

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE GIFT OF METAMORPHOSIS: GOETHE'S POETIC SCIENCE OF FORM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC STUDIES

BY

DANIEL CARRANZA

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE 2020

## Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures</b>	iv
<b>List of Diagrams</b>	v
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	vi
<b>Abstract</b>	vii
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>I. Natural Life-forms</b>	
<b>Chapter 1: Vital Exuberance: On Four Constitutive Moments of Morphological Method</b>	13
1. The Mereological Dimension	18
1.a The Vegetal Politics of Plant Entelechy	21
1.b Selfish Barnacles: Holistic Unity as Mereological Agon	29
1.c Insubordinate Parts: The <i>vita propria</i> of the Animal Eye	33
1.d Aesthetic Insubordination: The Case of Robert Haydon’s Horses	42
1.e Scaling Observation: The Symbolic Unity of the Sciences	49
2. Interlude: The Environmental Dimension	53
3. The Normative Dimension	55
a. <i>Das innere Unvermögen</i> : The Case of the Three-Toed Sloth	65
b. <i>Bewegliche Ordnung</i> : Poetic Form & Natural Norm in “Athroismos”	75
4. Interlude: The Epistemic Dimension	98
<b>II. Social Forms of Practice</b>	
<b>Chapter 2: Ritual Deformations: Goethe on the Life of Social Practices</b>	106
1. “eine ganz andere Elasticität des Geistes:” The Pleasures of Observational Practice	107
2. Goethe’s Morphology of a Form of Ritual Practice in “Das Römische Carneval”	116
2.a The First Structural Moment: Laughter in the Face of <i>das Unverfügbare</i>	127
2.b The Second Structural Moment: The Ritual Deformation of <i>das Gedränge</i>	134

2.c	The Third Structural Moment: The Festival of the <i>Augenblick</i>	141
3.	Conceptual Afterlives: Goethe, Moritz, Wittgenstein	149
3.a	The Carnival Practice in its Historical Plasticity: From Saturnalia to Political Renewal	150
3.b	Wittgenstein's Metamorphic Inheritance of Goethean Method	160
<b>III. Literary Forms</b>		
<b>Chapter 3: Goethe's Generic Experiments in Narrative Prose</b>		171
1.	Pathologies of the Imagination: The Intertwining of Narrative & Lyric Forms in <i>Novelle</i>	172
1.a	The Outbreak of Fire: The Anachronic Event as Phantasmatic Afterimage	188
1.b	The Outbreak of Tiger and Lion: The Social Imaginary as Manipulated by the Media	197
1.c	The Arrival of the Family: The Sentence's Freedom to Overcome Itself	202
2.	Catharses of the Imagination: Traces of the Riddle and Novella in <i>Das Märchen</i>	221
2.a	<i>Auslegungssucht</i> : The Social Game of Interpretation	222
2.b	Chronic Indebtedness and Utopian Debt Relief in <i>Märchen</i>	230
2.c	"Reinigungsmittel der Phantasie:" Desire and Exchange	244
3.	The Essential Kinship of Goethe's <i>Märchen</i> and <i>Novelle</i>	254
<b>Chapter 4: Poetic Form as Sonically Sensuous Thought in Goethe's <i>terza rima</i> Works</b>		261
1.	From <i>terza rima</i> to <i>Terzinen</i> : The Historical Poetics of a Rhyme Scheme	264
2.	The Sense of an Ending: Poetic Closure & the (Dis)Closure of Death in Goethe's "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's"	280
3.	The Sense of a Beginning: The Disclosure of Faustian Desire in <i>Anmuthiger Gegend</i>	309
4.	On Colored Hues & Bony Remains: A Poetic Diptych of the Late Goethe's Religiosity	352
<b>Appendix of Images</b>		359
<b>Bibliography</b>		378

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Animal skulls demonstrating the subordination of the eye.	359
Figure 2. Skulls of the prehistoric and the domesticated bull.	360
Figure 3. Serpentine lines of beauty.	361
Figure 4. Robert Haydon's horse heads in profile with eye and ear as details.	362
Figure 5. Skeleton of the giant prehistoric sloth in profile.	363
Figure 6. Skeleton of the three-toed sloth ( <i>Ai</i> ) in profile.	364
Figure 7. Skeleton of the <i>Unau</i> sloth in profile.	365
Figure 8. Illustration to Goethe's <i>Das Römische Carneval</i> : "Mädchen in Haustracht"	366
Figure 9. Illustration to <i>Das Römische Carneval</i> : "Advokat mit Pulcinellen."	367
Figure 10. The introduction to Comenius's <i>Orbis pictus</i> .	368
Figure 11. The encyclopedic illustration of "Herrschaft" with facing explication.	369-370
Figure 12. Illustration from Louis-Sébastien Mercier's <i>Tableau de Paris</i> : Scribes.	371
Figure 13. The Verona amphitheater.	372
Figure 14. The ninth print from Mantegna's <i>Triumphs of Caesar</i> .	373
Figure 15. Francesco Guardi's <i>Studio di folla</i> ( <i>Study of a Crowd</i> ).	374
Figure 16. The carnival medals ( <i>Faschingsorden</i> ) sent to Goethe with his <i>Narrendiplom</i> .	375
Figure 17. Illustration to <i>Das Römische Carneval</i> : "Nordländer und Tabarri."	376
Figure 18. Allegorical Interpretations of <i>Das Märchen</i> annotated by Goethe.	377

## Table of Diagrams

Diagram 1. Structural segmentation of “Das Römische Carneval.”	124
Diagram 2. External analepsis.	192
Diagram 3. Internal analepsis.	193
Diagram 4. Second external analepsis.	193
Diagram 5. Retroactive prolepsis.	195
Diagram 6. Anachronic events and their overcoming in <i>Novella</i> .	215
Diagram 7. The temporality of the <i>terza rima</i> rhyme form.	270
Diagram 8. Goethe’s use of icons to keep track of the triadic rhyme scheme.	277
Diagram 9. A table of the temporal progression of thought in <i>Im ernsten Beinhaus war’s</i> .	285
Diagram 10. Semantic <i>Steigerung</i> .	291

## Acknowledgments

This dissertation is inextricably interwoven with the intellectual endeavors and encouragements of many others. The graduate student community at the University of Chicago's Department of Germanic Studies has modeled for me academic community centered on the common pursuit of truth; it forms a true *polis* in an otherwise bureaucratic world. I am thankful for the many intellectual friendships and stimulating conversations I have cultivated with countless peers, particularly Marcus Lampert, Jake Fraser, Simon Friedland, Ethan Blass, and Amy Stebbins. Above all I am deeply indebted to my committee. Eric Santner has been an intellectually agile and humane interlocutor ever since my first graduate seminar on Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus*. I have benefited in particular from the scholarly vision and range of his work, and our conversations during office hours often seemed to me to take place as exercises in pure thought, unfettered by concern for disciplinary boundaries or philological scruples. I am also extremely grateful for Florian Klinger's close and attentive guidance throughout the dissertation process. Florian's seminars on Kleist, Kant, and Heidegger modeled what it would mean to think the minutest machinations of literary form together with philosophical problems of far greater scope. This is, of course, easier said than done, and I have learned much about the practice of interpretation and conceptual design – about the pragmatics of knowing – from energetic conversations with Florian. I am thankful in particular for his incredibly responsive feedback to my messy and long-winded chapters. Often when I would doubt the ultimate import of the project as a whole, Florian would encourage me to go beyond the orbit of immediate concern to consider the broader conceptual ramifications of an argument, to push into upper stratospheres of philosophical abstraction that laid bare the real (and really exciting) conceptual problem at hand. Finally, in more ways than I could possibly enumerate or even articulate, I am deeply indebted to

David Wellbery. From my time as a prospective student onwards, he has been a constantly resourceful and encouraging source of intellectual inspiration. If there was ever any doubt in my mind about the validity, importance, and even nobility of literary study and of a life devoted to humanistic inquiry, such doubts were definitively laid to rest in David's seminars and in informal discussions of literary texts. I always leave such interactions with a thrilling sense that nothing could be more intellectually, even existentially, important than getting at the deeper mystery of a literary work. That a work of literature can genuinely *have* a mystery in the first place is a property it perhaps shares only with life itself. In his own scholarship and person, he has exemplified to me what it means to live a life of intellectual virtue. I am thankful for his continual mentorship and guidance.

