment of theatre and nobility will be considered further below. They share the characteristic of being partly a 'front'. Wilhelm is taken behind the scenes in both cases, in Books 1-4 and 5 respectively, with demystifying effect from the reader's perspective. In *WML* the demystification of theatre is total, although Wilhelm proves to be a slow learner. In *WMTS* it is not, and Wilhelm, although still deluded at the end of the text, seems to be progressing, not towards a blanket rejection, but towards the more realistic acceptance recommended by Herr von C. In the case of nobility the lesson he learns is very largely wrong, but again he may be developing towards a compromise, probably through one of the 'Liebeshändel' between actors, actresses and the upper classes, which had been so beneficial to the French theatre.⁷¹

⁷¹ Above, p.139. Novelistic convention would, of course, ensure that the ending would be marriage rather than a liaison like that with Mariane.

Nobility and the outsiders

The theme of the exotic is considerably more prominent in *WMTS* than in *WML*, and like nobility and theatre, is used as a fantasy escape from bourgeois constraint, partly by means of symbolism which can loosely be called Freudian. The fantasy displacement is towards a series of alternative nobilities. Apart from the Shakespeare connection, the most important group are the Jews,⁷² who are first introduced as puppets, but are then repeatedly name-checked in a way which is obviously thematic. The Harper is perhaps a ‘Pfaffe’ or a Jew (217); later he is at risk of being taken for a Jew and a spy (313); Philine is at one point a ‘frivolous Samaritan’ (300), and so on (147, 151, 307, etc.). One of Serlo’s comic turns is as a rabbi, described in conventionally anti-Semitic terms (344). On the other hand Wilhelm tells us that ‘we’ will always hear of the Old Testament Jews as if they were our ancestors, and ‘the pre-eminent men of the pre-eminent nation must become for us the first in the world’ (92).

They are in other words a nobility, but one with whom we can associate ourselves, in this way outdoing the actual nobility by constructing for ourselves fantasy aristocratic pedigrees dating back three thousand years.⁷³ And if the introduction of modern Jews as, for example, second-hand clothes dealers (147) suggests to us the theme of degeneracy from distinguished ancestors, we might consider a parallel with the modern nobility and its relationship to ancestors who ‘took possession of the world’, in Werner’s phrase (119), during Möser’s middle ages.

Wilhelm’s childhood identification with the small and delicate figure of David has naturally interested those approaching the text from a psychoanalytical perspective,⁷⁴ in view of the naively oedipal nature of his combat with Goliath, and indeed of his symbolic victory over Saul, by slaying his tens of thousands and then marrying Saul’s daughter. The importance of the figure of Joseph is well known: for Goethe as a child he was linked to an exotic, noble intruder into the family home, in a sense partly displacing his father and perhaps influencing his entire adult career (Comte de Thoranc, above, p.22). The outsider

⁷² There are no Jewish characters in the text as we have it, although Goethe at one point thought of including one, Staiger, *Goethe*, i.471. The Jews are in part successors to the gypsies, previously similarly treated (oriental origins, homelessness, socially marginal status). See also above, p.34.

⁷³ This is a further link with Werther, who had identified with the heroes of the *Odyssey*. Both aristocracies are anti-bourgeois in the sense of associating us with resolute action.

⁷⁴ E.g., Annie Gilles, *Images de la marionnette dans la littérature: Textes écrits ou traduits en français de Cervantes à nos jours* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1993), pp.52-5; David Roberts, *The Indirections of Desire: Hamlet in Goethe’s ‘Wilhelm Meister’* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980), pp.52-3.

characters are, in fact, often noble fantasy figures coded to elude the Freudian censor, or the conscious self-censorship which Goethe exercised in dealing with this area, in deference to his public role.

Jews are linked to another exotic group, the Turks or other pagans. The Jonathan puppet wears a turban, for example (13), and the play of David and Goliath ends with a ballet of Moors, shepherds and dwarfs (15). Mignon and the Harper are further linked into this network. If he is at risk of being taken for a Jew, she sits on a ladder cross-legged, like a Turk (163). The main pagan theme, however, is from Tasso, especially Chlorinde, whose outsider status is further stressed by her link with the theme of androgyny, and with the 'Amazon', the future Natalie of *WML*, and so in turn with the themes of nobility and mythology.

The oriental exotic is for Wilhelm a source of fantasy aristocracy. In private he dresses up as a pasha or sultan (44, and cf. 148). Costume is external and theatrical, but outside the theatre nobility can only be asserted in this coded form, and only behind carefully closed doors. This oblique presentation of self becomes more overt when Wilhelm sets out for H[amburg] with the troupe, and gives some serious thought to what can only be called his 'image' (287). As Han Yan points out, we should be surprised that Wilhelm devotes careful attention to his appearance *after* his stay in the castle, but his new informal, rustic style of dress is as English as the 'Werthertracht', and is part of his repudiation of the nobility.⁷⁵ Along with the bourgeois revolution in his literary taste (Shakespeare superseding French classicism), and in his social and political attitudes, as in the immediately ensuing debates with the players (288-92), the new costume is a defiant, if disappointed, assertion of his non-noble identity.

Jews, or at least the prophet Daniel, and other orientals are combined in Wilhelm's play of *Belsazar*. Again the Freudian aspect is clear, with Belsazar, Nitokris and Darius as the conventional triangle, at once royal and oedipal. Despite its presumed descent from an earlier play which Goethe had destroyed, it seems to have been influenced by the Weimar background. It is difficult not to see Carl August in Belsazar, 'ein feiner junger Herr', as Wilhelm puts it, with conscious or unconscious irony (94), conventionally virtuous and

⁷⁵ Han Yan, *Die Signatur der Kleidung in Goethes Roman "Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre"* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2007) (Heidelberger Beiträge zur deutschen Literatur, 17), pp.82-7.

vaguely religious, but pleasure-loving and neglectful, not only of his public duties, but also of his wife, who will apparently be consoled by Darius after a decent interval.⁷⁶

The identification of aristocracy with kingship in a context of oedipal rivalry is continued in the case of Shakespeare. The plays in question, *Hamlet*, both parts of *Henry IV*, and *As You Like It*, all feature Freudian family romances about the deposition of a king or a duke. Hamlet has two fathers, and will kill one of them in an obvious oedipal displacement. Prince Hal is the son of a usurper responsible for the death of his predecessor, a relative, and is himself accused of impatience in waiting for his father's demise.⁷⁷ The duke in *As You Like It* has been deposed by his brother.⁷⁸

The stress on outsider characters as nobility had been so strong that Goethe, not trusting to irony, felt he had to step forward in person to denounce the modern theatrical trend towards 'sturdy vagabonds, noble robbers, generous gypsies, and all sorts of other idealised rabble' (296), in a partial repudiation of his past self by the creator of Crugantino. This leaves out of account the players of these characters, however, who are themselves the ultimate social outsiders, but are at the same time repeatedly treated as parody aristocrats.

Nobility and Lyrik

The characters under consideration are Mignon, the Harper, Wilhelm himself (as translator of 'Kennst du das Land' and author of 'Heiß' mich nicht reden') and the anonymous poet of the 'Spottlied' (probably Jarno).⁷⁹ The links with nobility are clear, but have been undermined by a misunderstanding. The editor of the *editio princeps*, Harry Maync, noting that there is no explicit connection in *WMTS* between Mignon and the Harper, stated confidently that Mignon's later history, 'die ihr den alten Harfner zum Vater gibt', was certainly a later invention by Goethe.⁸⁰ This is now the orthodox view. Boyle, for example, refers to the Mignon of *WMTS* as 'the child of one of the acrobats'.⁸¹ But the text tells us merely that one of the acrobats, recently deceased, 'für ihren Vater sei gehalten

⁷⁶ The oedipal implications are further stressed when Wilhelm supplants the brutish Bendel in the affections of Mme de Retti and takes over the part of Darius at the premiere.

⁷⁷ *2H4*, 4.3.

⁷⁸ For *As You Like It*, see Kurt Ermann, *Goethes Shakespeare-Bild* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983), pp.3-4, 266. Its relevance to the scene before the attack on the troupe is obvious; and when Wilhelm talks about Shakespeare's fondness for loyal servants who sacrifice themselves for their masters (289-90), the most obvious example is Adam in *AYLI*, 2.3.

⁷⁹ In *WML* Jarno uses the phrase 'armen Teufeln von Menschen', apparently a verbal echo of the first line of the song (*WML*, 955).

⁸⁰ Maync, edn., pp.xxviii-xxix, followed by Wundt, *Goethes Wilhelm Meister*, pp.141-2.

⁸¹ Boyle, *Goethe*, i.368.

worden' (139). This is a fairly clear misdirection by the narrator, part of the mystification of Mignon which proceeds further in *WML*. In fact the pillared house of 'Kennst du das Land' is sufficient to establish her origin, and it is known that Goethe associated her with an Italian villa, almost certainly by Palladio.⁸²

As to her paternity Maync was strictly correct, but the two characters are strongly associated with one another, for example by the unexplained appearance of the Harper at the end of Book 4. There is even a verbal parallel: both have singing voices described as 'rough' (rauh) (163, 217). In fact, while allowing for the absence of formal proof, but following the suggestion of Thomas Saine that the lost schema for *WMTS* differed less from *WML* than is usually believed,⁸³ I shall assume that the Harper is Mignon's father and that both belong to the Italian nobility.⁸⁴ This does not conflict with the fact that Mignon is consciously even more hostile to the nobility than to the theatre, passionately detests make-up at a time when the nobility as well as actors and actresses powdered their faces and their wigs, and adamantly refuses to perform her egg dance in the castle.⁸⁵

Her alienation is reinforced by links with Jarno. Superficially he is her antithesis, contemptuously and ignorantly rejecting her, but there are various parallels. Like her he is presented with a degree of mystification: he is presumably an officer, but is not in uniform; his birth is doubtful, placing him like her in an ambiguous relationship with the nobility (he may be the illegitimate son of the Prince); he has an odd name (253); both are detached from their milieu (her refusal to act, his willingness to join with the ladies in circumventing the count, for example, 264-5); Wilhelm is puzzled by him, but feels 'eine gewisse Neigung' (253).⁸⁶ If Jarno is indeed the author of the 'Spottlied', he is also a poet, even if

⁸² Herman Meyer quotes a diary entry for 22.9.1786: 'Ich war lang willens Verona oder Vicenz dem Mignon zum Vaterland zu geben', but have now decided definitely for Vicenza, 'Kennst du das Haus?', 284. See also William J. Lillyman, 'Andrea Palladio and Goethe's classicism', *GY*, 5 (1990), 85-102, at pp.98-9. Admittedly, in *WML* the Marchese gives a rational, if not very plausible account of Mignon's association with the pillared house (*WML*, 969), but this seems to be an afterthought.

⁸³ Above, p.122. The most striking example of coincidence between *WML* and the schema comes from an Italian notebook detailing Felix's bad table manners, WA 1.21:331, and Lieselotte Blumenthal, *Ein Notizheft Goethes von 1788* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1965), pp.19, 110-13. Unless we assume serious work on the plot at some point in Italy, for which there is no evidence, this episode from the final book of *WML* must have formed part of the schema.

⁸⁴ Cf. the final quatrain of 'Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen aß' (225). The Harper is not merely tormented by guilt, it is guilt which he feels has been imposed on him unfairly, which is consistent with the story of Sperata being already in Goethe's mind.

⁸⁵ Han Yan, *Die Signatur der Kleidung*, pp.29-30, also pointing out that her brown complexion separates her further from both groups (139). She reacts with warm enthusiasm when Wilhelm denounces the insincerity of the nobility to the players (289, 290).

⁸⁶ Both Mignon and Jarno are later connected with mountains. According to the Marchese, it had been natural for Mignon as a child to climb the highest peaks (*WML*, 969). In *WMW*, Jarno will become Montan, a 'Hochehrfahner', FA 1.10:533, who is strongly associated with mountains and

only of amusing *vers de société*, which is a further connection. On the other hand the denial in the poem of poetic talent to the nobility is itself ‘noble’, that is, characterised by an elegant disclaimer of personal superiority. The mystification surrounding the *Lyrrik* characters is thus connected with that of an element within the nobility, with each contributing reciprocally to the denaturalisation of the other.

Freedom and chains, flying and the gods

One of the means by which *Lyrrik* is connected with the nobility, and distinguished from theatre, is of structural importance for the text and is effected by an image group. The imagery of birds and flying in *WML* has been noticed several times, and was discussed in detail by Reiss, among others.⁸⁷ Chlorinde is an angel (26). Mariane is angelic (55), but very ironically so, as befits her theatrical orientation (the white dress which gives this impression was made from a present of cloth by Wilhelm’s rival). Mignon is identified with exotic, non-human species, but persistently with birds: she sings, perches on tree branches or on top of a ladder, goes along the eaves of a building (163), longs to migrate to the warm south (181), is strongly associated with eggs (191-2), and so on.

The Harper, or at least the minstrel who is his theme, sings like a bird (219). Wilhelm is a captive, a bird with his feathers glued together, apparently by his association with the players (217-18), although the same image occurs earlier, where the trap had been his father’s bourgeois household (34). He had earlier told Werner that the poet has been formed by fate to fly above the world like a bird, indeed not unlike a god, and to nest in the clouds. He should not be tied up by a chain to protect a farm, like a watchdog (82).

Chains and traps, the opposite of bird-like freedom, are even more frequent and are often associated with the erotic, that is, not only with women, but with erotic aspects of both theatre and nobility. Love for Mariane binds Wilhelm to the theatre with even stronger bonds (36, and cf. 353). We are told, somewhat obscurely, that Melpomene, the muse of tragic poetry is, ‘eine Tochter der Freiheit’, although chains are among her attributes (85). Melina thinks an actor is a dancing bear led about on a chain (111). The ‘Sänger’ refuses the gift of a chain (219). Associated with prisoners in chains, like the Melinas, is the concept of a trap. Wilhelm comes to think of theatre itself as a trap, a Siren (200). The

precipices, Hans-Jürgen Schings, ‘Wilhelm Meister und die Geschichte’, in Gerhard Schulz and others, eds., *Literatur und Geschichte: 1788-1988* (Bern: Lang, 1990), pp.13-26, here at p.24.
⁸⁷ H. S. Reiss, ‘On some images in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*’, *PEGS*, xix (1951), 111-38. His examples are very selective and his emphasis is different from what follows. See also Ammerlahn, *Imagination und Wahrheit*, pp.54-8.

erotic aspect of theatre has been repeatedly stressed from Book 1 onwards, and Philine, the epitome of this aspect, is a trap threatening Wilhelm (214, 287).

False nobility is characterised in its female form by overt eroticism, as opposed to true nobility, characterised by its absence (Melpomene), or by an androgyny arising from oedipal displacement (Chlorinde, the Amazon). Amazons are of especial importance in this connection, since the word is used consistently by Goethe not merely mythologically, but in the sense of a virago, like Margarete von Parma, or simply of the avoidance or absence of physical allure.⁸⁸ Wilhelm is at risk from the baroness, the personification of female nobility in its unworthy erotic aspect, but is warned off by hearing her compared to Circe, apparently by a previous victim (268-9). There follows a reference to a sorceress with a magic garden, clearly Tasso's Armida, whom we met earlier as the antithesis of Chlorinde (26).

Mythology is in fact used of theatre, nobility and *Lyrik* as a means of mystification. The characters of Corneille, the only nobles Wilhelm is as yet familiar with, are 'höher[e] Wesen', 'unsere Halbgötter' (75); their actions are 'firm and resolute' (ibid.), in sharp contrast to Wilhelm's own. The happy Belsazar hears birthday songs from his people, assuring him he is 'Der Glücklichste des Volks, den Göttern gleich zu sein' (95). Female mythical figures such as Circe, Sirens and Amazons not only mystify, but create a distancing sense of ambiguity, partly based on the blurring of species boundaries, as with Mignon. The whole theme of androgyny is among other things a special case of this mystification, whether of theatre, *Lyrik* or nobility.