## Abstract

The field of Germanic studies has recently witnessed a renascent interest in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's natural scientific work, above all his 'morphology' or study of natural formations. Upon returning from his Italian journey, Goethe developed an observational method that allowed him to intuit trans-formation as itself a kind of temporal form, one that rendered perspicuous the unity underlying and animating nature's unfathomably diverse plethora of beings. Current scholarly discussion has construed Goethe's morphology as a philosophically robust method of 'intuitive understanding' developed in the wake of Kant and Spinoza, one that reflects on its own serial form of textual representation in the morphological notebooks. My dissertation makes a contribution to this scholarship through a systematic shift in perspective that reconstructs Goethean morphology not just as a natural scientific approach, but as a *general* mode of observation that can be fruitfully applied to the cultural domain of literary criticism, above all that of Goethe's own works. Goethe explicitly professed that the observational practices that make up morphology allowed him to apprehend transformative processes at work shaping the domains of art and society in addition to nature. Recent engagements with Goethean morphology neglect this claim of general methodological applicability beyond the natural realm, perhaps in part because of a justified wariness of naturalizing the non-natural domain of culture. Goethe himself, however, was careful to emphasize that the 'three great world-regions' ("drei großen Weltgegenden") that morphology seeks to understand – nature, society, and art – remain constitutively different ontological districts with their own distinct kinds of lawfulness. In contrast to previous accounts, my dissertation takes Goethe's generality claim seriously, working out the possibility of a cultural, and specifically literary morphology.



## Introduction: Sketch of the Problematic

*Und dies Geheimnis redete das Leben zu mir: "Siehe," sprach es,  
"ich bin das, was sich immer selber überwinden muß."  
– Friedrich Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra*

“Life is said in many ways.”<sup>1</sup> The only other concept that Aristotle would dignify with this formula, a rhetorical recognition of discursively rampant polysemy, was ‘being.’ In both cases, he was practicing (at least initially) a form of ordinary language philosophy *avant la lettre*. We speak of the life of plants and animals in a biological sense, of course, but also of the ‘life’ of institutions, of ‘living’ or ‘dead’ conventions that have grown sclerotic with age and should be relegated to the exotica of historical custom. In moments of inspiration, critics are wont to speak of the ‘life’ of literary forms, of genres going ‘extinct’ once their conventions have been exhausted, or of an artwork’s ‘animation,’ the image’s uncanny capacity to look back at its viewer. What if the latter uses of the word ‘alive’ were not merely metaphors or the absurd professions of a panvitalist, but articulated a meaningful sense of the concept of life – valid ways of saying it?

Perhaps no other poet deployed the semantics of life as diversely as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. It was under the Mediterranean sun that Goethe’s eye learned to apprehend the lawful regularities through which nature’s formative forces promote the life of all things seen. Reflecting on his Italian sojourn, the poet remarked that such regularities governed vital transformative processes at work not only in nature, but in society and the arts as well. How does a plant metamorphose over time, in the flush of blossom even becoming utterly unrecognizable as what it once was and yet remaining identical to itself? How does a ritual practice unfold its formal potential from the ancient Saturnalia to the Roman carnival Goethe himself viewed in 1787 and later rediscovered in festivities held in post-Napoleonic Cologne? And how should one

---

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle. *De Anima*. Trans. Christopher Shields. Clarendon: Oxford 2016. Pg. 24 (2.413a20).

conceptualize the manner in which the epic genre recalibrated its formal conventions from Homer to Ariosto and on to Goethe himself, metamorphosing within varying cultural contexts? Goethe saw these as distinct, but affine questions, and he developed a method known as morphology to make sense of them. Whether investigating natural life-forms, social forms of practice, or literary forms, Goethean morphology continually remains attuned to the question of how formal identity persists not despite, but precisely because of self-transformation in light of novel environmental, historical, or cultural contexts. Whether that of organisms, institutions, or artworks, ‘aliveness’ for Goethe emerges in the negotiation between the activity of form and the open-endedness of time.

The three domains of nature, society, and art are not coincidentally selected. In his “Schicksal der Handschrift,” Goethe remarked that he had learned how to ‘see’ in precisely “jene drei großen Weltgegenden.”<sup>2</sup> Within each of these three distinct ontological districts, a concrete and particular individual’s ‘life’ (in the natural realm, that of a biological life-form such as a cat, say) will emerge in the interplay between an ‘ideal’ or normatively regulative form, on the one hand, and the spatiotemporal empirical world that ‘concretizes’ that form, on the other hand. Another avenue for elucidating how a general life-form (e.g., ‘the cat’) renders an individual life-form intelligible (e.g. *this* cat) in its singular empirical context would be to move to a higher plane of abstraction. In other words, this relation between the ideal and the empirical, between the unity of one general form and the multiplicity of many concrete exemplifications thereof, can be construed in terms of a specific kind of conceptual generality. For Goethe, this is the sort of generality evinced by the idea not over against, but in the midst of its phenomenal-empirical variability:<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> FA 24 415

<sup>3</sup> With regard to the idea’s relation to phenomenal appearance, the *Goethe-Wörterbuch*’s entry on “Idee” notes: “So kann dann auch begrifflich Unvereinbares gleichzeitig gelten, etwa daß die Idee sich in der Erscheinung zwar

Alle Empiriker streben nach der Idee und können sie in der Mannigfaltigkeit nicht entdecken; alle Theoretiker suchen sie im Mannigfaltigen und können sie darinnen nicht auffinden.

Beide jedoch finden sich im Leben, in der Tat, in der Kunst zusammen, und das ist so oft gesagt; wenige aber verstehen es zu nutzen.<sup>4</sup>

Only in the domains of life (or nature), the deed (in aggregate as practices and the society that hosts them) and art (its various aesthetic media and particular genres) do a normatively regulative idea and an empirico-phenomenal manifold find themselves united. Neither empirical nor theoretical attitudes alone will suffice in apprehending the ideal active form at work in the spatiotemporal phenomena native to each of the three ontological districts.

Recent engagements with Goethe's morphology have drawn renewed attention to the dynamics of form and time. Eckart Förster has reconstructed the philosophical trajectory within which Goethe's morphology is situated, construing it as a Spinozist science of the intuitive understanding developed in the wake of Kant.<sup>5</sup> Förster elucidates in particular the role played by intuited transitions (*das Übergängliche*) in the developmental unfolding of, say, a vegetal form. In a different vein, Eva Geulen has closely analyzed Goethe's essay on d'Alton's account of rodents, said to careen between form and 'unform,' by taking that individual text as a lens through which to reread the morphological notebooks.<sup>6</sup> Geulen devotes particular attention to the methodological technique of seriality (*Reihenbildung*), which constructs a provisionally holistic, open-endedly metonymic proto-structure also on view in the serial form of textual publication taken by the notebooks. In addition, David Wellbery has elucidated three ideal-typical, historically localized concepts of form (eidetic, endogenous, and constructivist), reconstructing the deep conceptual

---

einerseits verkürzt, sich aber andererseits erst in der Erscheinung zur Vollendung steigert." Cf. *Goethe-Wörterbuch*. Vol. 4, Sp. 1473-1479.

<sup>4</sup> From the *Maximen und Reflexionen*. Cf. HA 12 421.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Eckart Förster. *Die 25 Jahren der Philosophie. Eine systematische Rekonstruktion*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 2012. Esp. ch. 11, "Die Methodologie des intuitiven Verstandes," pg. 253-276.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Eva Geulen. *Aus dem Leben der Form. Goethes Morphologie und die Nager*. Berlin: August. 2016.

connection between the notion of the Idea and Goethe's account of temporalized form.<sup>7</sup> Wellbery opens up the discussion of form and morphology in Goethe's works by allowing one to operate with endogenous form as an epochal framework, an historico-conceptual space expanded in diverse directions by different authors such as Schopenhauer and A.W. Schlegel. The following discussion of form and transformation in Goethe's works attempts to contribute to this discussion in three ways: first, through a reconstruction of morphology as an ensemble of epistemic practices of *observation*; second, through an attention to the *transdisciplinary migration* of these observational practices from the natural sciences to cultural domains such as society and art;<sup>8</sup> and third, through a targeted rereading of key literary works by Goethe that seeks to practice a *morphological poetics*, a hermeneutic focus on narrative or poetic form as an open-ended process of transformation in search of stability.<sup>9</sup>

The last two moves in particular – attentiveness to how Goethe *already* practiced a cultural morphology and to the conceptual repertoire of interpretive tools thereby opened up – clear a path for future research on how Goethe's contemporaries, such as Wilhelm von Humboldt and August Wilhelm Schlegel, drew on morphological models in order to conceive what literary criticism could be in a time before its institutionalization as a 'discipline' in a university setting. Beyond the 'Age of Goethe,' recent research has devoted itself to the afterlives of morphological

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. David Wellbery. "Form und Idee. Skizze eines Begriffsfeldes um 1800." In: *Morphologie und Moderne. Goethes 'anschauliches Denken' in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften seit 1800*. Ed. Jonas Maatsch. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2014. Pg. 17-42.