For mythology as mystification, Melpomene is exemplary. She is the creation of the fourteen-year-old Wilhelm, and has obviously been formed by the Freudian splitting of his unsatisfactory mother into bourgeois and noble components. Melpomene is the opposite of Commerce, a sordid crone, and is:

⁸⁸ For analyses of the word see *GWb*, s.v. 'Amazone'; Michael Beddow, *The Fiction of Humanity: Studies in the Bildungsroman from Wieland to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.300, n.29; and Ronald D. Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist: A Study of Alchemical Symbolism in Goethe's Literary and Scientific Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp.238-9. Beddow and Gray both quote the *It. Reise* on a portrayal of St Ursula in Verona: she stands in the foreground as if she had conquered the land, 'sehr edel, amazonenhaft jungfräulich, ohne Reiz gebildet', HA 11:46. True female nobility is either maternal or virginal, in either case without overt sensual appeal; and it may even have martial connotations, as here and in the case of Chlorinde. The Amazon is also a saint ('Heilige', 302, 315), even an angel (304), and her head seems to be surrounded by an aureole (302). For the ritualistic aspects of the Amazon episode in *WML* (essentially similar), see M. Neumann, *Roman und Ritus: Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1992), pp.46-54.

herrlich gebildet! in ihrem Wesen und Betragen als eine Tochter der Freiheit anzusehen. Das Gefühl ihrer selbst gab ihr Würde ohne Stolz, ihre Kleider ziemten ihr, sie umhüllten jedes Glied ohne es zu zwingen, und die reichlichen Falten des Stoffes wiederholten wie ein tausendfaches Echo, die reizenden Bewegungen der Göttlichen [...] Enterbt und nackt übergab ich mich der Muse, die mir ihren goldnen Schleier zuwarf, und meine Blöße bedeckte. (85)

The image combines nobility (self-possession, dignity without arrogance, rich robes, harmonious grace of movement) with elements of the divine and the maternal. She clearly prefigures the later Amazon, another gender blurring, especially in the maternal gesture of veiling his nakedness. The two, taken together, form a female ideal of nobility corresponding to Herr von C., whose passive acceptance of the death-centred values of his code complements their oedipal displacement. The noble ideal embodied by the Amazon carefully avoids any overt sexual content ('die reizenden Bewegungen der Göttlichen' could apply to her as well as to Melpomene). Instead of entirely indulging this, however, as in *Werther*, the more mature Goethe gives us sharp social comedy at Wilhelm's expense by introducing Philine, who adopts a proprietorial manner towards him which he finds intensely irritating.⁸⁹ His attempted spiritual, and indeed literal social climbing is the complement to his Werther-like fondness for surrounding himself with his assumed social inferiors (his identification with Shakespeare's Prince Hal is significant in this respect).

The cash nexus

As Schlaffer and no doubt others have pointed out, money is emphasized in *WMTS* to an unusual degree and in a way which distinguishes it from *WML*.⁹⁰ One effect of this is to highlight a bourgeois illusion about the nobility in which the narrator occasionally seems complicit. Wilhelm is clear that culture and commerce are mutually exclusive. From his conversation with Werner, we have the impression that for him, to believe in the possibility of compromise between the two is inherently philistine, as it had been for Werther. Wilhelm sets out to dun his father's debtors for payment, and on the evidence is, or will become, perfectly competent at this. He thus seems well launched on a commercial career, but the chance meeting with the theatrical troupe soon leads him to put himself in the

⁸⁹ Philine notices both Wilhelm's attraction to the Amazon and his resulting anxiety to dissociate himself from her. The coyness of her reply to the Amazon's question as to whether Wilhelm is her husband is a well-deserved punishment (300). For the *pietà* formed by Wilhelm, Philine and Mignon, giving a blasphemous edge to the comedy, but continuing the mythological theme, see Jane K. Brown, 'Im Anfang war das Bild: Wilhelm Meister und die Bibel', in Johannes Anderegg and Edith Anna Kunz, eds., *Goethe und die Bibel* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2005), pp.241-59, at pp.243-5.

⁹⁰ MA 2.2:799.

traditionally noble role of patron, a pretension sharply undercut by the fact that the money belongs to someone else.

For Wilhelm nobility consists, among other things, of developing, or at least affecting, an indifference to money and a contempt for careful accounting. For the actors, especially Melina, but later also for Philine, this is merely childish, and establishes him as being in need of adult supervision (e.g. 148, 184-5, 198). Goethe thus has opportunities for three anti-bourgeois ironies. Two of them are personified by Werner, especially the Werner of *WML*, and by the narrator. In Book 8 of *WML* Werner congratulates Wilhelm on the improvement in his social graces, and tells him he will be able to use them to marry a noble heiress. Here we have a double irony, first at the expense of the bourgeois as cynic, knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing, and secondly at the expense of the novel reader as Rousseau-esque egalitarian sentimentalist, since Werner's prediction will turn out to be perfectly correct.

The third irony is a response to the social ambiguity of Wilhelm between the two *Stände*, another familiar theme from Rousseau.⁹¹ The financial arrangements for the players in the castle in *WMTS* are made in advance with the count's secretary (236). They will receive their keep, plus travel money and a bonus on leaving.⁹² They are thus partly in a modern contractual situation, but partly also in a form of elevated domestic service, complicated by unrealistic hopes of becoming permanent retainers in the household. Wilhelm's affectation of being with them but not part of them makes his position even more ambiguous, and leads to a richly comic scene when the time comes for leave-taking, as he declines payment from the countess. This superficial modesty is an attempt to assert an amateur status to which he is not remotely entitled. The situation is resolved by the social skill of Philine, who accepts on his behalf, smoothing over the social falseness and embarrassment he has created by a comic parody of greed (284).

The reaction of the players to their new position is more ambivalent. They are at first overawed by the secretary, but immediately relieved when he turns out to be a would-be author (235-6). As skilled parasites, they are perfectly familiar with this situation, which has already arisen with Wilhelm, and will again with the baron. Once they have left the

⁹¹ Saint-Preux is poor enough to take a post as tutor, but proud enough to make difficulties about receiving a salary from his noble employer, *La nouvelle Héloïse*, p.85. 'Noble' indifference to money is of course general in *La nouvelle Héloïse*.

⁹² In the event they also receive a weekly payment, apparently *ex gratia* (283).

castle, they pay themselves back for their obsequiousness by sneering at its inhabitants. Wilhelm in effect joins in, although with a show of moderation.⁹³

The theme of the cash nexus is basic to the debate which follows (288-92). They owe their former patrons no respect, as ‘the cleverest’ of the players puts it, since they were paid for their performance.⁹⁴ This is ‘clever’, because by asserting the primacy of commercial values, it blurs the distinction between respect for status and gratitude for generosity. The satirical content of the debate is Goethe’s comment on two characteristics of the players as aspiring middle-class professionals: their uneasy awareness of their own limited competence, and their ambivalent attitude towards noble service, which is both humiliating and tempting, because financially secure. He thus defines a stage in the historical development of a part of the bourgeoisie from status towards contract.

He is also very clear, indeed prophetic, about the political implications, as the players proceed from indulging their wounded feelings to an entire rejection of the *Ständegesellschaft* in favour of a republic. The republican form of government is the only appropriate one ‘among good people’ (292), and since their own goodness is not in doubt, the conclusion is obvious. ‘Wir sind alle zusammen freie Menschen, wir haben keine Verbindung noch Verbindlichkeit’ (ibid.), no obligations towards their superiors, that is, and as will emerge at the first adversity, almost none towards one another – certainly none towards their elected leader. They have rejected a social structure which is indefensible from an enlightened perspective, but is at least rational in so far as real, in Hegel’s phrase, in favour of one which is artificial and illusory.

Horizontals and verticals

Belsazar’s spirit tempts him to extend his already vast realm and conquer the world, pausing only reluctantly on the shore of the world’s last sea; but soon his thoughts move upwards and he acknowledges the god above him, to whom he is a mere mortal (96). Götz had ranged widely, but had eventually been trapped, only to escape upwards in a final apotheosis. The Turmgesellschaft, by contrast, would spread out far beyond the confines of Germany, itself a trap,⁹⁵ but would have no place for vertically orientated birds like

⁹³ The narrator pointedly draws our attention to this injustice towards ‘Standspersonen’ (288).

⁹⁴ ‘der Klügste’, not otherwise identified, ibid.

⁹⁵ In his memorial address on Wieland in 1813, he developed a comparison between Shaftesbury, with his breadth of experience and social standing ‘in dem meerumflossenen England’, and Wieland’s much more constrained existence ‘in seinem, überall von Land und Bergen

Mignon and the Harper. For Werner the nobility have extended their sway over the whole world, but trade is also lateral in orientation, ironically idealised as armies of entrepreneurs and merchant voyagers criss-crossing the globe. At the image level we have here a system of contrasts between the horizontal and the vertical, by no means universal in Goethe, but consistent and thematic in this text.

Vertical orientation is associated with mystification, horizontal orientation (or vertical orientation used ironically) with demystification. The main *Lyrik* characters are birds. The poet of the 'Spottlied' is mystified through anonymity and satirises the nobility, making the horizontal extension of their broad acres faintly ridiculous ('manch schön Stück Ackerland'), and still more ridiculous their belief that they can annexe literature, as if it were an adjoining province. He himself is not a bird, but the next best thing, a mountain-dweller, on Parnassus. Like Zarathustra, so to speak, he can look down because he is exalted (273). Invited to sing, the Harper begins by looking up to heaven for inspiration (217). Wilhelm thinks that song lifts itself to the sky, like a bird or a butterfly, and that it calls on the hearts and souls of the audience to accompany it (ibid.).

Lyrik, then, is vertically orientated, and this remains consistent throughout the text. There is no suggestion that poetry, and especially poetic inspiration, could be demystified. In the cases of theatre and nobility, however, calculated ambiguity abounds, with initial vertical imagery later ironised and sharply undercut by the horizontal. It would require a long digression to consider how this applies to theatre,⁹⁶ the outsider characters,⁹⁷ or even to Wilhelm himself.

The most explicitly satirical application of vertical/horizontal symbolism to nobility is later, in the *Märchen* (1795, contemporary with *WML*). The will-o'-the-wisps are characterised by elegant manners, ostentatious wealth and a certain frivolity. At least one contemporary interpretation made the obvious association with the *Adel*.⁹⁸ In their

umgränzten Vaterlande', MA 9:952. England is aristocratic and open to the world, Germany middle-class and confined.

⁹⁶ Theatre is mystified and then demystified, partly by a troupe of laterally wandering vagrants. At the end Wilhelm will meet another character with a theatrical mission. Part of her illusion had been, like his, that the stage gave her an elevated pulpit from which to preach. She would find the reality of an actress's relationship with her public degrading, even nauseating.

⁹⁷ Of the outsiders, apart from the actual gods and other supernatural beings, the Jews are the most unambiguously vertical in orientation, connected as they are to the divine by invisible, vertical wires. They are associated with *Lyrik* by singing the praises of David (15), himself a poet (and harpist), and are twice linked with the Harper.

⁹⁸ FA 1.9:1117. Interpretations are of course very numerous. The metaphor is certainly double, that is, the *Irrlichter* 'stand for' the nobility. Conflicting interpretations only begin with what nobility stands for, other than itself. For one recent proposal, see Dietrich Spitta, *Goethes*

dialogue with the snake (the *Volk*, again on one possible interpretation), they are gracious but condescending, and draw attention to their own distinguished ancestry:

‘Frau Muhme,’ sagten sie, ‘wenn Sie schon von der horizontalen Linie sind, so hat das doch nichts zu bedeuten; freilich sind wir nur von seiten des Scheins verwandt, denn sehen Sie nur’ – hier machten beide Flammen, indem sie ihre ganze Breite aufopferten, sich so lang und spitz als möglich –, ‘wie schön uns Herren von der vertikalen Linie diese schlanke Länge kleidet! Nehmen Sie's uns nicht übel, meine Freundin, welche Familie kann sich des rühmen? Solang es Irrlichter gibt, hat noch keins weder gesessen noch gelegen.’⁹⁹

In *WMTS* the trajectory of the nobility is similar to that of theatre. Associations with the vertical occur, especially in Book 2, but are ironised by attribution to Wilhelm. He believes, for example, that the characters in *Cinna* are ‘höher[e] Wesen’, ‘unsere Halbgötter’ (75), and that those of Racine dwell in a dazzling court, the ‘Wohnungen der irdischen Götter’ (270). Mme Melina, again in Wilhelm’s view, lacks ‘die sanfte Höhe’ of the queen in *Belsazar* (164). As soon as Wilhelm begins to associate with the nobility, the process of demystification begins. Herr von C. is idealised, but he is not mystified by vertical imagery. On the contrary, he regrets that Wilhelm has not more ‘Welt, und Menschenkenntnis’ (166). Later the nobility is repeatedly associated with the ‘world’ and thus with lateral extension.

The process of demystification is actually anticipated by Werner, whose method is precisely the use of horizontal imagery, as well as association with commerce. By the end it is almost complete, and the reader has most of the materials for an evaluation, with balance provided by an insistence on fairness towards the count, sometimes ignored by commentators, and by the injustice of the later criticisms from Wilhelm and the players. It is a very partial rehabilitation of the aristocracy, however, to point out that some of its members, however limited in ability, are conscientious and well-meaning, that much criticism of them is envious and unjust, and that ‘enlightened’ projects aiming at a social or political alternative are recipes for disaster. Even Herr von C. hardly supplies a corrective, in the sense of justifying the status quo, since he is presented largely as one of its victims. Of the two key political questions posed by this text, the first, whether the German nobility is worthy of its immense privileges, is answered with careful balance, but clearly in the negative. As to the second question, whether it contains within itself the seeds of a possible reform, a positive answer is certainly intended, but in the surviving text the figures of Jarno and the Amazon are too fragmentary to form the basis of a firm conclusion.

Einweihung und sein Märchen von der grünen Schlange und der schönen Lilie (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 2008), pp.76-88.

⁹⁹ HA 6:212.

The argument can be advanced a little further by focusing on theatre and on the novel structure. The text ends with Wilhelm's admission to Serlo's troupe, ironically presented as yet another of his 'theatrical' pseudo-decisions. In a different tone, and if it had rounded off Book 12 instead of Book 6, this would have made a possible ending. As it stands, Book 7 was presumably to proceed to a successful production of *Hamlet*, with another five books to follow. What is quite certain is that the actual ending would have included, and inevitably have reconciled, Wilhelm, Jarno and the Amazon. If Wundt was right about the future role of the Amazon (that is, in linking nobility and the stage by marrying Wilhelm and herself performing), the lost schema must have included some plot mechanism for this purpose. The normal conventions of the *Trivialroman* are for such links to be symbolised either by marriage or by the discovery or disclosure of family relationships. Since the parentage of both Jarno and the Amazon is mysterious, or at least ambiguous (another 'defamiliarisation'), they might have turned out to be related, even brother and sister, and to assist in the establishment of a national theatre at a prince's court, free from the financial uncertainties of the troupe and the cultural pressures of attracting a mass audience. Whatever the solution, it seems clear that Goethe lost faith in it, and probably in theatre itself, as a mediator between nobility and bourgeoisie.

Chapter 7: *Iphigenie auf Tauris*

und wohl
Sind gut die Sagen, denn ein Gedächtnis sind
Dem Höchsten sie, doch auch bedarf es
Eines, die heiligen auszulegen.

Hölderlin¹

IPHIGENIE: Nicht Priesterin! Nur Agamemnons Tochter.²

The remaining three texts are in different ways either responses to Weimar, or were deeply influenced by it. All three were completed after 1786, but *Iphigenie* can be tied to the Weimar decade by focussing on the prose version of 1779. The play is exceptionally contentious, with a very large bibliography, but lasting advances have been made, notably by Adorno and Rasch,³ and some of its key ambiguities are irrelevant for the present purpose, which is to concentrate on the social setting of the heroine and the ideal she represents.