<sup>8</sup> In this regard, Todorov noted of Goethe's morphology that "il y a peut-être une autre façon de justifier l'application de la morphologie goethéenne aux sciences humaines: non par l'identité des deux domaines mais précisément par leur différence. [...] Ainsi le déracinement des théories goethéennes [...] serait en réalité une restitution de leur sens véritable, ignoré par l'auteur même : celui d'être une méthodologie de ce que nous appelons aujourd'hui les sciences de l'homme" (40). Cf. Tzvetan Todorov. "Goethe sur l'art." In: *Écrits sur l'art*. Paris: Klincksieck. 1983. Pg. 7-59.

<sup>9</sup> Invocations of Goethe's natural science in the service of poetics might lead one to believe that a return to some sort of 'essentializing' natural metaphors of culture is in store here, but nothing could be further from the truth. Goethe himself never posited a monolithic ontological identity between nature and art, but rather their *analogy*. The naturalizing metaphors that have plagued past attempts at developing a morphological poetics (e.g., Günther Müller) forget this last, crucial qualification. Cf. Günther Müller. "Die Gestaltfrage in der Literaturwissenschaft und Goethes Morphologie" (1944). In: *Morphologische Poetik*. Max Niemeyer: Tübingen. 1968. Pg. 146-224.

concepts in modernity by focusing on thinkers such as Spengler, Wittgenstein, Simmel, Benjamin, and D'Arcy Thompson.<sup>10</sup> In attending to how morphology ramified outwards in Goethe's own time beyond the domain of nature to that of culture, it becomes possible to reconstruct how twentieth-century methodological debates in the humanities, such as those between James Frazer & Wittgenstein or Vladimir Propp & Claude Lévi-Strauss, are often conducted in Goethe's shadow.<sup>11</sup> For now, however, it will have to suffice to dwell with each of the three ontological domains Goethe sequestered for individual morphological investigation: nature, society, and art.

\*\*\*

At the very beginning of his Italian sojourn, on October 9, 1786, Goethe ventured to the Venetian shore. He there found himself endlessly amused by the behavior of sea snails and crabs, observing their hunt for prey as the sea's tide encroached and receded. The poet exclaimed: "Was ist doch ein Lebendiges für ein köstliches, herrliches Ding! Wie abgemessen zu seinem Zustande, wie wahr, wie seiend! Wieviel nützt mir mein bißchen Studium der Natur, und wie freue ich mich, es fortzusetzen!"<sup>12</sup> Even Goethe's enthusiasm has a logic; the three exclamations explicate one another in serial fashion. The first impression is one of sheer delight: the living is simply 'splendid.' Why should this be the case? Life is 'measured' ("abgemessen") according to its environmental condition ("Zustande"), that condition in turn dynamically responsive to an inner measure (*Maß*) or norm. The manifest accord between the life-form's inner norm and its outer environment constitutes its 'truth' ("wie wahr"). This metamorphic interplay between norm and environment makes up the individual life of the general life-form 'crab' or 'sea snail,' its very

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Eva Axer, Eva Geulen, & Alexandra Heimes. "Zeit und Form im Wandel. Goethes Morphologie und ihr Nachleben im 20. Jahrhundert." In: *Ästhetische Eigenzeiten: Bilanz der ersten Projektphase*. Ed. Michael Bies & Michael Gamper. Hannover: Wehrhahn 2019. Pg. 325-343.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Schneider even makes the fascinating argument that Goethe may be regarded as the first structuralist. Cf. Mark A. Schneider. "Goethe and the Structuralist Tradition." *Studies in Romanticism*. Vol. 18, No. 3 (Fall, 1979), pp. 453-478.

<sup>12</sup> From: *Italienische Reise*. Cf. HA 11 93

‘being’ (“wie seiend”) as this or that specific crab. The living’s delightfulness derives from its adaptability, its wondrous capacity to become other in new circumstances while remaining itself. At the same time, a distinctly intellectual pleasure is at work: Goethe is inspired to continue his “bißchen Studium der Natur,” for the observation of the living in its lawful intelligibility enlivens the observer’s own powers, spurring him on to continue his own activity of intellect.

Beyond the domain of nature, Goethe was inclined to speak of human activity – and not just the human life-form – as itself ‘alive.’ Writing in 1819 on the occasion of the opening of a veterinary school in Jena by Theobald Renner, owner of a large collection of animal skeletons, Goethe claimed:

Eine unterbrochene, doch nie getilgte Tätigkeit fand hierin ihre angemessenste Belohnung: denn bei jedem redlichen, ernstlichen Handeln, wenn auch anfangs Zweck und Beruf zweifelhaft scheinen sollten, finden sich beide zuletzt klar und erfüllt. Jedes reine Bemühen ist auch ein Lebendiges, *Zweck sein selbst*, fördernd ohne Ziel, nützend wie man es nicht voraussehen konnte.<sup>13</sup>

The passage deserves close commentary, some of which is endeavored in the second chapter. For now, the quote must suffice as demonstration of how ontologically promiscuous Goethe took the concept of life to be, extending from the realm of nature (which for Goethe emphatically included the inorganic) to that of human action and practice. Social practices are not, of course, ‘alive’ in a literal biological sense; that would be absurd. Like the crabs and sea snails, however, human practices are beholden to an inner normative purpose that allows their unfolding to fulfill its own end in better or worse degrees of realization (“*Zweck sein selbst*”). This inner ‘norm’ or formal end of the practical activity is not to be confused with any pedestrian instrumental end (a goal or *Ziel*), for the fullest realization of a practice in a given historical context or social situation may entail breaking with aspects of its ‘rulebook’ that are overly rigid or in need of reflective adaptation. Goethe hence claims that the practice is “fördernd *ohne Ziel*” and only ‘useful’ in an

---

<sup>13</sup> From the “Nachträge zur vergleichenden Anatomie.” Cf. *FA I* 24, 485. Emphasis in original.

unforeseeable manner (“nützend wie man es nicht voraussehen konnte”).

More than a rhetorical tic on Goethe’s part, the designation of meaningfully formed human activity that is an end unto itself – of a practice – as ‘alive’ evinces deep conceptual coherence with Goethe’s broader semantics of life. Goethe never used a word capriciously, and his lexematics in general deserve close study. In a letter to his friend and confidant in matters art-historical, Heinrich Meyer, Goethe straightforwardly claims: “Der Zweck des Lebens ist das Leben selbst.”<sup>14</sup> Kant associated such inner purposiveness with organic life, and, when without an ultimate purpose, with art. It is not surprising, then, that Goethe reports his reading of Kant’s third critique so:

das innere *Leben* der Kunst so wie der Natur, ihr beiderseitiges Wirken von innen heraus war im Buche deutlich ausgesprochen. Die Erzeugnisse dieser zwei unendlichen Welten sollten um ihrer selbst willen da sein, und was *neben* einander da stand wohl *für* einander, aber nicht absichtlich *wegen* einander.<sup>15</sup>

Commentators have not devoted sufficient attention to the self-purposiveness of social practices in addition to that of art and nature. Goethe himself leaves the social unremarked here. As the careful prepositions make clear, however, ascribing an ‘inner life’ to art and society does not mean that one ‘naturalizes’ cultural domains by taking what stands ‘alongside’ one another (“*neben* einander”) as intelligible through or ‘because of’ one another (“absichtlich *wegen* einander”).

Despite evincing their own distinct kind of lawfully intelligible living form, then, the cultural domains of art and society remain ontologically distinct. In the case of society, Goethe thought of man as a practical life-form the actions of which are beholden to an ‘idea’ or inner norm not given by nature, but by the human to itself. In a letter to Schiller, Goethe thus claims:

Was uns im theoretischen so auffallend ist sehen wir im praktischen alle Tage. Wie sehr

---

<sup>14</sup> From Feb. 8, 1796. Cf. *WA* IV 11 21.

<sup>15</sup> From “Einwirkung der neueren Philosophie.” Cf. *FA* 24 444. Emphasis added.

der Mensch genöthigt ist, um sein einzelnes einseitiges, ohnmächtiges Wesen nur zu etwas zu machen, gegen Verhältnisse die ihm widersprechen [...], und doch liegt auch hievon der Grund in dem Tiefern, Bessern der menschlichen Natur, *da er praktisch immer constitutiv seyn muß* und sich eigentlich um das was geschehen könnte nicht zu bekümmern hat, sondern um das was geschehen sollte. Nun ist aber das letzte immer eine Idee, und er ist konkret im konkreten Zustande; nun geht es in ewigem Selbstbetrügen fort um dem Conkreten die Ehre der Idee zu verschaffen u.s.w.<sup>16</sup>

To say that a social practice or institution is ‘alive’ is thus to make a claim about how it becomes intelligible: with reference to its inner norm of self-realization (“das was geschehen sollte”), its constitutive general form. Just as Goethe made sense of the individual sea snails by seeing them in light of the general life-form of the sea snail, which renders the tiny snail parts intelligible as a whole as it also renders individual ‘exemplifications’ of the general life-form intelligible in their empirical variability (their ‘unity in multiplicity’), so individual cultural actions may be rendered intelligible by seeing them in light of the general form of social practice being empirically exemplified in that moment.<sup>17</sup> The normative ‘idea’ of the life-form or social practice will each time become “konkret im konkreten Zustande,” and the morphologist must be wary of construing the empirically contingent as ingredient in the ideal form (“dem Conkreten die Ehre der Idee zu verschaffen”).

Two acts of rendering intelligible are thus in play: first, of the parts within the organic whole or of the sub-actions within the entire practical script; second, of the empirical individual qua whole, whether a concrete organism or a concrete practice-performance, in light of the ‘ideal’ or general form.<sup>18</sup> What philosophers would call a ‘constitutive unity’ is here at work: only

---

<sup>16</sup> From Feb. 10, 1798. Cf. *WA* IV 13 60-61. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> The broad conceptual analogy between life-forms and forms of practice is inspired by the work of Michael Thompson. Cf. Michael Thompson. *Life and Action. Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard UP 2008; *Lebensform und Praxisform*. Ed. Jens Kertscher & Jan Müller. Paderborn: mentis 2015.

<sup>18</sup> One can think of the conceptual analogy can be thought with Hegel in terms of a concrete universal: life-forms, social forms of practice, and artistic forms or literary genres all evince an inner norm of realization to which individual exemplars thereof are referenced in order to become intelligible, which involves understanding to what



through the lens of the general form does the concrete empirical individual in its wildly variable context, in its multifarious ingredient components, become intelligible as this or that kind of unitary whole. As Rawls puts this in the case of social practices, there are constitutive rules that do not regulate pre-existing behavior, but bring new behavior into being by ‘constituting’ a practice such as baseball. The constitutive rules of baseball not only render individual game performances intelligible, but also the ‘parts’ or specific moves that make up any one game: “The practice is logically prior to particular cases: unless there is the practice the terms referring to actions specified by it lack a sense.”<sup>19</sup> In a similar yet grander vein, the Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes channeled a Goethean vital semantics when he claimed that the U.S. Constitution was made up of “words that are also a constituent act,” words that “have called *into life* a being the development of which would not have been foreseen completely by the most gifted of its begetters.”<sup>20</sup> Such democratic experiments also constitute what Goethe termed a “reine[s] Bemühen [...] *Zweck sein selbst*, fördernd ohne Ziel, nützend wie man es nicht voraussehen konnte.” *Unlike* natural life-forms, however, social practices and institutions, even instituted governments, may *fail* to realize their general form in a manner that is unique to the social domain, for their inner norm is self-given. As Holmes continues, “they had created an organism; it [...] has cost their successors much sweat and blood to prove that they created a nation.”<sup>21</sup>

---

greater or lesser degree the individual realizes the general in an empirical context. Cf. Christian Martin. “Four Types of Conceptual Generality.” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 36:2 (2015), pp. 397-423.

<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein got at this thought by more generally claiming that “Obeying a rule is a practice” (in the German: “Darum ist ‘der Regel folgen’ eine Praxis”). Cf. John Rawls. “Two Concepts of Rules.” *The Philosophical Review* 64 (1955): 3-32 (here: 164); Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophische Untersuchungen / Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, & Joachim Schulte. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell 2009. Pg. 87 (§ 202).

<sup>20</sup> Holmes is credited with inaugurating the interpretive legal school that takes the constitution to be a ‘living’ document. Cf. *Missouri v. Holland* 252 U.S. 416 (1920). Pg. 433. Emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

In the ontological district of art, Goethe was similarly careful to sequester artistic forms from the domain of nature. In preliminary notes for the “Propyläen,” for example, Goethe outright claims that “Die Kunst ist constitutiv --- Der Künstler bestimmt die Schönheit, er nimmt sie nicht an.”<sup>22</sup> While natural life-forms belong to the realm of the given, the inner norms that govern the empirical concretization of artistic forms and social forms of practice alike are ‘self-given,’ thus autonomous and open to a unique kind of failure of which natural life-forms are incapable. While a sloth, say, cannot help but be a sloth, even if it is very unhealthy, social practices and artworks are open to the unique possibility of ceasing to be what they inwardly are, losing their very ‘being,’ as it were. An individual life-form may deviate from its general life-form due to environmental circumstances, evincing an ‘environmental gap’ between its inner norm and its concrete realization (say, a jellyfish that cannot glow blue, as this species generally does, due to an oil spill). However great the environmental gap between a concrete animal’s life and its normative form of life, it will never *fail* to exemplify its life form, will never *cease* to be itself however manifold its transformations may be. Any given human action (or specific artwork) *can*, on the other hand, fail to exemplify the practice (or the genre/medium) in which it partakes: I may overstay my welcome while participating in the practice of hospitality, may fail to inhabit the role of the guest in an appropriate manner in this novel context. Social practices may thus evince a ‘phronetic gap’ between their general form and their contextual realization.<sup>23</sup> In the case of art, a painting may fail to account for what it means to inherit the tradition of painting at this historical juncture, or it may exhaust the conventions of, say, the landscape genre in such a way that renders

---

<sup>22</sup> WA 47 290

<sup>23</sup> The phrase “phronetic gap” is drawn from Charles Taylor. Cf. Charles Taylor. “To Follow a Rule.” In: *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge: Harvard UP 1995. Pg. 165-180.

that genre ‘extinct’ for all intents and purposes.<sup>24</sup> The question then becomes how to transform the practice of hospitality (or the landscape genre) so as to do justice to the singularity of the social (or cultural-historical) situation without thereby becoming inhospitable (or ugly), or, for that matter, utterly unintelligible to other practice-participants, such as my host (or other painters and art critics). This plasticity of the general normative form of the practice or artwork is a transformative ontological option that is not available to natural life-forms due to their normatively inert givenness.

The chapters that follow track Goethe’s apprehension of natural life-forms, certain social forms of practice enacted by the specifically rational-practical life-form that is the human being, and the literary forms that emerge from the specific practice of literary writing and reading. That one historical individual would have exerted his faculties so comprehensively for the sake of understanding certainly makes Goethe unique. As Goethe observed his own observational practice: “Mein ganzes inneres Wirken erwies sich als eine lebendige Heuristik, welche, eine unbekannte geahnte Regel anerkennend, solche in der Außenwelt zu finden und in die Außenwelt einzuführen trachtet.”<sup>25</sup> More than a method of observation, the ‘living heuristics’ of morphology recognize an unknown rule not merely in a theoretical belief or cognitive acknowledgment, but in a practical realization. As the alternation of case makes clear, the “Regel” or formative lawfulness differently operative in nature, society, and art is both ‘discovered’ and ‘constructed,’ but not localized in the object as a sort of inner eidetic essence nor in the subject as a sort of imposed projection onto nature. In a less modernist vocabulary that dispenses with concerns about the distinction between discovery and construction, object and subject, one might instead say that,

---

<sup>24</sup> The idea that an artwork’s ‘success’ vis-à-vis the medium or genre in which it participates is bound to how it historically inherits the conventions and ever-shifting problems of that medium or genre is taken from Cavell. Cf. Stanley Cavell. *Pursuits of Happiness. The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard UP 1981. Pg. 27-28.