The play confronts us with not one, but three nobilities. The highest of them, the Olympians, are permanently in the background. The other two, Greek and Scythian, correspond to Weimar and the Sturm und Drang. Goethe thought that *Iphigenie* would exercise a positive moral effect, and his repeated references to its hoped-for 'Wirkung' can hardly be paralleled for any other text, but the nature of this influence is elusive. The reform is partly in the direction of feminisation and gentility, but is devised by a woman who explicitly rejects many of the traditional female values of her society, and this is one of the sources of her capacity for independence and moral radicalism. Her authority to carry out her reform programme is partly social, and derived from her father, with whom her relationship is deeply ambiguous. We are certainly to be aware of the possible existence of moral leadership, however, even of radical moral innovation. It will come from ethically gifted individuals who are likely to be women.⁴ They need not be of our

¹ 'Stimme des Volks', 2nd version, ll.69-72, Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Gedichte*, ed. Detlev Lüders, 2 vols. (Bad Homburg: Athenäum, 1970), i.254.

² References to the 1779 version of the play are taken from FA 1.5:149-97, and are in the form 189.23, that is, l.23 of p.189 (as here). References to the final version are taken from HA 5:7-67, and are by line number only (here 1822).

³ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Zum Klassizismus von Goethes Iphigenie', in *Noten zur Literatur*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1958-1974), iv.7-33; Wolfdietrich Rasch, *Goethes Iphigenie auf Tauris als Drama der Autonomie* (Munich: Beck, 1979). Of especial relevance to the social theme are Dieter Borchmeyer, 'Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Iphigenie auf Tauris*', in Harro Müller-Michaels, ed., *Deutsche Dramen: Interpretationen von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*, vol.1 (Königstein/Ts: Athenäum, 1981), pp.52-86, his commentary in FA 1.5, and id., *Die Weimarer Klassik*, i.104-15.

⁴ When Iphigenie exclaims, 'O hätt ich doch ein männlich Herz', 186.7, she means that she would then have lower moral standards, and would not be paralysed by unnecessary scruples.

own race or religion (192.9-12, and more explicitly, 1937-42), but our natural expectation would be to find them at the highest level of society.

As we have seen, one of the functions of aristocracy is to provide us with models for emulation, 'Nachstreben'.⁵ Morality itself, Goethe believed, had been brought into the world by exceptional individuals.⁶ This is, of course, putatively a historical event, or rather one of several. Iphigenie is clearly not the originator of morality, merely one in a line of ethical reformers, who will go on to include, certainly, Christ but also Luther (the priesthood of all believers), although her achievement is naturally on a smaller scale. Her immediate predecessors are the Olympians, in themselves an enlightened advance on a previous dark age personified by older female figures (not only the Furies, but the Parcae, Gorgons and unspecified 'Ungeheuer' are mentioned), who are at least compatible with a primitive matriarchy, along the lines suggested a century later by Bachofen.

Morality then has evolved, and Goethe did not doubt that our standards are higher than those of classical antiquity. He seems not to have expressed this in so many words, but only because he would have thought it obvious, as it certainly was to Schiller.⁷ Iphigenie is an archetype of this historical process, and accordingly is temporally fluid. On the one hand she belongs to what was already the heroic Homeric past, on the other hand her moral standards are of a modern, Kantian elevation (she has 'the moral law in her heart', as she in effect says). Her situation nevertheless depends on specific features of Greek religion.

The gods in *Iphigenie* are everywhere and nowhere: everywhere, because the heroine is a priestess, of mythical origins, and owes her life to divine intervention; and nowhere, because since Aulis, they have been invisible and silent. For Iphigenie Diana resembles far more the *deus absconditus* of Racine than the God of Abraham in the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen.22). Her religion has ritual, but no scriptures. The only recourse is to priests, notoriously fallible if not actually corrupt,⁸ or to legends, oracles and especially to the course of events, all inherently ambiguous.

In consequence any theodicy, indeed any theology, must depend on creative interpretation. The first debate between Iphigenie and Thoas (155.32-161.24) is dominated by rival interpretations of the will of the gods, and inevitably by mutual accusations of self-serving,

⁵ *WML*, FA 1.9:898.

⁶ Above, p.113.

⁷ For Schiller on 'die schönere Humanität unsrer neueren Sitten', which Goethe had succeeded in introducing to the Greek world, see FA 1.5:1044-5.

⁸ For the influence of Voltaire on the dramatic tradition here, see Rasch, pp.71-9.

hypocrisy and/or self-deception. In the following scene between Orest and Pylades the topic is resumed, rather more temperately. Rasch's stress on Iphigenie's 'autonomy' has become almost universally accepted, but in fact all five characters have confident and quite inconsistent views of the gods, and are at least to that extent autonomous.

The interpretation of Iphigenie prevails, but because of innate qualities within her, which can partly be called aristocratic, although they are clearly also undefinable. It no doubt also deserves to prevail, but by virtue of its utility, not its substantive truth.⁹ We need gods, and if they are to underwrite morality, they cannot be morally inferior to ourselves. If a change in human moral sentiment takes place, usually, as in this case, under the influence of a kind of ethical genius, the gods must change, or be changed, to accommodate it.¹⁰ The alternative is continued belief in arbitrary, unjust divinities, the psychic consequences of which are illustrated both by the end of Orest's vision of the Tantalids in Hades (the gods' enmity is eternal; they are incapable of human forgiveness) and by the 'Parzenlied' (the gods are remote and their judgements unjust or simply inscrutable). Fortunately neither vision is authoritative. Orest's is the product of insanity and the 'Parzenlied', despite its (acquired) title, is folklore from the heroine's nurse.

Iphigenie's task is in fact threefold. First comes the individual moral insight (human sacrifice is wrong), leading secondly to the theological generalisation (the gods do not actually desire it, 161.11-13); and thirdly the exercise of personal authority to bring about the change in religious practice. Of these, the first derives from an innate superiority, the second is the arbitrary imposition on the first of a generalisation from her own case, based on a moral self-confidence which Pylades thinks is inherently female, and which is perhaps a female form of genius ('ein Weib bleibt stet auf seinem Sinn, du rechnest sichrer auf sie im Guten wie im bösen', 167.2-4). This is, of course, what Thoas regards as female inaccessibility to reason (160.12-14 and ff). The third requires an access to all the sources of authority available to her, at least some of them social.

As Borchmeyer and others have pointed out, the old concept of the gods has important implications for secular lordship,¹¹ and this adds to the urgency of a change in theology.

⁹ This point is made sharply by Thomas Berger, against the longstanding critical tendency to assume that the plot objectively validates her interpretation, *Der Humanitätsgedanke in der Literatur der deutschen Spätaufklärung* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008), pp.180-1.

¹⁰ For Plato and others, including Euripides, as similarly wanting to 'reform the gods', see Girard, *The Scapegoat*, pp.76-94, here at p.79.

¹¹ For Borchmeyer, see FA 1.5:1313-15; and see Berger, op. cit., p.200. Iphigenie strengthens the parallel by a critique of kings in wording very like that of the gods in the 'Parzenlied' (189.15-21).

The gods of the 'Parzenlied', feasting at their court, are everything the unenlightened prince too often was, and the enlightened one must not be: objects of fear, arbitrary and cruel in their judgments, and above all, remote. The need for a new theodicy thus has political implications. It will present itself to Thoas as a disturbing innovation, but is in fact necessary to avoid a moral critique of the powers that be which risks involving not only the gods, but also their ordained representatives on earth.

The content of the myth will need to be revised as well as its interpretation, as we see from the heroine's version to Thoas. In Goethe's sources Tantalus had cooked parts of his own child and served them up to the gods in a meal, to test their omniscience. This now becomes not much more than bad manners, a lack of that smooth social 'Subordination', which Goethe himself, like Werther, found so difficult.¹² Indeed, in a unique criticism of the gods themselves, Iphigenie boldly attributes to them part of the blame for his fall: the gods 'ought not to consort with humans' (157.27-9).¹³ Mortals are too weak to bear this elevation. 'Übermut und Untreu' had led to Tantalus' ruin. We inevitably compare him with those other Titans, the 'Genies' of the Sturm und Drang, several of whom had been unable to cope with elevation to the dining tables of the Weimar Olympians. The gods must not be too remote from their subjects, but neither should they condescend too far and risk encouraging presumption. The social and political implications are self-evident.

As in the case of Tantalus, social considerations appear in the proposal scene, where the implied standards become the middle-class feminised ones of the novel. A heroine has as a matter of course the right to make her own choice of a husband, or no choice at all. Thoas, on the other hand, must take rejection like a 'gentleman', that is, he might reflect privately on Iphigenie's apparent ingratitude, but could not conceivably express this, least of all in her presence. By becoming bitterly misogynistic he defines himself as a 'barbarian', but only in the qualified modern sense of being insufficiently genteel to be a possible husband.

Thoas in fact illustrates the ambiguous nature of the moral advance represented by Iphigenie. Following the Euripidean connection, in his monologue in the last act he is briefly allowed to revert to the world of *Götter, Helden und Wieland*, and to deplore the consequences of what he calls (three times) his own 'Güte' (leniency, forbearance). Years

¹² 157.27-30, much amplified in the final version, 315-26.

¹³ Arthur Henkel, 'Die "verteufelt humane" Iphigenie. Ein Vortrag', *Euphorion*, 59 (1965), 1-17, esp. 9-10. As this example shows, Berger is not quite correct to state that all the characters confine themselves to interpreting the will of the gods and avoid challenging them, *Humanitätsgedanke*, p.182. Cf. also the final version, 23-4 (not in the 1779 version).

of Iphigenie's influence have deprived him of the power to act with proper male decisiveness, even ruthlessness. He reflects bitterly on what would have happened to her if she had 'fallen into the rough hands' of one of his ancestors. We can hardly call the ending of human sacrifice morally ambiguous, but any advance comes at a price. Civilization means feminisation, which means degeneracy. Thoas has been launched on a trajectory which will end with the inhibited rectitude of Sir Charles Grandison, a schoolgirl's idea of the perfect gentleman.¹⁴ The ironies surrounding Thoas arise from Goethe's continuing attachment to his Sturm und Drang origins, and to the influences of Herder and Möser. Behind the antithesis Greece/Scythia, lie others, certainly France/Germany,¹⁵ but also Weimar/Frankfurt, and therefore *Adel/Bürgertum*.

If we set aside the primary issue of human sacrifice, neither the intellectual nor the moral advantage is consistently with the heroine. In her quarrel with Thoas in the last act, an ironic balance is maintained between Thoas, by implication defending human sacrifice, but with some degree of force, and Iphigenie, championing enlightenment and defying male power, but with a muddle of formal ethical precept (190.19-20), untruth, or at least evasion (combined with an insistence on her own moral righteousness),¹⁶ and repeated references to Agamemnon, at least one of which is an infuriated insistence on her rank (189.23-5).

The irony is continued in a moral key in the ensuing confrontation between Arkas and Orest. Arkas's tone is effortlessly dignified and elevated: 'Gelassen, wie sichs dir ziemt seh ich dich o König den Feinden gegenüber' (194.7-8). He need not even express his contempt for the thief and the thief's treacherous female accomplice. Nobility and apparent moral advantage here are one, and entirely on the side of the Taurians. Goethe is doing justice to Frankfurt, and if he ever seriously thought the play 'verteufelt human', this merely expresses his determination not to allow Weimar too unequivocal a victory.

More important than the merits of Iphigenie's case are the reasons why it prevails, in other words the nature of her authority. This is, of course, complex, and is largely personal, or derived from her situation, in particular the supernatural nature of her arrival in Tauris. It

¹⁴ Cf. the letter to Cornelia Goethe, 6.12.1765, HaBr, i.18, 23.

¹⁵ Möser was sent a copy of the prose text in 1782. He replied politely, but thought it 'durch die französische Zärtlichkeit zu verwöhnt' for 'unser deutsches Publikum', Winfried Woessler, 'Möser und Goethe', *GJb*, 113 (1996), 23-35, here at p.28, and cf. *ibid.*, pp.33-4.

¹⁶ Compare her assertion that she, as a 'pure soul', could never stoop to cunning (190.29-30), with her conversation with Arkas, Act 4, sc.2, or her comment at 191.7-8. For the central importance of Thoas, see the letter of 14.3.1779 to Knebel, who was to create the part, quoted, FA 1.5:1014. Knebel had had cold feet and wished to withdraw. Goethe begged him to change his mind, and threatened to abandon the play if he persisted in his refusal.

is also, however, based on an extraordinary and paradoxical self-confidence, which in part has social origins. Both in their initial debate and elsewhere, Thoas and Iphigenie are free with accusations of hypocrisy and/or self-deception. She does not wish to marry Thoas and longs to return to Greece. She therefore gives good reasons rather than real reasons for declining the marriage, and confidently asserts that the gods have a plan for her with which it would be inconsistent, a claim based on no evidence other than intuition. Finally, in what seems to him the climax of hypocrisy, she gives thanks to the gods that they have given her the firmness to decline a union which they do not approve (160.21-3).

With so heavy an imbalance of power in his favour, Thoas has no right to expect candour, but we are still likely to agree with his answer, in a key passage:

TOAS:¹⁷ Du nennst das Götterwort was dir im Herzen schlägt.
IPHIGENIE: Sie reden nur durch unser Herz zu uns.

Whether the accusation is of conscious or unconscious falseness is immaterial. Anyone who had been subjected to Pietist examination of conscience, let alone anyone aware of Freud and the inaccessibility to us of at least part of our hearts, would find it difficult to accept the heroine's certainty that her motives are entirely transparent to her, and uncontaminated by self-interest. Goethe seems, however, to require us to do so, and to be asking us to admire an ideal type which can confidently dismiss any accusation of bad faith as absurd. C. S. Lewis, commenting on a change of moral sentiment in silver Latin authors, remarked on how rarely their classical predecessors had shown an awareness of 'the great fact of self-deception'.¹⁸ Iphigenie is in these terms a throw-back, an enlightenment heroine who is allowed to enjoy the moral self-confidence of the pre-Christian world. She is not merely prior to an awareness of unconscious motive, but superior to it as a kind of morbid introspection, like a biblical patriarch or a Homeric hero.

The origins of her confidence are in part social. In the confrontation with Thoas in Act 5, sc.3, she first utters a diatribe against kings, who have clean hands and maintain a godlike distance and elevation by finding subordinates to commit their crimes. Thoas thinks these wild words from a priestess, and their relevance is not obvious, even if her conscious complaint is in part of being used as such an instrument herself. Her reply is worth attention: 'Nicht Priesterin! Nur Agamemnons Tochter. Du ehrtest die unbekante, und der Fürstin willst du rasch gebieten' (189.23-5). That is, she disclaims any special insight

¹⁷ The spellings Toas and Thoas are used indifferently in this Ms.

¹⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* [1936] (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.71.

or authority due to her sacred office, but insists the more on what is due to the princess. She continues: ‘Von Jugend auf hab ich gelernt gehorchen, erst meinen Eltern und dann einer Gottheit und diese Folgsamkeit ist einer Seele schönste Freiheit, allein dem Ausspruch eines rauhen Mannes bin ich mich zu fügen nicht gewohnt.’

It is a familiar trope in Goethe that those fit to command must themselves have learned submission and *Entsagung*,¹⁹ and we know from Spinoza that freedom is the recognition of necessity. In any case her office of priestess has been submission to what she calls a ‘kindliche Beschäftigung’ (172.16), a kind of intolerably prolonged childhood. In effect she is claiming to have received a training fitting her for the exercise of authority. The antithesis ‘sanft’ (or ‘Besänftigung’)/‘rauh’ has been a recurring one for female/male relations, but her dissatisfaction with these relations means that she is frustrated by being restricted to ‘soft power’. The word ‘rauh’ is of course normally applied to the Taurians, and since ‘Mann’ is ambiguous, this reintroduces the antithesis between her ‘godlike’ first father, who had attempted to lure her to her death, but was no doubt a model of propriety in other respects, and her second father,²⁰ the suitor who had offered her marriage without knowing she was a princess, and had been undeterred even by the story of her origins.²¹

In this text the past shares an ambiguity with enlightenment historians such as Voltaire or Gibbon. It is both an atavistic, nightmare world characterised by human sacrifice and cannibalism, and at the same time a heroic age of ancestors from whom we are a decline and fall.²² On the one hand Iphigenie’s father was ‘göttergleich’, and the source of a social superiority which she will firmly assert; on the other, he had wished to sacrifice her.²³ On the one hand the descent from Tantalus was from a being worthy to sit at table with the Olympians; on the other, it hardly permits the normal ancestral pride of nobility.

In the end the past, whatever social and other advantages we may draw from it, must be rejected. ‘Old’ is a pejorative term. It is an ‘old law’ of the Taurians which demands

¹⁹ E.g., above, p.135. Its application does not exclude women, e.g., *Hermann und Dorothea*, vii.114-15, HA 2:494.

²⁰ ‘den Mann, den zweiten Vater’, as she calls him in her final speech (197.6-7).

²¹ The nobility of his behaviour is increased if we agree with Reed that his motives are primarily dynastic. The prospect of having children who might inherit the curse would daunt most suitors, as Iphigenie intends. Terence James Reed, ‘Iphigenies Unmündigkeit. Zur weiblichen Aufklärung’, in Georg Stötzel, ed., *Germanistik – Forschungsstand und Perspektiven*, 2 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985), i.505-24, here at p.515, n.21.

²² On the sense of decline, of living in an age of epigones (somewhat exaggerated), see Borchmeyer in *Deutsche Dramen*, p.56, and in FA 1.5:1309.

²³ Pylades seems to believe that he had carried out the sacrifice himself (‘seine älteste Tochter, Iphigenien, bracht’ er dort als Dianens Opfer um’, 169.14-15), but apparently Calchas had actually held the knife (190.6).

sacrifice (189.30); the Furies are ‘ancient daughters of night’ (172.23). Both must be banished to make a happier future possible. More importantly, and this is one of Adorno’s most valuable points, the text has heavy psychoanalytic implications. Myth is neurosis, and neurosis is repetition. The curse of the gods consists of, is evidenced by, actions which are apparently driven by a repetitive compulsion, and not fully owned by the Tantalids.²⁴ Freedom will come from a moral reformer with the courage to refuse to repeat the past, even if this involves rejecting much of past religion.

But if the reform programme as content is feminised, its proponent is a woman who comprehensively rejects female norms, a point pursued with psychological finesse. Iphigenie remains close to Agamemnon: her distance from her mother is heavily stressed.²⁵ The Iphigénie of Racine had been a *jeune fille à marier* whose arrival at Aulis, supposedly to marry Achille, had led to various romantic complications; Iphigenie by contrast reacts to news of the death of her former fiancé, if such he was, with polite regret but no hint of personal feeling (168.21). More than once her imagination is aroused by thoughts of heroic male activity, with imagery at times drawn from warfare (e.g., 180.23). Hers has been the usual fate of women, she tells Arkas, uselessness (153.26-7). Her rejection of female norms begins with her opening soliloquy: it would be the normal expectation that a princess, in particular, would marry, leave home and perhaps spend her life in a kind of exile at a distant court.²⁶ In a post-Freudian text we should expect her rejection of the conventional female role to be connected with her capacity for ethical radicalism, for critical questioning of the gods, and this does indeed seem to be Goethe’s intention.

Her authority does not derive from her function as priestess, to which she refers more than once without enthusiasm. Nor is it based on intellect. The intellectual is Pylades, who claims to believe that the only value of ‘Witz’ is to make us aware of the will of the gods (166.1-2). Indeed Iphigenie’s key claim that the gods ‘reden nur durch unser Herz zu uns’ (160.25) is an implied rejection, not only of priests and oracles, but also of unaided human intelligence. It is also, like the Lutheran priesthood of all believers, implicitly paradoxical, offering a freedom to the individual conscience which is in practice the freedom to agree with a new, no less authoritarian legislator.

²⁴ Staiger, *Goethe*, i.365.

²⁵ Pylades prepares to tell Iphigenie of her mother’s death, but finds her indifferent to the fate of the ‘criminal’ (‘Die sei den Göttern überlassen’, 171.22, a dismissive echo of *Hamlet*).

²⁶ Henkel makes this point, ‘Iphigenie’, p.172.

The ideal which Iphigenie embodies, rather than the one she preaches, can be approached more closely by referring her to the group to which she belongs. Cornelia Goethe, with her 'entire absence of sensuality',²⁷ is obviously important, more so than Frau von Stein. Cornelia had been ill-suited to marriage, and ought to have been an abbess.²⁸ Iphigenie is not precisely an abbess, although she has attendant maidens ('Jungfrauen', 181.16, and cf. 938), and will presumably continue her present role on a larger scale at Delphi. Her virginity has an absolute value, like that of Shakespeare's Isabella, whose situation hers slightly resembles.²⁹ Even the creator of the role, Corona Schröter, belongs here, as an actress who managed to keep both Goethe and Carl August at arm's length, and went about accompanied by her personal duenna.

The final version of the play was strongly influenced by a portrait of St Agatha in Bologna, supposedly by Raphael, and resembling the 'amazonenhaft' St Ursula in Verona.³⁰ The word 'Amazon' is twice applied to Iphigenie,³¹ linking her both to the Amazon of *WMTS* and to St Agatha.³² The theme is continued by parallels with Diana, another chaste sister usually surrounded by female votaries. St Ursula, herself a princess, was portrayed at Verona and often elsewhere with her eleven thousand virgins. The ideal is aristocratic, and contains an element of absolute rule, for which Iphigenie, with her supreme moral confidence, is entirely suited, but it is rule over a group of women at some remove from society. The 'Ewig-Weibliche' can lead us upwards, but only by maintaining its distance.

²⁷ *DuW*, HA 10:132.

²⁸ Goethe disliked to think of her as a housewife, 'wohl aber als Äbtissin, als Vorsteherin einer edlen Gemeine', *ibid.*, and similarly to Eckermann, 28.3.1831, FA 2.12:477.

²⁹ That is, she can presumably save her brother's life by marrying Thoas. She tells Pylades that her office of priestess depends on the king, who is angry with her, 'und seine Gnade mit teurem Lösegeld zu erhandeln versagt mein Herz', 170.10-12. Admittedly she does not yet know the captives' identities, but the point still applies after she does. Nothing similar appears in the final version, with its increased idealisation of the heroine.

³⁰ Above, p.155, n.88. The descriptions of the two paintings in the travel diary for Frau von Stein are strikingly similar, FA 2.3:53, 132.

³¹ 'Ist uns nichts übrig, und muß ein Weib wie eure Amazonen ihr Geschlecht verleugnen,' 191.22-3, and cf. 166.31-2. There has of course been extensive study of the Amazon as androgyne, mainly centring on *WML*. For a general account with a different emphasis to the above, see Helmut Fuhrmann, *Der androgyne Mensch: 'Bild' und 'Gestalt' der Frau und des Mannes im Werk Goethes* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995), esp. pp.44-52.

³² The link between Amazons and St Agatha is mutilation. St Agatha rejected the advances of a low-born Roman prefect and was thrown into prison for her Christian faith. Her tortures included the excision of her breasts, and she is often depicted carrying them on a platter. Whether this applied to the picture in question is uncertain (it was probably misattributed and seems now to be lost).

Chapter 8: *Egmont*

As a subject, the war for Dutch independence had both attractions and drawbacks. On the one hand, the Protestant myth was still current and was in principle as acceptable in Weimar as in Frankfurt. The historical Egmont could be heavily adapted into a ‘Sturm und Drang’ *Kraftkerl*, with a mixture of youth, *sprezzatura* and defiance of authority. It seems to be agreed, however, that one important aspect of the subject for Goethe was the opportunity for a critique of contemporary reformist tendencies in Berlin and Vienna associated with the *Aufklärung* and seen by Möser and others as authoritarian.¹ The play’s origins in 1775 preceded ‘Josephinism’, but not Möser’s critique of absolutism, and events during the 1780s, as radical reform developed in Vienna, would only have added to its relevance.

Since 1770 or even earlier Goethe had been familiar with Montesquieu’s view of the nobility as a barrier against absolutism,² and the influence of Möser’s pyramid model of society would reinforce this. As a defence of the nobility this view was rather weakly supported by history, but the historical background to *Egmont* could be regarded as a striking exception. In Montesquieu’s picture the role of the nobility is to mediate. It faces upwards and downwards. Its downward function, towards the *Volk*, includes the provision of justice and sound administration, the maintenance of order, military expertise and personal leadership at times of external threat (Saint-Quentin, Gravelines). We might expect another such function to be the delegated implementation of policies emanating from the court of the prince, but in this text the conservatism of tone and the emphasis on stability are so firm that the reader must wonder whether any innovation is a legitimate exercise of power. General legislation seems to be inherently absolutist. The ship of state is to be maintained on an even keel; the possibility that it might be desirable or necessary for it sometimes to change course seems to be discounted.

Equally discounted, or at least skirted around, is the possibility of irreconcilable differences between prince and people. In a sixteenth-century context these would

¹ Hans Reiss, ‘Goethe, Möser and the Aufklärung: The Holy Roman Empire in *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Egmont*’, *DVLG*, 60.4 (1986), 609-44; Jean Moes, ‘La liberté dans l’ordre. La problématique politique dans *Egmont* de Goethe’, in Susanne Craemer and others, eds., *Europäische Begegnungen. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft, Sprache und Philosophie. Festschrift für Joseph Kohlen* (Walferdange: Université de Luxembourg, 2006), pp.269-85; and Renate Stauf, *Justus Möser’s Konzept einer deutschen Nationalidentität: Mit einem Ausblick auf Goethe* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), pp.392-3.

² Conze, ‘Adel, Aristokratie’, pp.20-21. The term ‘Mittelstand’ was often used by contemporaries, but not by Goethe, to mean the ‘Adel’, because of this mediating role, *ibid.*

typically be doctrinal, and no solution is offered other than the plea for tolerance of Machiavell (379.27-30),³ not much more credible than Posa's for 'Gedankenfreiheit'. The nobility in *Egmont* are as subject to irresistible fate as Prometheus or Zeus, or as Götz himself, if by fate we mean impersonal historical forces,⁴ and the hopeless defiance this may demand of them is part of the Sturm und Drang residuum in the play. Tensions between prince, *Adel* and *Volk* are inherent, but are much worsened by absolutism.

Instability as a direct product of absolutism is a heavily stressed theme. *Egmont*, the burgesses, both regents and the prince all want stability, but of course on their own terms. The final uprising will have class implications as well as nationalist ones, but its motivation is no more class hostility than nationalist aspiration. Goethe was not very close to the world of the French Revolution when he warned Carl August about the wild boar on the Ettersberg (above, p.97), or when he reflected on the miseries of the peasants' condition, but still he was closer to it than in *Egmont*, where nothing could conceivably be regarded as a portent of social revolution.

Apart from Montesquieu another presence in the text is certainly the most successful manual of statesmanship from Goethe's youth, Moser's *Der Herr und der Diener*.⁵ How far Goethe was influenced by Moser, and how far his outlook simply resembled that of a fellow-member of the mandarin caste, is unimportant. Moser's central theme was the relationship between prince and minister, naturally leading to a discussion of how this must differ, depending on differences in the innate capacities of princes for government, or indeed in inclination for it. Some can only with difficulty be dragged away from the usual diversions. Others wish to rule in person but lack the ability to do so, at least without advice which they may not have the self-confidence to take (p.76). Some simply hate the chore of writing (p.94; and cf. *Egmont*, 398.31-2). Moser's ideal is naturally the prince with will and ability, but capable of taking advice (pp.76-7). Goethe's is the further point that there is no necessary coincidence between skilful performance of the public role of nobleman and a capacity for administration.

The contrast is dramatized as that between *Egmont* and *Oranien*. *Egmont* is the ideal as presentation, but although decisive and competent in routine administrative action, he only

³ Bracketed references to *Egmont* are to page and line numbers in HA 4:370-454.

⁴ This is the theme of Hans-Dietrich Dahnke, 'Geschichtsprozeß und Individualitätsverwirklichung in Goethes *Egmont*', in Hans-Günther Thalheim and Ursula Wertheim, eds., *Studien zur Literaturgeschichte und Literaturtheorie* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1970), pp.58-100, 340-4.

⁵ Friedrich Carl von Moser, *Der Herr und der Diener geschildert mit patriotischer Freyheit* (Frankfurt: Raspe, 1759). See also above, p.32.

doubtfully conforms to Moser's ideal in the other respect. The contrast with the introverted Oranien was one Goethe found in his sources, but it also corresponds to the ideal as action. Another antithesis is important. The famous image of the sleepwalker, which Goethe elsewhere applied to himself,⁶ is not merely of peril, or at least precariousness, but also of the physical grace which comes of unconscious instinct. The antithesis to the sleepwalker is the chess-player, with his calculated strategic moves (403.12). The contrast is clear from their respective attitudes towards war with Spain. Egmont's revulsion is instinctive: Oranien seems to have learned, perhaps from Machiavelli, that if war is inevitable, there is no advantage in postponing it.⁷

The nobility has other, less clearly defined functions which are partly psychological and partly symbolic. Egmont's 'attrativa', Goethe's word for charisma,⁸ is a personal quality, but one which is strongly class-based – we can hardly imagine it as an attribute of one of the burghesses. Its nature is explored in the crowd scenes and in those involving Klärchen, with the latter illustrating Freud's view of the erotic nature of the link between leader and followers. Egmont is in part the narcissistic leader ('Sieh dich nur satt!', 413.7), inviting and receiving in response a kind of intellectually confused sense of identification.

In the case of the crowd this is supported with appropriately comic naivety in the first act by their demand that their ruler should be like themselves, and at the same time immeasurably elevated above them. Their ideal had been Charles V, who had ruled the world, but been simple and affable in manner. His son, by contrast, is 'kein Herr für uns Niederländer' (372.25), both his foreignness and his Spanish stiffness partially blocking identification. At the end of the corresponding scene in Act 2, Egmont benefits from the same process. He is approved of, both as 'der echte Niederländer', but at the same time (by the tailor Jetter) for his fashionable Spanish dress (395.10-17). There is more to this than genial, rather Shakespearean comedy at the expense of the muddle-headed *Volk*. The advantage of a ruler sharing national identity with his subjects is a recurring theme in Machiavelli, one of several taken up in *Egmont*,⁹ and is varied in the treatment of Klärchen, who finds reassurance in Egmont's implied insistence that his real identity is the private, intimate one, not the public persona, presented as a mask. The confusion in her

⁶ Aphorisms, 2.75.1, FA 1.13:210.

⁷ 405-6. Cf. *Il Principe*, 3.14.

⁸ Hans Naumann, 'Goethes Egmontmythos', *ZDP*, 71 (1951-2), 277-91, here at p.278.

⁹ See, e.g., *Il Principe*, 3.3, 3.4, 5.1, 6.2. For Machiavelli in this text, see Reiss, 'Goethe, Möser and the Aufklärung', esp. pp.636-7; Wolfgang Wittkowski, '*Egmont*. Der Mensch in der Politik: Machiavelli', *Goethe*, pp.131-72.

case lies in her obvious attraction to the public persona as well, symbolised for her, as for Jetter, by his Spanish court dress and by the Order of the Golden Fleece.