<sup>25</sup> From the *Maximen und Reflexionen*. Cf. *WA* 42 153.

where Goethe did not find a normatively regulative form ‘in’ the outer world (“in *der* Außenwelt”), he introduced one ‘into’ it via practical activity (“in *die* Außenwelt”), in the very *act* of morphological observation. The intellectual apprehension of form in its ontological traversals calls for such a “lebendige Heuristik.” Goethe’s morphology not only studies the many ways in which life is ‘said’ and ‘seen,’ then, but itself opens onto a new mode of human living, a Goethean form of life.

## Chapter 1: Vital Exuberance: On Four Constitutive Moments of Morphological Method

*Wie wundersam kommt das Allgemeine als Ausnahme zurück...*

– Goethe to Nees von Esenbeck, Jan. 7, 1819<sup>26</sup>

Upon returning from his Italian journey, Goethe found himself “in das gestaltlose Deutschland zurückgewiesen.”<sup>27</sup> During this time, he wrote three essays that point toward a common morphological method of observation, each text attuned to a different ontological district: in the realm of nature, the “Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären” (1790); in the realm of art, “Einfache Nachahmung der Natur, Manier, Stil” (1789); and in the realm of society, “Das Römische Carneval” (1788). With regard to this simultaneously emergent triad, Goethe relates: “sie zeigen sämtlich was damals in meinem Innern vorging, und welche Stellung ich gegen jene drei großen Weltgegenden genommen hatte.”<sup>28</sup> Such remarks point not only to the transdisciplinary reach of Goethe’s morphological method, but also to its versatility. Given that “Gestaltenlehre ist Verwandlungslehre,” the method allowing one to observe form *as* transformation itself transforms to fit novel, unique realms of application.<sup>29</sup> In notes to his *Propyläen* project, Goethe hence writes: “Übersicht über Natur und Kunst. Von der Idee auszugehen, daß beyde Reiche zu isoliren sind. / Sowie im allgemeinen die physische und technische Morphologie zu begründen ist.”<sup>30</sup> Rather than eliding the borders distinguishing ontological “Weltgegenden,” such a ‘technical morphology’ – an ensemble of observational practices and orienting principles – would enable one to draw isolating lines of demarcation *between* them, accounting for constitutive differences such as that between the given laws of

---

<sup>26</sup> A paralipomenon for an unsent letter. The context is a botanical discussion. Goethe wishes that Esenbeck may demonstrate to his students “das Einzelne” by means of “dem allgemeinen Typus.” Cf. *WA* IV 31, 307.

<sup>27</sup> From “Schicksal der Handschrift” (1817) written for the publication of *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen*. Cf. *FA* I 24, 414.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *FA* I 24, 415.

<sup>29</sup> The oft-quoted apothegm stems from the diary fragment titled “Morphologie.” Cf. *FA* I 24, 349.

<sup>30</sup> From “Weitere Ausführung der Aufsätze:” 24.9.1798. Cf. *WA* 1/47, 282. Emphasis added.

nature and the self-given laws of art, while nonetheless remaining fruitfully applicable *within* each of those realms.

Goethe's morphology, then, is itself a kind of protean meta-method, perhaps explaining why there is no consensus in recent scholarship as to whether Goethe's morphological writings coalesce into something that can justifiably be termed a coherent 'method' in the first place. Eckart Förster has reconstructed Goethe's natural scientific framework as a method of the intuitive understanding developed in the wake of Kant and Spinoza.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to this systematic reconstruction, Eva Geulen proceeds from a focused reading of one text – Goethe's discussion of rodent skeletons drawing on d'Alton – in order to develop an account of morphology as a theory of form and proto-formations that reflects its own representational (non)form in the morphological notebooks, a loose assemblage of generically disparate texts that decidedly resist holistic unity qua work.<sup>32</sup> The question of morphology's putative methodological consistency may seem to depend on how influential one takes the background philosophical commitments animating Goethe's natural science to be.<sup>33</sup> Goethe himself, however, directly

---

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Eckart Förster. *Die 25 Jahren der Philosophie. Eine systematische Rekonstruktion*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 2012. Esp. ch. 11, "Die Methodologie des intuitiven Verstandes," pg. 253-276.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Eva Geulen. *Aus dem Leben der Form. Goethes Morphologie und die Nager*. Berlin: August. 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Geulen and Förster's accounts diverge above all in their different interpretations of how serialization (*Reihenbildung*) functions in the Goethean experiment. Geulen reads serialization as a procedure that brings both discrete natural phenomena and the experiments about them into an open-ended metonymic proximity, such that each serialized object is immediately (*unmittelbar*) in contact with the subsequent one yet not necessarily in some sort of determinate connection to it that would 'round out' the series into a definitive whole. In a different vein, Eckart Förster has brought the notion of series-construction in relation to Goethe's later emphasis on the moment of transition between serialized objects, for only in the mental apprehension of the lawfulness governing transitions in a series may the method of serialization disclose the idea governing its elaboration in time. Förster argues that Goethean serialization is a Spinozist method of the intuitive understanding (*intellectus archetypus*) that Kant claimed we could only apprehend as possible via its contrast to our discursive understanding. As Geulen notes, the word 'transition' (*Übergang*) and its variants are never mentioned in "Der Versuch als Vermittler von Subjekt und Objekt" (1793; Geulen 117). Only three years later, as early as 1796, however, Goethe notes the importance of 'constancy' or 'continuity' (*Stetigkeit*) in a letter to Schiller from July 20 (*WA IV 11*, 143). Ultimately a concept of mathematical provenance, the "Grundsatz" of *Stetigkeit* forms the unavoidable sister concept to *Schwanken*. In a remark from the science-historical section of his *Beiträge zur Optik* (on which Simmel wrote a short meditation), Goethe links constancy and serialization in a most general manner: "Alle Wirkungen, von welcher Art sie seien, die wir in der Erfahrung bemerken, hängen auf die *stetigste* Weise zusammen, gehen in einander über; sie unduliren von der ersten bis zur letzten. [...] Starre scheidende Pedanterie und verflößender Mysticismus bringen beide gleiches Unheil. Aber

professes to possess a unique ‘method’ in contradistinction to philosophy: “Seit Schillers Ableben hatte ich mich von aller Philosophie im Stillen entfernt, und suchte nur die mir eingeborne Methodik, indem ich sie gegen Natur, Kunst und Leben wendete, immer zu größerer Sicherheit und Gewandtheit auszubilden.”<sup>34</sup> In a “Betrachtung über Morphologie überhaupt” from 1798, Goethe describes morphology as a kind of second-order discipline that feeds off of what might seem marginal, even ‘accidental,’ to all other disciplines in order to zero in on its own object:

sie [Morphologie] muß sich als eine besondere Wissenschaft erst legitimieren, indem sie das, was bei andern gelegentlich und zufällig abgehandelt ist, zu ihrem Hauptgegenstande macht, indem sie das, was dort zerstreut ist, sammelt, und einen neuen Standort feststellt, woraus die natürlichen Dinge sich mit Leichtigkeit und Bequemlichkeit betrachten lassen.<sup>35</sup>

Key here is the connection drawn between a new science (*Wissenschaft*) in the modern sense and the ancient notion of *theoria*, of the contemplation (*Betrachtung*) of an eternal cosmos that may be noetically apprehended from a human vantage point “mit Leichtigkeit und Bequemlichkeit.”<sup>36</sup> Anything but a given, such a contemplative human “Standort” must in modernity be both

---

jene Thätigkeiten, von der gemeinsten bis zur höchsten, vom Ziegelstein, der dem Dache entstürzt, bis zum leuchtenden Geistesblick, der dir aufgeht und den du mittheilst, *reihen sie sich aneinander*” (*WA* II 5, 403, emphasis added). Goethe likely encountered the concept of *Stetigkeit* in a review of his own work on plants by Maimon, written just five years before his epistolary remark to Schiller. Cf. Georg Simmel. “Die Stetigkeit in Goethes Weltbild.” In: *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1909-1918*. Bd. 1. Ed. Rüdiger Kramme & Angela Rammstedt. In: *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 12. Ed. Otthein Rammstedt. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 2001 (orig. 1912). Pg. 374-380; Julia Mierbach. “Die Reihe. Zur mathematischen Poetik einer Denkfigur um 1800. (Goethe, Schelling, Herbart, Novalis).” *DVjS*. Vol. 92, Issue 3. Sept. 2018. Pg. 377-427; Salomon Maimon. “Ueber Stetigkeit in der Natur.” *Deutsche Monatsschrift*. Bd. II. 1791. Pg. 136-145.