The question of whether the relationship of nobility and *Volk* is inherently organic in this text, or indeed inherently Germanic, has been discussed in a somewhat metaphysical tone, but with some support from Goethe, although exclusively the much later Goethe.¹⁰ What is certain is that in a polity which is undemocratic but heavily mediatised, the nobleman has a dual representational role. He represents in the sense of ‘standing in for’, that is, he performs one of the functions of an elected member of the legislature in a democratic system. He also represents in the sense of (legal) advocacy, explaining the prince to the people and vice versa. Crucially he must avoid loss of contact in either direction, although Goethe’s main concern was the risk of loss of contact with the *Volk*. His positive examples of organic unity include Götze and the Landgrave of Hanau (above, pp.37-8), and the unnamed ‘Edelmann’ in *Der Bürgergeneral*. The more numerous negative ones, some of them influenced by later experience of the French *émigrés*, are of a kind of rootless and futile detachment, of which *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* gives examples.¹¹

The functions of the nobility towards the prince certainly include restraint on any tendency towards despotism, but in normal times are curiously like those attributed by Bagehot, in a famous formula, to the constitutional monarch: ‘the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, the right to warn’,¹² although these are duties as well as rights. From the prince’s viewpoint, the nobility act as quasi-ambassadors, notably in providing expertise on their local area.¹³ Unlike ambassadors, however, they have deep local roots, leading to the risk of their ‘going native’. This possible reversal of primary loyalty is much in the mind of both regents in the play and contributes to the erosion of trust. The issue would have been familiar to Goethe from history, but also from Machiavelli.

A purely functional discussion of Egmont omits a crucial aspect: Egmont ‘looks like’ a nobleman,¹⁴ that is, he embodies the role with typifying, normative force. He presents himself, as Goffman would put it, and does so at least in part consciously (the appearance

¹⁰ Klaus Ziegler, ‘Goethes Egmont als politisches Drama’, in Johannes Schwartländer, ed., *Verstehen und Vertrauen. Festschrift für Otto Friedrich Bollnow zum 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1968), pp.272-92, esp. pp.290, 291.

¹¹ Earlier ones include Ferdinand, Lila and Oronaro.

¹² Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (Glasgow: Collins, 1963), p.111.

¹³ ‘Ich kenne meine Landsleute’, Egmont to Alba, 430.11.

¹⁴ ‘A hero is one who looks like a hero’, R. Warshow, *The Immediate Experience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), p.153, quoted, Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p.84. Warshow’s context is the Western film.

to Klärchen, the preference for the lowly title of ‘count’ rather than that of ‘prince’ to which he is entitled, the self-proclaimed awareness of a special destiny).

Schiller’s famous objection to the ‘Opernwelt’ was partly that a clash of gears was audible between the social and political plot and the symbolic ending. But in fact Egmont is in the ‘Opernwelt’ throughout, or to update the metaphor, in the world of cinema. Peter Wollen, the theorist of film, applied to its language C. S. Peirce’s classification of signs into the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic.¹⁵ Peirce had believed in the possibility of a perfect sign which would combine all three, that is, would combine beauty, truth and symbolic meaning, and it was Wollen’s thesis that cinema is uniquely placed to provide this. In that sense Egmont is cinematic, not merely magnificent as spectacle, but indexically pointing towards a truth about nobility (true, that is, in terms of Goethe’s private ideology), and in another sense of ‘true’, symbolising the social and political ideal. As those other self-presenters, Henry V and Othello, stand to kingship and generalship,¹⁶ so Egmont stands towards nobility, in one, but only one of its aspects. Goethe’s technique of endlessly sophisticated added implication makes the entire embodiment of an ideal impossible.

The wisdom or otherwise with which Egmont performs or neglects his duties has been the subject of controversy. To describe him as ‘unpolitical’, as did a once influential article,¹⁷ is to force the contrast between him and Oranien unduly. It is Egmont, not Oranien, who fulfils the duties of advising and warning Alba, and in the debate with Oranien, the advantages, moral and practical, are distributed fairly equally.¹⁸ Egmont is given a long and impassioned speech on the horrors of civil war, and Oranien’s self-justification, although more than once quoted as convincing, is unsatisfactory (405.32-4). It is at least arguable that Egmont’s only miscalculation is to fail to realise his own vulnerability, and failure to imagine tyranny is a kind of innocence, even moral elevation.

¹⁵ Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1969), pp.120-54.

¹⁶ The casual quelling of a popular disturbance, 394, seems indebted to *Othello*, 1.2.59ff.

¹⁷ Georg Keferstein, ‘Die Tragödie des Unpolitischen. Zum politischen Sinn des *Egmont*’, *DVLG*, 15 (1937), 331-61. For a more modern view see, e.g., Renato Saviane, ‘Egmont, ein politischer Held’, *GJb*, 104 (1987), 47-71.

¹⁸ The extremes for and against Egmont may be represented by John M. Ellis, ‘The Vexed Question of Egmont’s Political Judgement’, in C. P. Magill and others, eds., *Tradition and Creation: Essays in honour of Elizabeth Mary Wilkinson* (Leeds: Maney, 1978), pp.116-30, and M. W. Swales, ‘A Questionable Politician: A Discussion of the Ending to Goethe’s *Egmont*’, *MLR*, 66 (1971), 832-40. For the debate between the two men, the strongest defence of Egmont is in Reiss, ‘Goethe, Möser and the Aufklärung’, and of Oranien in Stauf, *Justus Möser’s Konzept*, pp.401-4.

Of course, those taking a hostile or limiting view, especially those wishing to stress Egmont's undemanding view of his own responsibilities, are not short of evidence.¹⁹ But in Goethe's case such a controversy over an individual character merely demonstrates the care with which he has created ambiguity by inserting pointers in both directions. One of these pointers has perhaps been overlooked. Egmont is at his most irresponsible when he wishes simply to opt out of the public sphere, as he seems to tell Klärchen he would like to do. The irony of this is pointed out by Alba during their confrontation, but also earlier, at the very opening of the play, in an episode which is clearly thematic.

In the first scene, the citizen spectators at a shooting contest talk about the rewards or otherwise of victory. The winner will be for a year 'Meister und König', a title neatly combining the *bürgerlich* and the feudal. The tailor Jetter finds nothing enviable in this. The 'Meister' has to make a double contribution to the round of drinks: 'Ihr sollt Eure Geschicklichkeit bezahlen, wie's recht ist.' Since there is no reference to a prize other than the title, we might ask why it is 'fair' that the winner should pay extra for his own skill. The answer seems to be that the 'Meister' is already (over-)paid by the title and the adulation he receives, and therefore owes his subjects, rather than the other way about.

In the event the prize is won by a soldier of Egmont's named Buyck, who then calls for a whole round, entirely at his own expense. The pedantic Jetter objects that this is not their custom, but is humorously overruled by Buyck: 'Ich bin fremd und König, und achte Eure Gesetze und Herkommen nicht' (371.32-3). This leads adroitly on to the next theme, foreign rule, but the serious implication of the episode is that elevation comes at a price. Egmont regards himself as a deserving beneficiary under the social contract, but in his case the contract has a penalty clause. The citizens seem to grasp this better than he does.²⁰

More important than how we are to regard Egmont, are first, the hypostatic twinning of Oranien and Egmont as typifications of nobility in action and presentation respectively, and secondly, Egmont's fate, and to a lesser extent Oranien's, as a critique of the central situation. The two are closely linked.

Oranien is famously 'silent', but also complex, saturnine. Egmont is open in speech, even where this is imprudent, but this illustrates a need for government to talk to the *Volk*, both

¹⁹ For example his comment on Oliva's letter: 'Es dreht sich immer um den einen Punkt: ich soll leben, wie ich nicht leben mag' (399.15-16). This is entirely the *Kraftkerl*, Crugantino even more than Götz.

²⁰ The parallel between Buyck and Egmont is reinforced by the shooting contest between Egmont and Alba, where again it will be the winner who pays, 446.37-447.5.

to learn and to instruct. The prevalence of taciturnity and reserve is one of the causes of the dangerous pressures building up throughout the play.²¹ Egmont is not unpolitical, in the sense of being uninterested in power – he has after all aspired to become regent himself (381.2-3) – but he shares Goethe’s tendency to regard politics as a necessary evil. Moenkemeyer’s description of the political as the ‘Bereich der Sorge’ applies almost as well to this play as to *Die natürliche Tochter*.²² Action is as much a key function of nobility as presentation, and ‘Tat steht mit Reue, Handeln mit Sorge in immerwährendem Bezug’.²³ It is noble to die as Egmont does, in a heavily symbolic manner,²⁴ but no less so to take up the burden of leadership in war and to accept responsibility, at least indirectly, for failures, defeats, almost certainly crimes. Oranien too will die for the cause, much less ambiguously than Egmont, and if the cause itself is only ambiguously validated by the text, still it cannot give meaning to the one death but not the other. This goes beyond the text into history, but permissibly so with a semi-mythological figure like Oranien.

Noble acceptance of responsibility, in the form of guilt, is illustrated by the scene between Alba and Ferdinand (424-5). Alba wishes his son to take his place among his legitimate brothers, but insists on a rite of passage. Ferdinand says he will obey, although ‘[z]um ersten Mal mit schwerem Herzen und mit Sorge’. And Alba’s reply is no less significant: ‘Ich verzeihe dir’s; es ist der erste große Tag, den du erlebst’ (425.30-33). Ferdinand’s initiation into a crucial aspect of his future political role takes the form of acting as accomplice to a murder for reasons of state. This is primarily a comment on despotism, but it also points to the link between nobility and ‘Sorge’.

On balance then the play celebrates the nobility, but in a far from straightforward way. Its members benefit from enormous privileges, but these are validated by time and do not arouse social envy from the citizenry,²⁵ whose sense of its own identity depends heavily on inherited privileges. Their reaction to Egmont’s wealth and prominence is not envy, but an anxious and sympathetic awareness of the danger of his elevation. There is an obvious irony here, since this elevation is largely his popularity with the citizens themselves. Precisely this gives him his representative status, and so puts him at risk of being ‘made an

²¹ Of Philip II Jetter says, ‘Er spricht wenig, sagen die Leute’, 372.24; Margarete von Parma complains of Oranien that he never speaks out openly, 381.10; Alba is not only silent himself, but compels silence round about him, 421; the citizens are frightened into silence, and public discussion of affairs of state is criminalised, 415-6.

²² Heinz Moenkemeyer, ‘Das Politische als Bereich der Sorge in Goethes Drama *Die natürliche Tochter*’, *Monatshefte*, 48.3 (1956), 137-48. For *Egmont*, see *ibid.*, pp.140-1.

²³ Above, p.119. This is the *Sorge* of Faust, which is inseparable from power.

²⁴ Parallels with the death of Christ are listed by Ellis, ‘The Vexed Question’, pp.127-9.

²⁵ As Egmont tells Alba, 431.30-31. We know it would be contemptible to envy Egmont’s wealth from the fact that only Vansen does so, 418.23-4.

example of' by an absolutist regent. It is not even open to him to opt out of his status by resignation from public life. Acceptance of the obligation to represent is forced on him by over-confidence and a sense of responsibility, both being inherent parts of the role he has been taught to perform. The criticisms of commentators who describe Oranien, or even Vansen, as being more 'sound' in political judgement,²⁶ or as being justified by events, in the sense of making cleverer predictions, miss part of Goethe's point here.

The critique is not of individual characters, but of a situation, and ultimately of politics. Government policy, aimed, Egmont says, at destroying the citizens in order to reform them (432.18-24), creates tensions particularly affecting the nobility. The people instinctively look to them for protection against the destruction of their liberties (393.18-19, 417.9-11), and equally instinctively respond to pressure from above by threat of disturbance. The government, in turn, can no longer trust the nobility to enforce policy, suspecting, and this is true of both regents, that the nobles will be tempted to strengthen their own position by at least tolerating civil disobedience. Both regents are clear that the nobility must be forced to choose between loyalty to the people and to the crown, but the choice itself is ruinous, and symptomatic of a pathology.

Other obviously pathological symptoms include Alba and Vansen, no less so because much of what each says is clearly authorial.²⁷ Burgesses clamouring to hear a lecture on their 'privileges' from a disreputable drunk would have been as unwelcome a sight to Goethe as the same burgesses cowering before a foreign army of occupation. Both would have been signs of government incompetence. The situation itself, then, requires the nobility to choose between collapse into a kind of civil service (and thereby abnegation of a key function) and revolt, and since the choice has been forced on them by the prince, he is to blame for the consequences. For Goethe revolutionary disorder is always the fault of government,²⁸ and if absolutism contains an inherent element of instability, this is in part because it has no room for the mediating role of the nobility.

²⁶ E.g., Reiss, 'Goethe, Möser and the Aufklärung', p.627.

²⁷ For Vansen's closeness to Möser, see Moes, 'La liberté dans l'ordre', pp.273-4, and Stauf, *Justus Möser's Konzept*, pp.398-9. This leads Stauf to defend his personal character, however, which is hardly possible. See, for example, 420.24-7.

²⁸ To Eckermann, 4.1.1824, FA 2.12:532.

Chapter 9: *Torquato Tasso*

[On the age of Voltaire:] Der Einfluß der Sozietät auf die Schriftsteller nahm immer mehr überhand: denn die beste Gesellschaft, bestehend aus Personen von Geburt, Rang und Vermögen, wählte zu einer ihrer Hauptunterhaltungen die Literatur, und diese ward dadurch ganz gesellschaftlich und vornehm. Standespersonen und Literatoren bildeten sich wechselsweise, und mußten sich wechselsweise verbilden: denn alles Vornehme ist eigentlich ablehnend [...]

DuW¹

Much discussion of *Torquato Tasso* has centred on an implied double antithesis between the hero as poet or as everyman, and his environment as a court or simply as any society.² What follows will naturally concentrate on the court, but both ambiguities are present in the text, and must be borne in mind. The poet is a dramatically useful figure, with unusual powers of self-presentation, but his social problems are not necessarily specific to his genius. Similarly a court is 'exclusive', but any society will both accept and exclude. Certainly Tasso's own view is not that poets have especial difficulties in social adaptation, nor even consistently that high society is more false and problematic than any other. In his third soliloquy, for example, he says that he is now learning to pretend, as social life, not court life, requires ('So zwingt *das Leben* uns zu scheinen', 2746), although he goes on almost immediately to complain of '[d]ie ganze Kunst des *höfischen Gewebes*' (2749),³ as if it were an especially acute case.

Whether as 'society' or as 'court society', Ferrara is certainly 'good society'; but 'gute', 'bessere', 'die beste Gesellschaft', although common enough expressions in Goethe, have different meanings at different periods, and only become entirely unambiguous in the very last phase of his life.⁴ According to Eckermann, when a young Englishman told Goethe that he was reading *Tasso*, and that this had caused surprise because of the play's reputation for difficulty, Goethe was encouraging:

¹ HA 9:484.

² For an overview of earlier criticism, see Irmgard Wagner, *Critical Approaches to Goethe's Classical Dramas: Iphigenie, Torquato Tasso and Die natürliche Tochter* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995), pp.91-143; and for 'the poet', Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, 'Torquato Tasso. The Tragedy of the Poet', in E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, *Goethe, Poet and Thinker: Essays* (London: Arnold, 1962), pp.75-94; Wolfdietch Rasch, *Goethes Torquato Tasso. Die Tragödie des Dichters* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1954); Dieter Borchmeyer, 'Tasso oder das Unglück Dichter zu sein', in Dieter Kimpel and Jörg Pompetzki, eds., *Allerhand Goethe. Seine wissenschaftliche Sendung [...]* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1985), pp.67-88, and id. in FA 1.5:1413-19. For 'everyman', see, e.g., Stuart Atkins, 'Observations on Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*', in Luanne T. Frank and Emery E. George, eds., *Husbanding the golden grain: Studies in honor of Henry W. Nordmeyer* (Ann Arbor, MI: Dept. of Germanic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1973), pp.5-23.

³ Emphasis added in both cases. *Tasso* is cited by line number from HA 5:73-167.