<sup>34</sup> Goethe immediately notes how the acquaintance of Hegel brought him back to philosophical reflection. From: *Tag- und Jahres-Hefte als Ergänzung meiner sonstigen Bekenntnisse*. [1807]. Cf. *WA* I 36, 124.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *FA* I 24, 368.

<sup>36</sup> Hannah Arendt discusses *theoria* in her account of the *vita contemplativa*, associating it with the ancient endeavor to discover man’s place in the cosmos to be adequate to reason. That the order of being is intelligible, re-cognizable in the first place (the miracle of noetic *adequatio*) renders thought divine. Unlike the ancients, Goethe will emphasize the extent to which contemplation of the idea operative *in* rather than behind natural phenomena gives rise to lively activity, i.e. to a more than merely noetic participation in the intuited phenomenon. As Schmitz articulates this aspect of Goethe’s transformed relation to Aristotle: “[Für Aristoteles war] das schauende Verhalten als Tätigkeit des Geistes (...) bestimmt. Dieser energische Charakter der Schau besteht für ihn aber, wie wir gesehen haben, nur in selbstgenügsamer Anspannung des Geists, die nur gleichsam nebenbei durch ihre Ausstrahlungskraft nach außen wirksam wird; die tätige Schau bei Goethe verbindet sich dagegen gern mit lebhafter räumlicher Bewegung und unmittelbarem schaffenden Eingreifen” (135). Cf. Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: UCP. 1958. Pg. 301-304; Hermann Schmitz. *Goethes Altersdenken im problemgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang*. Bonn: Bouvier. 1959.

constructed and (re)discovered within the metamorphic chaos of a temporalized nature and a complex field of increasingly insular, specialized disciplines.<sup>37</sup> Given this disciplinary fragmentation of knowledge, morphology must necessarily inhabit the interstices between disciplines, and for this reason Goethe can claim “daß sie [Morphologie] mit keiner Lehre im Widerstreite steht, daß sie nichts wegzuräumen braucht um sich Platz zu verschaffen.”<sup>38</sup> Morphology collects (“sammelt”) that which lies at disciplinary borders and peripheries so as to preserve thereby a contemplative vantage point in accord with the human intellect. Goethe hence concludes “daß die Operationen des Geistes, wodurch sie [Morphologie] die Phänomene zusammenstellt, der menschlichen Natur angemessen und angenehm sind.”<sup>39</sup> In the same fragment, Goethe even declares that morphology “nur darstellen und nicht erklären will,” bringing it into proximity with phenomenological description as a method that “[r]uht auf der Überzeugung, daß alles was sei sich auch andeuten und zeigen müsse,” that everything that *is* must bring itself to phenomenal appearance (or at least ‘indicate’ if not outright ‘show’ itself).<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> The fate of Lynkeus, who contemplates “Die ewige Zier” (pointing to the etymological roots between the ‘cosmetic’ and ‘cosmos’) only to face the fire below, demonstrates just how precarious such a lofty theoretical “Standort” becomes in modernity. In *Novelle* as well, the princess and Honorio’s contemplation of nature on the highest peak (at the narrative’s precise midpoint) is disturbed by a fire.

<sup>38</sup> *FA I 24*, 368.

<sup>39</sup> One recognizes here why Goethe was so hostile toward scientific instruments that would augment the human senses, distancing the observer from the phenomenon. Cf. *FA I 24*, 368-369.

<sup>40</sup> Earlier literature has focused on Goethe’s natural science as a phenomenology of nature *avant la lettre*, concerned not with efficient causes that can be mathematically described as effective behind phenomena, but with the conditions for the possibility of a phenomenon’s regular appearance. Adolf Portmann, for example, helpfully draws on the metaphor of a theatrical play in order to distinguish Goethean science from modern natural science, while Cassirer emphasizes that Goethe is concerned with the genesis and regularity of a phenomenal procession and not with the mathematical formula that might predict a quantifiable regularity of experimentally measurable effects of that phenomenon. Werner Heisenberg similarly draws attention to Goethe’s rejection of mathematical abstraction for the sake of phenomenal description. Cf. *FA I 24*, 364, 349; Adolf Portmann. “Goethes Naturforschung.” In: *Biologie und Geist*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 1956. Pg. 273-292; Ernst Cassirer. “Goethe und die mathematische Physik. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Betrachtung.” In: *Idee und Gestalt. Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, Kleist*. Berlin: Bei Bruno Cassirer. 1921. Pg. 27-76, esp. 43; Werner Heisenberg. “Das Naturbild Goethes und die technisch-naturwissenschaftliche Welt.” *Physikalische Blätter*. 24. Jahrgang, Heft 5. 1968. Pg. 193-200. & “Fortsetzung.” In: Heft 6. Pg. 241-247; David Seamon & Arthur Zajonc (eds.). *Goethe’s Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*. Albany: State U of NY. 1998.



In order to make sense of morphology's transdisciplinary reach beyond nature to the realms of society and art, the following argumentative reconstruction will isolate four ideal-typical moments or dimensions of the morphological method of observation. These should not be understood as definitive of a unitary 'method,' but as orienting categories for approaching Goethe's morphological attempts to represent and account for natural phenomena. The four aspects will naturally shift and rearrange themselves into new constellations of prominence and dependence depending on the phenomenon and, especially, the ontological district in question (nature, society, or art). They are: the mereological (1); the environmental (2); the normative (3); and the epistemic (4) dimensions. These will be discussed seriatim with recourse to Goethe's morphological writings, with a view in particular to the first and third dimensions of mereology and normativity. While all four dimensions are simultaneously in play in any sustained act of morphological observation, the first and third form the focus of the subsequent discussion, in part because they have been more neglected in the secondary literature.<sup>41</sup> The environmental and epistemic dimensions will nonetheless be addressed within close analyses of individual texts (e.g., the environmental in Goethe's account of sloth species, the epistemic in his engagement with sculpted horse heads). The discussion of mereology that follows focuses in particular on how morphological approaches to art forms and forms of social practice are prefigured in Goethe's approach to natural life-forms

The first section on the mereological dimension reconstructs the text "Über die Gesetze der Organisation überhaupt" (1795) as a sort of conceptual scaffold that will set the groundwork for more focused discussions of the way in which parts may overtake wholes, challenging stereotypes of Goethe as a thinker of a priori organic unity or holism. Within different domains of life, the event of such mereological *disorganization* takes on a distinct logical structure, in the

---

<sup>41</sup> The fourth dimension of epistemology has been discussed at length above all by Eckart Förster.

case of plants metaphorically prefiguring *societal* forms of organization (parts here have a ‘right’ to ‘strive’ and become independent wholes), in the case of animals conceptually implicating *aesthetic* forms of unity (parts here are ‘insubordinate’ to the whole, precariously situated between an intensification into an aesthetic ‘micro-whole’ or a devolution into monstrously tumescent growth). A brief turn to the environmental dimension then discusses how these inwardly self-organizing wholes or organisms interface with their outer environments, emphasizing an aspect on view in each dimension, namely the scalar and perspectival relativity of key methodological distinctions (e.g., organism/environment, part/whole, etc.). The normative dimension in turn will focus on the relationship between natural lawfulness and its empirico-phenomenal exemplifications (even exceptions) by juxtaposing two texts: Goethe’s discussion of sloth skeletons drawing on d’Alton & the didactic poem “Athroismos.” This analytic juxtaposition furnishes a case study for making sense of the unique epistemic contribution made by poetry to Goethe’s morphology (a number of poems populate the morphological notebooks, often occupying key moments of intertextual transition). At the same time, two strategies Goethe used to make sense of the givenness of natural norms will be elucidated: conceptual spatialization and poetic personification. The ideal *Typus* emerges in the course of this discussion as a ‘living’ norm itself in the throes of transformation. A brief glance at the epistemic dimension then elaborates the practical knowhow acquired vis-à-vis the observer’s intuition of this normative type, casting a bridge from natural norms to the self-given norms that govern human practical action and aesthetic formation.