⁴ Discounting of course the use of 'gute Gesellschaft' to mean merely good, in the sense of congenial, company.

‘Die Hauptsache beim Tasso,’ sagte Goethe, ‘ist die, daß man kein Kind mehr sei und gute Gesellschaft nicht entbehrt habe. Ein junger Mann von guter Familie mit hinreichendem Geist und Zartsinn und genugsamer äußeren Bildung, wie sie aus dem Umgange mit vollendeten Menschen der höheren und höchsten Stände hervorgeht, wird den Tasso nicht schwer finden.’⁵

It would be absurd to look for irony here. In earlier texts, however, such as the passage from *DuW* quoted above, the estimation of tone may be problematic. It is possible, but difficult, to assert in all simplicity that the best society consists of persons of birth, rank and wealth. Either this is true by definition, in which case it is not easy to see why it needs to be said at all, or we suspect irony (quoting an orthodoxy in order to challenge it), or alternatively the defiant assertion of an unconventional opinion, a nailing of one’s colours to the mast. In this case the context suggests irony, since it emerges that by bringing literature into contact with the best people, Voltaire had done it harm.⁶ The two perhaps flourish best apart. Patronage may be essential, but should not lead to a mutually contaminating exchange of values. This might seem very far from *Tasso*, but is after all a possible gloss on the ending of the play.

More generally Goethe, especially before 1800, but also much later, continued to pronounce negatively on ‘good society’ in two separate senses. In the first place, he could be directly critical. Modesty is the social virtue most praised by the mob (‘die Menge’), but it consists of dissimulation, in order to avoid injuring the self-esteem of others.⁷ More significant for the present play are the many echoes of Serlo’s lesson to Wilhelm on the essential negativity of the ‘vornehme Anstand’. One demonstrates one’s entitlement to membership of the best society by not doing things, and Serlo provides a helpful list of some of the things to avoid, behind which we can no doubt hear the voice of Frau von Stein.⁸ He had earlier complained similarly of the excessive naturalism of German theatre. Our theatre lacks a standard (‘eine Grenze’), a frontier that must not be crossed. Every ‘gute Sozietät’ can only exist under certain conditions, that is, by excluding certain mannerisms, turns of phrase, topics, ways of behaving; and precisely the same applies to theatre.⁹ As a programme for the reform of theatre, and even of manners, this is plausible, but so negative as to risk becoming a straitjacket. For the writer, as Goethe complained to

⁵ To Eckermann, 10.1.1825, quoted, FA 1.5:1388-9.

⁶ For a similar reference to Voltaire and high society, where the context again supplies irony, in this case his preaching the gospel of Newton, see *Zur Farbenlehre*, Hist. Teil, 6 Abt., FA 1.23/1:869. For ‘vornehm’, see also above, p.63, n.91.

⁷ *West-Östlicher Divan*, Besserem Verständniß, Künftiger Divan, FA 1.3/1:221, and on the falseness of social modesty, *WMW*, ‘Der Mann von Funfzig Jahren’, HA 8:175, and to Eckermann, 4.1.1824, FA 2.12:530.

⁸ *WML*, FA 1.9:722-3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.710-11.

Eckermann (in the context of *WML*), the problem is that good society cannot be portrayed through ‘so-called good society’ – no-one would read the book. It can only be conveyed through ‘so-called bad society’,¹⁰ that is, indirectly, by means of irony. It is, of course, entirely impossible to imagine Goethe as the author of any fiction idealising a noble, or indeed any society, without an undercurrent of irony. The dismissive reference to the absurdity of the baron’s plays in *WMTS* would alone be sufficient to illustrate this (above, p.134). This is not to say, however, that Ferrara is not, within limits, a good society.

The importance of Serlo on theatre and good society lies in the tendency to treat the play as a bipolar dichotomy between personal ethics and the code of an elite. In fact there is a more complex tension in three directions, with aesthetic values as a third term. The stage of a court theatre is the ultimate in Norbert Elias’s *Affektbeherrschung*, a place from which spontaneity is entirely excluded, and therefore embarrassment or surprise. Tasso’s two blunders resemble a stumble by a dancer, a wrong note by a musician or simply an actor’s lapse of memory, at any rate a sudden falling out from a performed role into a different reality plane. They draw attention away from the ensemble, that is, the aesthetic spectacle, and towards the individual.¹¹ This suggests that theatrical literary values are much closer to Antonio than to Tasso. But of course, as Rousseau reminded us, we do not merely observe and learn to imitate. We also identify, and the flow of ethical sympathy from the author manipulates our identification between the court and Tasso, sometimes drawing it towards both at once, so that the embrace of the Princess is both exhilarating (a release of tension) and at the same time horrifying.

The gap between ethical and social values, between virtue and convention, seems to return us once again to *Le Misanthrope*. Tasso, in the latter part of the play, ‘rebukes the world’, like the more consistent Alceste,¹² but as in the case of Werther his rebuke is undermined by a strong previous attachment to court society, combined with a sense of entitlement to social acceptance.¹³ To use the Freudian formula of Philip Rieff, both Werther and Tasso

¹⁰ To Eckermann, 25.12.1825, FA 2.12:165. For the uselessness of good society for literary purposes, see also ‘Hast du nicht gute Gesellschaft gesehn?’, FA 1.1:459.

¹¹ The best exposition of the play as aesthetic spectacle is Gerhard Neumann, *Konfiguration: Studien zu Goethes Torquato Tasso* (Munich: Fink, 1965). Neumann’s conclusion is that ‘Das Grundgesetz dieses Dramas ist erlesenes Zeremoniell’, and he goes on to compare it to formal dancing, p.186.

¹² ‘And remember, child, he who rebukes the World is rebuked by the World’, R. Kipling, ‘The Undertakers’, in *The Second Jungle Book* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p.116.

¹³ Tasso is quite clear that he deserves his place at court not only through nobility of birth, but ‘durchs Gemüt, das die Natur / Nicht jedem groß verlieh, wie sie nicht jedem / Die Reihe großer Ahnherrn geben konnte’, 1355-7.

are instances of neurosis as ‘the penalty of ambition unprepared for sacrifice’,¹⁴ the sacrifices being in both cases the normal, necessary adaptations. In the view of the Duke, Tasso’s neglect of social life, his truancy from what Shaftesbury had called that excellent school, the world,¹⁵ is dangerous.

Alphons will, of course, be amply justified by the event, although he seems to be answered almost immediately by Tasso’s production of his book (380). Here at least we are very close to Goethe himself. For the artist, his creations are ‘Kinder der Einsamkeit’,¹⁶ and social life at least threatens to be a waste of time. Both its value and how far it could safely be neglected were intensely personal questions.

For decades, for reasons which are unclear, the fashion has been to unbalance the text in favour of Tasso and against the court, whereas the older tradition more reasonably stressed the perfection of Goethe’s balance. The most comprehensive modern treatment of the play in book form is committed to an implacable hostility towards the aristocracy, and attributes this to Tasso,¹⁷ and an influential and much-cited article dismisses ‘die Hofsympathisanten unter den Kritikern’,¹⁸ and gives a strained and paradoxical account of an important episode, the aftermath of the challenge to Antonio, of which a different interpretation is given below. The inherent absurdity of expecting from Goethe in the 1780s a bitter philippic on small courts is self-evident, but here as always he was concerned, to the point of obsession, with balance, even in a case where he had so strong a temptation towards empathy.¹⁹ The justified criticisms of Ferrara must be briefly reviewed before considering its positive features.

We are introduced to the court through the figure of the Princess, who is both twinned and contrasted with Tasso. Like him she has created an alternative world and is in retreat from the real one, not only from society at large, but from aspects of the court. This tendency of courts to permit fantasy aesthetic flight is familiar from Lila, Mandandane, possibly the baroness in the *Die ungleichen Hausgenossen*, and others, all of them in some relationship

¹⁴ Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (London: Gollancz, 1959), p.308.

¹⁵ See above, p.94, n.29, and for Alphons, ll.243ff.

¹⁶ *DuW*, HA 10:48, and for other references, Rasch, *Goethes Torquato Tasso*, pp.47-8.

¹⁷ Gabriele Girschner, *Goethes Tasso: Klassizismus als ästhetische Regression* (Königstein/Ts.: Hain, 1981). See among many examples, pp.278-9, 348.

¹⁸ Reed, ‘Tasso und die Besserwisser’, here at p.102. Cf. Boyle’s claim that the play ‘contains some of the most withering denunciations of a court Goethe ever wrote’, *Goethe*, i.606, which could only be supported by citing Tasso in a deeply deluded state.

¹⁹ Borchmeyer hardly exaggerates when he calls Goethe’s equitable distribution of sympathy between Tasso and the court an ‘Akt unerhörter Selbstüberwindung’, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, p.102. Elsewhere he cites both Richard Wagner and Thomas Mann on the impossibility of any final judgement between the two, id., *Die Weimarer Klassik*, i.126, 130.

to Duchess Luise. Still to come was the full-length portrait of the 'schöne Seele'. Her character has been much debated, but the judgement of Natalie is roughly authorial:

Eine sehr schwache Gesundheit, vielleicht zu viel Beschäftigung mit sich selbst, und dabei eine sittliche und religiöse Ängstlichkeit ließen sie das der Welt nicht sein, was sie unter andern Umständen hätte werden können. Sie war ein Licht, das nur wenigen Freunden und mir besonders leuchtete.²⁰

The relevance to the Princess is obvious, although she is distinguished from the rest of the group by a lucid and deeply pathetic awareness of her predicament (1900-1913). None of this explains to us what the Princess ought to be to the world, however, whether she should, like Natalie, concern herself with social questions, or at least with good works, or merely allow her civilising influence to be disseminated more widely by a more conscientious performance of social duties. Pastoral, by contrast, is a flight from conflict, even from time and change (1882-3), with strong implications of regression to childhood (24-7). The difference between her and Tasso is partly her lack of the poet's capacity for self-dedication (the silkworm motif, 3083-91), and partly also the negative implications of her social skill at deflecting his too emphatic expressions of personal feeling, which clearly has class origins.²¹

Other limiting aspects of the court emerge later. They will include a playful indulgence towards women which casts an ironic light on the Princess's claim that it is a feminised, and therefore a genteel environment. In the Duke's world men are for affairs of state and women for the recreation of the administrator. The role of the artist is also a feminised and subordinate one.²² He may well be in a more favourable position at Ferrara than either his medieval or his modern, market-dependent counterparts, as Borchmeyer claims, but this does not quite make Alphonse 'das Ideal eines aufgeklärten Mäzens'.²³ An ideal patron would show more signs of actually wanting to read the book, and would not permit Antonio's affront to Tasso by his eulogies of the pope, who knows how to keep artists in their place (665-71), or his wounding praise of Ariosto by extolling an entertainment aesthetic opposed to Tasso's (709-41). More generally, Goethe had repeatedly satirised or criticised courts which retreated from society and failed to perform a public function, and

²⁰ WML, FA 1.9:897.

²¹ The parallel with the 'schöne Seele' is developed by Lawrence Ryan, 'Die Tragödie des Dichters in Goethes *Torquato Tasso*', *JDSG*, 9 (1965), 283-322.

²² Commentators point to the stage direction at the end of Act 1: 'Dem Fürsten folgt Antonio, den Damen Tasso.'

²³ Borchmeyer, 'Tasso oder das Unglück Dichter zu sein', p.73. His earlier account in *Höfische Gesellschaft*, pp.69-77, is more balanced. Antonio's undoubted personal envy of Tasso, and the implications of his activity as a minor poet, allow Vaget to denounce the court for its 'Dilettantismus', Hans Rudolf Vaget, 'Um einen Tasso von außen bittend: Kunst und Dilettantismus am Musenhof von Ferrara', *DVLG*, 54.2 (1980), 232-58.

this must qualify his endorsement of the ducal court in its retreat at the 'Lustschloss' of Belriuardo. If the image of the court is not entirely negative, however, as some have assumed, it must satisfy two requirements: it must possess an ideal or ethos which its members respect, even if they do not always succeed in living by it, and the ideal must be demonstrated in action. In fact both of these conditions are met.

Apart from the maintenance of a long tradition as a *Musenhof*, Ferrara is dominated by a code of civility, expressed as control of affect.²⁴ The key elements are an insistence on restraint in expressing sexual feelings towards women, with medieval, chivalric origins (*Frauendienst*), and a code of honour permitting, indeed sometimes requiring the duel. The duel does not play the role attributed to it by Norbert Elias, for whom its suppression by Richelieu and Louis XIV was part of 'the transformation of warriors into courtiers'.²⁵ On the contrary, the duel is itself part of civility.²⁶ The emphasis is not on the elimination of violence, but on its stylisation. Goethe himself fought a duel as a student,²⁷ and certainly defended duelling much later, to Chancellor von Müller. The practice was controversial in the 1780s, but Goethe adhered to the older view.²⁸ The defence depended, however, on adherence to a code. What was intolerable was for response to an injury or insult to descend into vulgar brawling.

Tasso will, of course, offend unforgivably against both these requirements of civility, and both offences link him to the Sturm und Drang. The archetypal male figure of the pre-Weimar works is agreed to be Crugantino, who expresses himself by defiance of the honour code. He is characterised by banditry, that is, unregulated violence, and by behaviour towards the heroine which is predatory to the point of attempted rape. Tasso's offences are pallid in comparison, but are clearly related. Viewed in this light the conflict between Tasso and Antonio is, like that between Thoas and Iphigenie, one between Frankfurt and Weimar, but with a very different emphasis. Here the antithesis is between a

²⁴ For *Affektbeherrschung* see Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, pp.95-101, largely following Norbert Elias.

²⁵ Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.226.

²⁶ On one eighteenth-century view, the duel actually contributed to civility, because its possibility imposed on manners a higher standard of punctiliousness, V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.136-7.

²⁷ Boyle, *Goethe*, i.66.

²⁸ For the debate in 18th century Germany, see Ute Frevert, *Men of Honour: A Social and Cultural History of the Duel*, trans. Anthony Williams (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), pp.17-35. She lists contemporary arguments in its favour, pp.22-7, citing Goethe at p.23. Other defenders included Johann Georg Schlosser (1776), Möser (1786) and Christian Garve (1792), id., 'The Taming of the Noble Ruffian: Male Violence and Duelling in Early Modern and Modern Germany', in Pieter Spierenburg, ed., *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998), pp.37-63, here at p.45.

Sturm und Drang conception of nobility (violent, seductive), and a later courtly one (controlled and superficially respectful towards women). There is absolutely no scope here for idealising Tasso at the expense of the court. Rather, as in *Iphigenie*, a painful process of growth is being presented, with regretful backward glances at what is being sacrificed. In Tasso and Antonio conflicting forces are personalised, as we expect in a drama, but it would be easy to see that they represent a conflict within a single individual, even if this were not spelled out for us by Leonore (1704-6).

Of Tasso's two breaches of decorum, the less important for the present purpose is the embrace of the Princess. His idealisation of the court leads to a confusion of levels of reality,²⁹ which is one of the dangers of his past neglect of society. There may also be a 'courtly' challenge to bourgeois values in requiring the reader to accept the gulf between the two characters, expressed by the Duke's reaction, not that Tasso's behaviour is intolerably coarse, but that he has become insane (3285).³⁰ The challenge to Antonio and its aftermath is much more significant, however, since it illustrates a vital aspect of court life and its norms, ethical, behavioural and legal (roughly corresponding, that is, to the *honestum*, *decorum* and *justum* of Thomasius, respectively, above, p.15). These are carefully woven together in the text, but must be unwoven for analysis. They are in part symbolised by the three characters involved.

The simplest case is Tasso, seen here by Goethe, certainly with great compunction, as an 'answer to Rousseau'.³¹ Like Rousseau, Tasso has a heart which assures him of his own essential goodness, and whose promptings must therefore be allowed to overrule the requirements of good manners, the *Ehrenkodex*, or even the criminal law.³² If other characters differ from him, that is either because they are wicked, or because they have not yet heard his version of the facts. Thus to the Duke's comparatively mild remark that he

²⁹ The comparison with Faust's embrace of Helena has been made by various commentators, e.g. Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, p.63.

³⁰ This is taken from one of Goethe's sources, quoted, FA 1.5:1450. The fact that the gap between Tasso and Leonore Sanvitale is considerably less, despite her being a married woman, may be a further challenge to non-aristocratic norms, as pointed out by Rasch, *Goethes Torquato Tasso*, p.147.

³¹ Angelika Jacobs, 'Torquato Tasso: Goethes Antwort auf Rousseau', in Ortrud Gutjahr and Harro Segeberg, eds., *Klassik und Anti-Klassik: Goethe und seine Epoche* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), pp.35-62.

³² *Herz** (excluding *Herzog**) occurs 51 times in the text, 33 of them spoken by Tasso, who also has synonyms such as 'Brust', 'Busen', etc. See also Johannes Mantey, *Der Sprachstil in Goethes Torquato Tasso* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959), p.71. Goethe's point resembles that of Stendhal: 'Comprenez donc, ajoutez M. de La Mole, que toujours on en appelle à son cœur quand on a fait quelque sottise', *Le Rouge et le Noir: Chronique de 1830* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964), p.375. This heart and head antithesis is finally worked out in *WML* (above, p.145), but is also one of the many links with *Werther*.

has behaved badly, his reply is entirely confident: his own heart acquits him, and he is sure that the Duke's will also (1466-7).³³ The dangers of self-deception here would be obvious even if Goethe had not allowed Antonio to point them out shortly before (1237-43).

The case of Antonio is more ethically complex, depending as it does on the view we take of courtliness and the *Ehrenkodex*, and in particular on whether both have been allowed to usurp the function of a code of ethics. The code of manners is not intended to exclude feelings of jealousy or hostility, merely to place their expression within fixed bounds of civility. But in fact the completeness of Antonio's triumph is that Tasso is provoked into breaking not only the *Kodex*, but also the criminal law.

This summary is unfair to Antonio, who has less in common than it implies with Elias's (or Saint-Simon's) monsters of calculation and cynical rationality. In fact there is a strong element of incomprehension, arising from the absence of a shared moral vocabulary. When Antonio asks: 'Unsittlich wie du bist hältst du dich gut?' (1365), the muted comic effect depends on the ambiguity of 'sittlich' and related words. In this text their purely ethical, as opposed to social sense is barely present. The Princess believes that where 'Sittlichkeit' rules, women rule (1019), and this must mean 'Höflichkeit', 'courtesy'. Her opposite term to 'Sittlichkeit' is 'Frechheit' (1020) (Tasso's reply is to ask rhetorically whether she thinks men are 'unbändig, roh, gefühllos'). Later, when bitterly regretting bringing Tasso and Antonio together, she says she had relied upon 'Sitte', 'Höflichkeit', and on 'den Gebrauch der Welt, der sich so glatt / Selbst zwischen Feinde legt' (1692-4), on civility, in other words, not on moral virtue. For the Sturm und Drang residue embodied by Tasso, however, bad manners are almost a guarantee of goodness, rather than its opposite.

Tasso's reply to Antonio in the quarrel scene is to reject the word 'unsittlich' itself, at least as Antonio has used it (1366). In context, this is the adoption of an aggressively class-specific position, combined with an appeal, as it were, to a higher standard than civility. In response Antonio's sneer becomes overtly social, climaxing in his reference to 'das Volk' (1396). One of the most frequent criticisms of the *Kodex* is that its application is limited to those within a particular social group, leading to paradoxes such as Antonio's later insistence that he may have offended Tasso as a human being, but not as a nobleman

³³ Cf. his later reference to 'the entire correctness' of his own behaviour ('[m]ein volles Recht', 2476). This is the point of his antipathy towards Leonore Sanvitale for having a detectable motive behind her actions ('Absicht', 969). In Tasso's world we have no intentions. Our hearts prompt us, and because our hearts are virtuous, we know their promptings will be so.

(1613-14). Neither this, nor his call for the enforcement of the criminal law against someone he has consciously provoked (1458), is in the best moral taste.

Questions of courtesy can be intricate, and are certainly not trivial, since individual discourtesies might or might not involve the right to a duel. Nevertheless they are questions of behaviour, and the spectator is likely to share Tasso's instinctive feeling that a higher standard exists, and that an appeal to it cannot simply be denied. The effect of such a denial is to confirm the standard view of aristocracy as dominated by *Schein*, and as inaccessible to a higher standard based on *Innigkeit*. The overall impression is that a complex issue involving law, courtesy and ethics has been thoroughly muddled, on the one side by the socially impossible view that our moral instincts trump civility and the criminal law, even render them irrelevant, and on the other by a seeming unawareness of the existence of any higher standard. This view of the situation, and of the court, is however immediately corrected by the intervention of the third character, the Duke.

The Duke's behaviour is exemplary, and is based on administrative skill and a kind of class-based social finesse which justifies not only his authority, but the court itself. On his entry (at 1408) he finds evidence of a serious criminal offence, which he naturally treats as the first priority. The scene resolves into an informal court of law, with appropriate vocabulary ('Gesetze', 'Richter', 'freisprechen', 'bestrafen', etc.). There is no question of a defence, since Tasso's guilt is patent, but he is allowed to plead provocation. Sentence against him is pronounced (1528-9), as it must be, since quite apart from the preservation of public order, any failure to do so would involve treating him as an infant not responsible for his actions. It is indicated, however, that punishment will not be severe.

In the ensuing scene between Alphons and Antonio, the legal issue having been settled, the moral ones are addressed, including those involving the *Ehrenkodex*, to whose terms Antonio attempts to confine the discussion. The Duke neither dismisses these issues, nor allows them to predominate. His own view is that this is not a case where a duel is inevitable, but he admits that one may become necessary if, as he puts it, 'die Meinung', that is, the general opinion of the court, so decides (1610). The status of the *Ehrenkodex* is that of a supplementary legal code, but one possessed and policed by court society itself, and forming an important part of its sense of identity. Antonio need only cite the criminal law against Tasso, confident that the Duke is not above it and cannot refuse to implement it, but the same applies even more strongly to the right to a duel. Here the Duke hesitates even to act as judge, and must defer to the public opinion of the *Stand*.

This leaves the purely ethical issue, and the Duke now proceeds with effortless skill and confidence. He begins by evoking the unexceptionable moral principle that any violent dispute must be the fault of the more reasonable party (1619-20),³⁴ who must therefore bear the burden of peace-making. This of course flatters Antonio, but his final words show an awareness of having also been rebuked, and his apology is not merely formal (1645-8). Despite later critical, even contemptuous words about Tasso, nothing in his subsequent behaviour undermines the impression of sincerity here. A course of action is prescribed to him which he does his best to follow, and which does indeed bring about a reconciliation, however equivocal. One possible account of Antonio would be to point to him as the only character who learns, or develops morally, in the course of the play.

The court is no more free of interpersonal friction than any other human society, but its procedures for conflict resolution are authoritative, and in fair and competent hands. As Rousseau's friends could have testified, however, the best of such procedures do not always work, and as we know from Serlo, any society can only maintain itself in being 'under certain conditions', which among other things means by treating certain conventional rules as legal. This will apply *a fortiori* to a court: everything 'vornehm' is also 'ablehnend', and the best society will have the most stringent conditions for inclusion, without which it cannot perform its exemplary social function. Readers who were left at the end feeling a little unclear as to what that function actually was, or how a court or a ruling class exercised it, would find an answer in the next Goethe text with comparable ambitions, the *Lehrjahre*, but an answer even more ambiguous and problematic than the one given here.

³⁴ Strictly, '[d]en Klügsten'. 'Klug' is a word of exceptional importance in this text, and in its various forms, including 'Klugheit', occurs 42 times. It is certainly thematic, with a calculated exploitation of its ambiguities, both positive and negative. See Mantey, *Der Sprachstil in Goethes Torquato Tasso*, pp.43-7, and Mark Boulby, 'Judgment by Epithet in Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*', *PMLA*, 87.2 (1972), 167-81.

Conclusion

Tout commence en mystique et finit en politique.

Péguy¹

In dealing with the period before Weimar, a development has been traced from admonition based on an early, immature resentment at exclusion to forms of fantasy identification, especially the Anakreontik and the anti-social hero of the Sturm und Drang. Both of these were in different ways a search for allies in a liberation movement by Goethe, and of course others, against 'bourgeois' life, or in Goethe's case against Frankfurt. This part-alliance, part-opposition is expressed as a conflict within Goethe between the horned wood-god and Emiren, Götze and Weislingen, Crugantino and Pedro, Tasso and Antonio, Scythia and Greece, and in general between the rough and the smooth,² with ever varying outcomes. The symbolism used to insist on the parallels includes family relationships. Crugantino and Pedro are brothers, as are Götze and Weislingen (figuratively); Agamemnon and Thoas are the first and second fathers of Iphigenie; Tasso and Antonio are even parts of the same individual.³ *Bürgertum* and *Adel* make up one of these pairings, but an unstable one. The image of the *Adel* was first characterised by the smoothness of the Anakreontik, then took on some of the roughness of the *Kraftkerl*, and finally acquired increasing depth and complexity, in part from the social experience of Weimar and the wider world to which Weimar gave access.

The conventional attitude towards the first Weimar decade includes a good deal of prejudice, based on the feeling that Goethe wasted what should have been his artistic prime on work which, although well done, could have been done by many others. This cannot be entirely dismissed, supported as it is by later statements from Goethe himself, by the virtual absence of autobiographical material and by significant repudiations such as the later destruction of his correspondence. The common-sense view of Wieland remains very persuasive, however: the experience of Weimar would be of value to Goethe, simply as experience.⁴ His own belief was that his administrative career had been a valuable addition, not only to his personal, but to his literary character, partly by giving him an enhanced understanding of power and its exercise.

¹ Charles Péguy, *Notre jeunesse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p.31.

² Cf. Gen. 27:11.

³ For Götze and Weislingen as Castor and Pollux, HA 4:89, and for the other parallels, above, pp.168 and 185, respectively.

⁴ Wieland to Merck, 26.1.1776: 'Und doch, bei diesem herrlichen Gottesmenschen geht nichts verloren', Bode, i, no.237.

Court society placed on the aspirational individual a burden of role-play, felt as especially heavy because of an over-consciousness of rules which had not been fully internalised, and perhaps never could be by anyone beyond a certain age. Hence in part the fascination for Frau von Stein, whose adaptation was perfect ('Die Hofmanieren, die sie vollkommen an sich hat [...]').⁵ With gradual inclusion, albeit one negotiated very much on his own terms, came the opposite of the oscillations of ambiguity: the irreversible changes of morphology. Butterflies do not regret their former existence as caterpillars, or think of transformation as disloyalty. But to adapt another favourite image of Goethe's, although snakes may shed their skins repeatedly and outgrow their former selves, an inner identity remains. What are at stake here are the limits of transformation and adaptation. Both Werther and Wilhelm come up against these limits. The individual may be unaware of, or underestimate, the need for adaptation, and will then pay the penalty of infringement, like Wilhelm with the prince or, if we believe him, Werther before his 'expulsion'. More commonly the internalisation is imperfect, leading to memories of past social awkwardness, and a kind of subliminal stage fright in respect of present and future.

Reference to such feelings can only be speculative, since they certainly do not form a literary theme in Goethe, but they are relevant to a well-established dichotomy between court life and solitude or actual flight, a dichotomy which was already firmly in place in Loen's *Der redliche Mann am Hofe*, with the court sometimes standing in for adult social life (hence the importance of *Le Misanthrope* and parts of *Hamlet*), and sometimes, more conventionally, for an elevated standard of manners. Part of the value of Goethe's social opportunities was certainly that they enabled him to develop his own *Hofkritik* far beyond the platitudes of Loen or of his own father. He could now focus on subsidiary issues such as the artist and the noble patron, or noble dilettantism. Another such issue is a variant of the court as the opposite of social refusal, that is, the court as itself providing opportunities for withdrawal from social life and a retreat into sentimentalism. More generally, Weimar enabled him to try to adapt to court manners, perceived as a superiority, and therefore a challenge, but one which he could address as a developmental project.

Flight from society has emerged as a major theme, but the opposite of the fugitive is the expellee, or scapegoat, who has a different kind of pathos. The main examples are Götz, Werther, Egmont and Tasso, all justly or unjustly driven out in the interests of the preservation of order. Debate on how far Goethe's ethical sympathy was engaged on behalf of any of these four characters is inevitable, but in one sense pointless, being based

⁵ Above, p.100.

on a confusion between character and theme, or rather themes. As argued above in the case of *Tasso*, noble society is ‘ablehnend’, exclusive, but is in that respect only a special case of all societies. Its right to reject any element which threatens its orderly existence, which for a court is an existential threat, is asserted by implication by Serlo, but neither his nor anyone else’s is the last word. The polarity of feeling is itself the theme.

Apart from its feminine side (‘Hofmanieren’), Weimar offered Goethe an opportunity to exercise power. Nobility was for him strongly connected with action, ‘die Tat’, but the evidence here is unusually difficult. Public service led him to question what the ‘honest man at court’ could achieve, certainly without unconditional backing from his prince. More radically, what could princes do? Goethe can hardly be blamed for caution in discussing this very delicate theme, or at least discussing it in writing. There were disappointed hopes, but their nature, beyond a generalised *Wohltätigkeit*, seems to be irrecoverable.

One of the conventional accusations against Goethe is of an obsession with order: he was a ‘Stabilitäts-Narr’, who clung to the nobility, and later to Napoleon, as safeguards against social anarchy.⁶ That he expressed himself very strongly on the subject of anarchy is certain.⁷ The need for order links him to Schiller and the social aestheticism of the *Letters*, and so to political implications which arouse anxiety in some commentators. Similar political issues arise from the aesthetic treatment of social skills, which can be viewed as coercive (the ‘symbolic violence’ of Bourdieu). The character of the baroness in the *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* is the clearest instance. If what we are watching is a performance, we must deplore its violation by the boorish importunity of revolutionary politics, like Stendhal’s pistol shot at a concert. On the other hand, if the performance itself is implicitly political, a political response may be justified.

For the present purpose the question is how far this aesthetic appreciation of courtly manners can be ‘read back’ into the pre-classical Goethe. Count C. in *Werther* is an example of social skill as aesthetic spectacle, and his namesake in *WMTS* is only one further example among others in that text. These and other instances discussed above, including *Tasso*, continue the varied treatment, often with an accompanying irony. The

⁶ The ‘Stabilitäts-Narr’ is from Börne, writing in 1835. For the context, and similar criticisms, see Günter Hartung, “‘Linke’ Opposition gegen Goethe”, in G. H., *Der Dichter Bertolt Brecht. Zwölf Studien* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2004), pp.49-81, here at p.62.

⁷ ‘mir aber, dem von Jugend auf Anarchie verdrießlicher gewesen als der Tod selbst [...]’, *It. Reise*, HA 11:318.

works dating from the next phase show one clear change of perspective. What we do not see before Italy is a defence, even an implied defence, of aristocracy based on exaggerated anxieties about anarchy.⁸ The revolutionary comedies show not so much an entirely new key as the temporary abandonment of an earlier ironic balance, under the pressure of political events.