## **1. The Mereological Dimension**

1. Emergent forms of (self-)organization account for the difference between an unstructured set and a whole. The relationship between part and whole, in other words, depends on the more conceptually primary relation between structure and genesis. Goethe situates different kinds of wholes, aggregates, even

provisional assemblages on a spectrum the polar ends of which range from part/part- and part/whole-relations of mutual indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) to the mutual subordination and distinctiveness (*Entschiedenheit*).

2. Even in cases when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, the parts stand in tension, even antagonism, with the whole, often figured by Goethe in a socio-political metaphoric (e.g., the vegetal politics of plant entelechy).
3. The part/whole distinction can take on a scalar relativity, functioning as a heuristic device rather than ontological designation to frame a 'partial' vital phenomenon as a whole in order to render it more intelligible at a higher or lower scale of observation. The observer may take an animal organ, say, as itself a 'whole' in order to understand it better (scaling downwards; e.g. the 'insubordinate' part of the animal eye or the prehistoric bull's horns). The observer may alternately take a whole at one observational scale and see it as a 'part' exemplifying (even symbolizing) a greater level of organization (scaling upwards; e.g. the symbolic 'fetish' of the *Lepas polliceps* barnacle).
4. The event of a form of organization's emergence or structural transformation calls for a new framework of intelligibility appropriate to its specificity. Goethe explains this sudden need for a new mode of explanation in terms of the operation of *Steigerung*.
5. Related to such 'intensification' as well as to 'distinctiveness,' a metamorphosis that amplifies a structure's immanent complexity leads to greater 'perfection' (*Vollkommenheit*). This is not an ethically charged value, but a designation of complexity defining the degree to which the parts making up a whole are interdependent, i.e. positionally differentiated and functionally independent and specialized, while nonetheless subordinate to the whole.

In "Über die Gesetze der Organisation überhaupt," Goethe distinguishes between inorganic and organic realms via recourse to an account of how minerals come into and pass out of being. Empirical structural genesis (and the ideal genetic structure guiding it) is here conceptually primary to static mereological configurations. The crystallization and decomposition of minerals do "zwar auch nach Gesetzen geschehen," but crystals cannot be said to properly 'grow;' rather, they aggregate in a way that knows "weder Grenze noch Ordnung."<sup>42</sup> When part of a mineral is cut off from the aggregate 'whole' in which it is ingredient, then "der Körper, der erst zerstört schien, liegt wieder in seiner Vollkommenheit vor uns."<sup>43</sup> A mineral aggregate has, in a sense, no borders, thus no proper environment of its own; without definitive beginning or end, minerals do

---

<sup>42</sup> *FA I* 24, 273.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

not know ‘death.’ A severed part of a crystal does indeed cease to be a part of *that* mineral aggregate, but it does not thereby cease to exist tout court; it merely becomes a new whole. In contrast, were one to sever a part from an artifactual whole, then the part would cease to exist qua part. A hammer handle broken off from its iron head is not the handle of a hammer any more, but just a piece of elongated wood: its identity qua part is tied to how it occupies a functional role within the whole tool.<sup>44</sup> As Goethe puts this, “Das Hauptkennzeichen der Mineral-Körper [...] ist die Gleichgültigkeit ihrer Teile in Absicht auf ihr Zusammensein, ihre Ko- oder Subordination.”<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, such inorganic states cannot be sequentially ordered into a directed processual logic, but are instead essentially reversible: minerals appear “auf eine Rück-Zusammensetzung zu warten.”<sup>46</sup> Even if they evince “eine Art von Neigung,” inorganic formations ultimately depend on “nur äußere Determinationen.”<sup>47</sup> Despite this, Goethe does not deny minerals “den zarten Anteil, der ihnen an dem allgemeinen Lebenshauche der Natur gebührt.”<sup>48</sup> Beginning with a discussion of mineral mereology is thus significant for Goethe’s morphological project, for it brings into view the remarkably expansive scope that the concept of life had for Goethe. Even stones, in some unique sense, participate in the phenomenon of ‘life.’

Despite this, however, minerals are not ‘alive’ in any straightforward biological sense. In an essay titled “Naturlehre” published in Wieland’s *Teutsche Merkur* shortly after his return from Italy, Goethe argued against a friend’s remark (writing from home in Germany) that the ice

---

<sup>44</sup> A philosophical tradition of thought leading from Kant back to Aristotle makes the same point Goethe does here. Aristotle, for example, calls on the reader to imagine a living axe in order to begin to conceive of the hylomorphic unity possessed by the animal. Kant captured the point when he claimed that artifacts exhibit a form of external purposiveness, using the example of a clock, the parts of which do not relate to one another in a linear causal-efficient manner (*nexus effectivus*), but in a teleological causality of reciprocal co-determination, each part both cause and effect of the rest (*nexus finalis*). Unlike an artifact, of course, the organism contains the unifying concept of its purpose within itself rather than in the mind of an artificer, hence its *inner* purposiveness. Cf. Aryeh Kosman. *The Activity of Being. An Essay on Aristotle’s Ontology*. Cambridge: HUP. 2013. Pg. 106-7; Immanuel Kant. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Hamburg: Meiner. 2006. Pg. 280-281 (§65).

<sup>45</sup> *FA* 1 24, 274.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *FA* 1 24, 274.

crystal formations on a winter windowsill ‘grow’ in a vegetal manner. Goethe adamantly refuses this move, not by adhering to a vertical *scala naturae* model, but by collapsing it into a horizontal series of equal ‘peaks’ or ontological orders of nature:

Er [der Geist] sieht wohl ein, daß er alle zusammen einem einzigen Begriffe, dem Begriff des Lebens im weitesten Sinne, unterzuordnen hat: [...] Er wird die drey großen in die Augen fallenden Gipfel, Crystallisation, Vegetation, und animalische Organisation, niemals einander zu nähren suchen, vielmehr wird er nur ihre Zwischenräume genau zu kennen trachten, und mit großem Interesse an den Puncten verweilen, wo die verschiedenen Reiche zusammen zu treffen und in einander überzugehen scheinen. [...] Ein Salz ist kein Baum, ein Baum kein Theil; hier können wir die Pfähle feststecken.<sup>49</sup>

Rather than severing ontological districts of nature off from one another, morphological observation always remains careful to dwell at the liminal spaces (“Zwischenräume”) between them, seeing how the concept of life in its broadest sense (“im weitesten Sinne”) manifests itself at those thresholds *between* logically distinct forms of mereological organization.

### **1a *The Vegetal Politics of Plant Entelechy***

Attending to the mereology of vegetal wholes will allow us to understand better how a morphology of forms of *social*, even political, organization is already prefigured in Goethe’s account of *natural* life-forms. Unlike minerals, plants present an interestingly liminal case, situated as they are on the threshold between the inorganic and the organic, some plants occupying one of what Goethe termed the “Zwischenräume.” In his copy of Kant’s third critique, Goethe tellingly wrote the marginal note “Gleichgültigkeit des Pflanzenreichs” beside Kant’s consideration of a vegetal being in section §64.<sup>50</sup> The section addresses three ways in which a tree is a natural purpose unto itself (*Naturzweck*): insofar as it reproduces its genus, giving rise to other trees; insofar as it generates itself as an individual, i.e. grows; and insofar as certain of its

---

<sup>49</sup> *FA I* 15/2, 882.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Géza von Molnar. *Goethes Kantstudien. Eine Zusammensetzung nach Eintragungen in seinen Handexemplaren der “Kritik der reinen Vernunft” und der “Kritik der Urteilskraft.”* Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger. 1994. Pg. 327; Kant. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Pg. 274-277.