In Book 10 of *DuW* Goethe discusses the poets of the previous generation. Some had been born to miserably poor circumstances; others, and he instances Hagedorn, had been '[l]ebensgewandte Edelleute'.⁹ The sense of the adjective is clear enough, and a general translation might seem adequate ('urbane', 'sophisticated', 'worldly'). At first glance it is no more than a synonym of 'weltgewandt', or simply 'gewandt', in one of its meanings,¹⁰ and so denotes merely social skills. But the word seems to have been Goethe's own, and was rare even in his usage.¹¹ It is not now current, and seems never to have been. It perhaps goes beyond social skills, and is worth taking literally ('life-skilled'), that is, as implying the kind of mastery of life which, applied to Goethe himself, is the theme of Safranski's recent biography.¹²

In connection with 'Meisterschaft' Safranski cites Goethe's well-known letter to Herder of July 1772, detailing his Pindar reception and introducing for the first time the recurring image of the charioteer:

Wenn du kühn im Wagen stehst, und vier neue Pferde wild unordentlich sich an deinen Zügeln bäumen, du ihre Kraft lenckst, den austretenden herbey, den aufbäumenden hinabpeitschest, und jagst und lenckst und wendest, peitschest, hältst, und wieder ausjagst biss alle sechzehn Füße in einem Tackt ans ziel tragen. Das ist Meisterschafft, epikratein, Virtuosität.¹³

Here mastery is of course artistic, but the image is exceptionally fluid. As applied to Egmont, or to Goethe himself, at the very end of *DuW*, on the eve of his new role in Weimar, it has inescapable social and political implications, not only of self-command, but also of charisma, power over others, domination ('epikratein'). In *DuW* at least it seems to include the prospect of attaining to the personal superiority of the *Weltmensch* and to the later exercise of power by the man of action, the *Tatmensch*.

⁸ The crisis over the Necklace Affair may have been an important dividing line here (above, p.107), but this can only be speculation.

⁹ HA 9:397.

¹⁰ *GWb*, s.v., 3a. For example, Paris in the court theatre in *Faust II* (6458ff.). A *Dame* objects: 'Ein bißchen könnt' er doch gewandter sein.' A *Ritter* agrees: too much of the shepherd boy and nothing of the prince ('Vom Prinzen nichts und nichts von Hofmanieren').

¹¹ Grimm cites only this instance, and there are only two others in the Chadwyck-Healey database.

¹² 'nicht nur ein großer Schriftsteller, sondern auch ein Meister des Lebens', Rüdiger Safranski, *Goethe. Kunstwerk des Lebens. Biographie* (Munich: Hanser, 2013), p.15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.116-17. The text here is taken from HaBr, i.132.

The limited achievement of both these aims has been discussed above (Chapter 4), but more important in the present context is the project of self-development itself, the aspiration to Bruford's 'Selbstvervollkommnungsideal' (above, p.13). This included an assumption of the inherent value of noble manners, aligning him once more with Garve.¹⁴ The evolution of Wilhelm Meister is a kind of commentary on this aspirational process. Wilhelm's first outing is as a man with a 'Sendung', a mission to preach to his countrymen from an elevated theatre-pulpit, with the aim of raising them up to his own level, culturally and perhaps also morally. Implicit in this is the belief that he is himself securely in possession of the values and manners both of French classicism and of the actual nobility. The ironies surrounding these over-confident assumptions were accumulating well before the end of the surviving text.

Whether Wilhelm was destined to abandon his mission in *WMTS* is unknown, but Goethe certainly abandoned it. In his next avatar Wilhelm would become something much more modest, an apprentice, with less to teach and a great deal to learn, from life in general, but certainly from the nobility. Goethe's dual character as a lifelong educator (Mann's 'leidenschaftliche Erzieher', above, p.95), but also as a lifelong student, emerges clearly in Wilhelm's successive metamorphoses, and in the context of the nobility, in Goethe's attempts to combine personal and political loyalty with both *Ermahnung* and later, with critical detachment and an almost scientific curiosity.

In its refusal to specify the nature of noble life skills and of their absolute value (that is, their ethical or aesthetic content), 'lebensgewandt' seems to approach the indefinable quality referred to in connection with Countess Werthern (above, pp.106-7). Only to approach it, however. There is a permanent distinction between the partial validation of the nobility as a whole, and the rare actual embodiments of the ideal. Precisely by this embodiment, the Countess represents a perfection, a 'Vollkommenheit', which we can approach but never attain.¹⁵ This returns us once more to 'Das Göttliche', and to Reed's virtuous spiral (above, p.116), whereby these images of perfection raise us progressively

¹⁴ For Garve, see, e.g., 'Ueber die Maxime Rochefoucaults [...]', *Popularphilosophische Schriften* [...], i.[707].

¹⁵ For 'Vollkommenheit' as aspirational process towards an ultimately unattainable goal, cf. the 'schöne Seele': 'Daß ich immer vorwärts, nie rückwärts gehe, daß meine Handlungen immer mehr der Idee ähnlich werden, die ich mir von der Vollkommenheit gemacht habe, daß ich täglich mehr Leichtigkeit fühle, das zu tun, was ich für Recht halte [...]', FA 1.9:792-3; and similarly, Christian Garve, *Einige Betrachtungen über die allgemeinsten Grundsätze der Sittenlehre* [...] (Breslau: Korn, 1798), p.194. The ultimate source is, of course, Matt. 5:48 ('Darum sollt ihr vollkommen sein').

through an endless sequence of upward strivings towards an internal ideal, of which we have an ever improved and purified conception.

The view of Krippendorff, that the Weimar decade disillusioned Goethe about the possibility of transforming the existing nobility into a socially useful ‘dienende Klasse’, is much too broad.¹⁶ For an ‘Ordnungspolitiker’ who thought administration a *métier*,¹⁷ indeed for a time thought it his own *métier*, and for whom ‘pfuschen’, ‘Pfuscheri’ were favourite words, the nobility were the only imaginable guarantors of sound administration. And of course he was well aware that administration is only a part of government, which needs to be publicly performed, and that this must be done by the nobility, not only to symbolise power, but also to present an ideal for imitation, or at least ‘Nachstreben’.

The need for power to be performed, and thus both demonstrated and justified, has links with Goethe’s deep respect for social order. This feeling in turn has subdued links with theatre. As treated above, theatre has two aspects. First it is a platform, and Goethe certainly at least asked himself whether it would serve as a platform for his own social values and attitudes. Equally certainly, the cost of theatre made it necessary for any message to be acceptable to a (relatively) mass audience, and like Zarathustra, Goethe by the 1780s was not the mouth for these ears. Public theatre had followed middle-class sentiment into self-satisfied cultivation of its own prejudices. Goethe himself, apparently unlike the first version of Wilhelm Meister, accepted the implications of this.

Theatre, however, especially court theatre, has another more ambiguous aspect. On the one hand, a competently staged play is the ultimate aestheticized society. No one on stage will cause dismay, surprise, or especially laughter, by an unforeseen action (unforeseen by the author or director, that is, and in Goethe’s case the two might be the same); no one will begin a political harangue, or indeed a literary one, like Wilhelm with the prince. The audience itself, mildly intimidated by the privilege of attendance at court, can usually be relied upon not to commit any social solecism. Not even the Versailles of Saint-Simon or the Balinese palaces of Clifford Geertz were such rigidly controlled environments; indeed historians and sociologists describing formal court societies inevitably reach for theatre as

¹⁶ Ekkehart Krippendorff, “*Wie die Großen mit den Menschen spielen*”: Versuch über Goethes Politik (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), p.68.

¹⁷ To Eckermann, 18.2.1831, FA 2.12:441, and elsewhere. For the ‘Ordnungspolitiker’ in general, see Wolfgang Rothe, *Der politische Goethe: Dichter und Staatsdiener im deutschen Spätabolutismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), esp. pp.160-89.

a metaphor. And if the best image would be a court theatre, the next best would be one of marionettes, where the slightest arm or leg movement is under quasi-divine control.

The ambiguity arises from Goethe's mixed feelings about the carnivalesque (above, p.81), and a fascination with artistic or ritual performances which in some way failed or misfired. The most obvious examples are the child actor in *WML*, on stage without any lines to speak, and the masonic ceremony in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*,¹⁸ but numerous others are to hand.¹⁹ Goethe was in fact drawn both to total control and to a kind of disorder, hilarious or embarrassing, of which theatre, especially the amateur theatre of the first Weimar years, with its encouragement of improvisation, would have provided many examples.²⁰ Indeed the whole *Genietreiben* episode could be seen as a defensive reaction against sudden immersion in the formal manners which he was soon studying to master himself. Both subversion and the chameleon-like urge to assimilate are aspects of the fundamental ambivalence towards nobility which has been the theme of this study.

The nobility exercised the power of the state and at the same time symbolised it, projecting it with widespread, although not universal, popular acceptance, and thus helping to guarantee public order. They were also, in widely varying degrees, images of a partly unanalysable superiority available to the population at large for upward striving ('Nachstreben'). To express its role in this way is to stress performance, and thereby inauthenticity, but Goethe's early insistence on the primacy of authenticity over seeming (*Sein* and *Schein*, above, p.83, n.51) came to be replaced by a synthesis of the two. Tasso may be an intensified Werther, but *Torquato Tasso* the play is less an intensification of *Werther* than a successful appeal against it in the name of a higher justice, a more equitable balance of ethical sympathy. By 1786 Goethe was far advanced on the road to the *Märchen* (1795), where 'Schein' would appear along with 'Weisheit' and 'Gewalt', as one of the three pillars of society.

¹⁸ *WML*, FA 1.9:380; *Wahlv.*, HA 6:301-2. For a curious anticipation of both of these, see the dialogue in the 'Labores Juveniles', at MA 1.1:17. In the case of *Wahlv.*, the repeated failures of symbolic performance, 'die Verkümmerng des Rituals zur Selbstparodie, das systematische Fehlgehen der rituellen Vermittlung' has been identified as a major theme by David E. Wellbery, 'Die Wahlverwandtschaften (1809): Desorganisation symbolischer Ordnungen', in Lützel and McLeod, *Goethes Erzählwerk*, pp.291-318, here at p.292.

¹⁹ E.g., Luciane's charades and Bendel's performance in *Belsazar*. Wilhelm had wished to give his tragedy of *Jesabell* a very dramatic ending, but was afraid that one night the final curtain might fail to come down, with ludicrous effect, *WMTS*, FA 1.9:94. Goethe and Eckermann reminisced at length over past theatrical mispronunciations and malapropisms, FA 2.12:534-6. Tasso's blunders also belong here, and for the coronation in *DuW* in this connection, see Ulrich Stadler, 'Der Augenblick am Hofe. Allgemeines und Besonderes in Goethes Schauspiel *Torquato Tasso*', in Gabriela Scherer and Beatrice Wehrli, eds., *Wahrheit und Wort. Festschrift für Rolf Tarot zum 65. Geburtstag* (Bern: Lang, 1996), pp.463-81, at pp.466-7.

²⁰ For the importance of improvisation, see Borchmeyer, *Die Weimarer Klassik*, i.96-7.

This formulation, however, itself testified to his continuing identification of nobility with performance, and by implication with theatre. The refusal to think of nobility as merely a different form of authenticity could be seen as a gesture of residual loyalty towards Frankfurt, but in fact it followed necessarily from an analogy. The classical Goethe would theorise about naturalism and the *Steigerung* which, partly by transformation and partly by selection and omission of detail, would make the difference between naturalism and art. Before Italy there had been no such theorising, but the social and political foundations on which it would rest were already in place. Part of this foundation was the contrast between consciousness and action (above, pp.130-31), ordinary social life and *Hofmanieren*, and ultimately bourgeoisie and nobility.

The noble instinct for stasis was inherently ‘non-enlightened’, in the sense of not requiring a rationale or justification. The social value of an aristocracy, similarly, once challenged, was impossible to prove and difficult even to illustrate – difficult, that is, without becoming partisan, in a way which Goethe always resisted. The words of Charles Péguy, quoted above, applied to the German nobility as much as they later would to the French Republic. Already in 1792 Garve could speak of the nobility as having become a ‘Partei’, that is, a factional interest defending itself.²¹ One of Goethe’s misfortunes was to outlive part of the mystique and to feel bound to defend what ought not to need defending, at least not in the face of an existential threat. This led to an almost logical impasse: on the one hand, the *Adel* was, if not inherently poetic, at least linked to art by a kind of analogy; on the other hand, its defence could only be by a political ‘Parteinahme für das Bestehende’ (Borchmeyer, above, p.16, n.35), which was at the furthest possible remove from poetry. The awkwardness of his attempts to square this circle in the 1790s is generally agreed.

As his private ideal of nobility became more precise, it became increasingly difficult for Goethe to treat the real nobility as a fictional theme without radical criticism. The problem is illustrated rather than solved in the revolutionary comedies, and in the relevant major works after 1786 (*WML*, *Die natürliche Tochter*, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, *WMW*), the distinction between idealisation and ironised reality becomes very sharp. We can hardly speak of an innovation here, since at least in his literary works his groups of aristocrats, whether at court or elsewhere, had never been validated as a class. Rather they had contained individuals possessing qualities, which, by a paradox, seem typical of their *Stand*, and are certainly not to be found elsewhere in society, but at the same time are

²¹ Conze, ‘Adel, Aristokratie’, p.31. Loyalty to this ‘Partei’ was what Frau von Stein and others expected from Goethe after 1789. They would often be bitterly disappointed.

exceptional. These individuals recur after Italy, but not often, and in 1786 the gap in Goethe's creative imagination between them and the nobility as a whole was set to widen. Because of an increasing tendency to apodictic pronouncement on politics, it also tends to become a gap between the teller and the tales. A second instalment of the above thesis would have to address this ever-widening gap, but also a continuing sense that the nobility contained within itself elements which approached, or even embodied the personal ideal he had of them, 'gleich Sternen [...] als Richtpunkte' (above, p.113) and helped to shore up socially and morally their political indispensability.

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Passages quoted in translation have been guided by, but may not exactly follow, the standard published translations, where available. This applies in particular to those in the 12-vol. Suhrkamp Edition, *Goethe's Collected Works* (New York, 1983-1989), and to the translation of *Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Calling* by John R. Russell (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995).

Extensive use has been made of the Chadwyck-Healey database, *Goethes Werke im WWW* (ProQuest LLC, 1997-2014).

Abbreviations

Periodicals

<i>DVLG</i>	<i>Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte</i>
<i>GJb</i>	<i>Goethe Jahrbuch</i>
<i>GLL</i>	<i>German Life and Letters</i>
<i>GQ</i>	<i>German Quarterly</i>
<i>GR</i>	<i>Germanic Review</i>
<i>GRM</i>	<i>Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift</i>

<i>GY</i>	<i>Goethe Yearbook</i>
<i>JDSG</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schillergesellschaft</i>
<i>JFDH</i>	<i>Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts</i>
<i>JWGV</i>	<i>Jahrbuch des Wiener Goethe-Vereins, Neue Folge</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>PEGS</i>	<i>Publications of the English Goethe Society</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>WB</i>	<i>Weimarer Beiträge</i>
<i>ZDP</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie</i>

Other abbreviations

Bode	Wilhelm Bode, comp., <i>Goethe in vertraulichen Briefen seiner Zeitgenossen</i> , vol.1, 1749-1793, ed. Regine Otto and Paul-Gerhard Wenzlaff (Munich: Beck, 1982) (individual letters cited by number)
<i>DjG</i>	<i>Der junge Goethe</i> (see above)
FA	Frankfurt edn. of Goethe's works (see above)
<i>Ghb</i>	<i>Goethe-Handbuch</i> , 4 vols., ed. Bernd Witte (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996-8)
Grumach	Ernst and Renate Grumach, <i>Goethe: Begegnungen und Gespräche</i> , vol.1, 1749-1776 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965), and vol.2, 1777-1785 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966)
<i>GWb</i>	<i>Goethe Wörterbuch</i> , ed. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen and others (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966-)
HaBr	Hamburg edn. of Goethe's correspondence (see above)
MA	Munich edn. of Goethe's works (see above)
WA	Weimar edn. of Goethe's works (see above)

Individual works of Goethe have in some cases been cited by standard abbreviations, especially:

<i>DuW</i>	<i>Dichtung und Wahrheit</i>
<i>WML</i>	<i>Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre</i>
<i>WMTS</i>	<i>Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung</i>
<i>WMW</i>	<i>Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre</i>

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