parts may in turn come to take on the status of independent wholes, say through grafting. The potential independence of a vegetal part from the whole in which it is embedded led Goethe to consider, then, a contact point of mereological indifference between the living and the non-living. In “Gesetze der Organisation,” Goethe speaks of plants as progressive modifications of the same organ, the subsequently diversified parts of which, however, may form ‘apparent wholes:’ “denn Pflanzen, in viele Teile getrennt und zerrissen, werden wieder als eben so viele scheinbare Ganze aus der Erde hervorsprossen.”<sup>51</sup> At the same time, and *unlike* minerals, plants obey a directed, processual logic of six-stage development; leaves, for example, regularly develop before the blossom. Goethe associates this processual logic with the plant’s entelechy in a passage worth quoting in full, for it draws on a socio-political metaphoric key for understanding not just the structural relation between parts and whole, but how such relations are processually maintained and even transformed. Tracking how the plant actively maintains its wholeness as it grows allows one to trace an entire vegetal politics on view throughout the morphological notebooks, a metaphorical prefiguration in nature of potential social forms of organization:

Jedes Blatt, jedes Auge an sich hat das Recht ein Baum zu sein; daß sie dazu nicht gelangen bündigt sie die herrschende Gesundheit des Stengels, des Stammes. Man wiederholt nicht oft genug, daß jede Organisation mancherlei Lebendiges vereinige. Schauen wir im gegenwärtigen Falle den Stengel an, dieser ist gewöhnlich rund oder von innen aus für rund zu achten. Eben diese Rinde nun hält als Einheit die Einzelheiten [sic] der Blätter, der Augen aus einander und läßt sie, in geordneter Nachfolge, aufsteigen zu regelmäßiger Entwicklung bis zur Blüte und Frucht. Wird nun eine solche Pflanzen-Entelechie gelähmt, wo nicht aufgehoben, so verliert die Mitte ihre gesetzgebende Gewalt, die Peripherie drängt sich zusammen und jedes Einzelstrebende übt nun sein besonderes Recht aus.<sup>52</sup>

The plant’s entelechy, its being in realization of its inner *telos*, governs its development in a healthy case (when not “gelähmt” or “aufgehoben”), such that at every moment of its processual

---

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *FA I 24*, 276.

<sup>52</sup> From the text “Nacharbeiten und Sammlungen,” written in connection to Goethe’s study of Georg Friedrich Jäger’s *Über die Mißbildungen der Gewächse* (1814). Cf. *FA I 24*, 464-465.

self-unfolding the plant is always already fulfilling its immanent end.<sup>53</sup> When Goethe himself defines entelechy, he emphasizes the Aristotelian sense of active, ever-renewed fulfillment: “Die Griechen nannten Entelecheia ein Wesen das *immer* in Function ist.”<sup>54</sup> Goethe elsewhere accordingly claims that “Funktion, recht begriffen, ist das Dasein in Tätigkeit gedacht.”<sup>55</sup> What the plant truly *is*, that in which its existence (“Dasein”) genuinely consists, is not its current formation at any given point in empirical time, but its ongoing vital activity, its functioning so as to realize its own end and thereby become more fully what it *should* be. Already the third, normative dimension is at play here in Goethe’s reference to “die herrschende Gesundheit” that keeps individual parts ‘bound’ (“bändig”) within a whole rather than splintering off to form new wholes (in this case, trees).

The context here is a discussion of anomalous vegetal growths, cases that lead Goethe to contemplate how such anomalies “deuten auf Vielheit in der Einheit.”<sup>56</sup> This plurality in unity, a sort of vegetal *e pluribus unum*, is governed by the ‘legislative power’ (“gesetzgebende Gewalt”)

---

<sup>53</sup> As the *Goethe-Wörterbuch* notes, this is the first use of the word *Entelechie* in Goethe’s oeuvre. It will later be systematically tied to Goethe’s idea of eternal life (not conceived as a heavenly realm where one’s subjectivity might continue to exist in disembodied state, but as a kind of lingering, posthumous efficacy of a deceased person’s life-activity that goes on beyond the agent’s control and even mortal lifespan, associated by Goethe with Mozart and, in a conversation with Eckermann on *Faust*, with Homunculus, who represents for Goethe entelechy in search of embodiment). Goethe thus departs from Aristotle in conceiving of entelechy as a kind of activity without agent, as if one’s deeds and their unforeseeable consequences or effectivity were more ‘real’ than the substrate subject from which they emanate (‘you are what you do,’ even posthumously). Hilgers associates this with Leibniz, reconstructing how Goethe synthesized the concepts of entelechy and monad. She also helpfully notes that Goethe encountered the term through Oken’s botanical work. Aristoteleans have a notoriously difficult time distinguishing *energeia* from *entelecheia*, for what it is to be in *internal* possession of an *end* (*en-telecheia*) and to *realize* that end just *is* to be in energetic activity (*energeia*). Blair hence concludes that the terms function as synonyms with different positing of accent depending on which phase of Aristotle’s work one finds oneself in. Kosman likewise shuttles between the terms synonymously, seeing entelechy more as a state-characterization of what it means to be in *energeia*. Cf. “Entelechie.” *Goethe-Wörterbuch*. Bd. 3, Sp. 121-122; “Entelechie..” In: *Goethe-Handbuch Supplemente: Bd. 2: Naturwissenschaften*. Ed. Gabriele Busch-Salmen, Manfred Wenzel, Andreas Beyer, & Ernst Osterkamp. Stuttgart: Metzler. 2013. Pg. 383; Klaudia Hilgers. *Entelechie, Monade und Metamorphose. Formen der Vervollkommnung im Werk Goethes*. München: Wilhelm Fink. 2002. Pg. 157-176; George A. Blair. “The Meaning of ‘Energeia’ and ‘Entelecheia’ in Aristotle.” *International Philosophical Quarterly*. 7(1): 101-117. 1967; Aryeh Kosman. *The Activity of Being*. Cambridge: HUP. 2014.

<sup>54</sup> “Paralipomena: Entwicklung der Wissenschaft.” Cf. *WA* II 11, 370. Emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> From Goethe’s account of the debate between Cuvier and Geoffrey: “Principes de philosophie zoologique discutés en mars 1830 au sein de l’académie royale de sciences par Mr. Geoffrey de Saint-Hilaire Paris 1830.” Cf. *FA* I 24, 835.

<sup>56</sup> *FA* I 24, 464.

of “die Mitte,” the round stem functioning as an organizing center that regulates the growth of individual parts and allows them to emerge in regular (“regelmäßiger”) development. Should the legislative power become dysfunctional or unhealthy, a decentering ensues: particular components (“die Einzelheiten”) – each described as a striving agent (“jedes Einzelstrebende”) – exercise their right to constitute a new whole, resulting in the self-dispersal of the whole into peripherally striving parts that seek to individuate themselves at the expense of unity. Goethe does not, however, disparage this unruly self-dispersion of the vegetal whole, but recognizes each part’s ‘rights,’ continuing to note (this time with regard to leaf-division):

Wenn Blätter sich teilen, oder vielmehr wenn sie sich aus sich selbst zur Mannigfaltigkeit entwickeln, so ist dieses ein Streben vollkommner zu werden, und zwar in dem Sinne daß ein jedes Blatt ein Zweig, so wie jeder Zweig ein Baum zu werden gedenkt; alle Klassen, Ordnungen und Familien haben das Recht sich hiernach zu bemühen.<sup>57</sup>

If parts each have a right to develop into wholes, then these “Einzelstrebende” themselves partake in a more universal striving to gain in perfection (“ein Streben vollkommner zu werden”) through self-differentiation. Vegetal entelechy thus does not seek to realize some predetermined empirical end-state, which would all too rigidly comprehend the *telos*, but rather strives to form a more ‘perfect’ union, establish a more internally variegated configuration, a maximally realized whole. Such entelechy does not (just) aim for blossom, then, but for an inwardly tensed form of unity characterized by self-multiplying vital exuberance. The plant must, as it were, strike a balance between self-diversification into a more internally complex being and overreaching in such striving so as to disperse into a collection of independent ‘apparent wholes.’

While a sociopolitical metaphoric is here employed to elucidate the inner mereological tensions that animate plant entelechy, such mereological considerations extend to the kind of social organization constituted by morphologists themselves. Morphological method, in other

---

<sup>57</sup> *FA I* 24, 466.



words, does not merely seek to characterize the kinds of wholes and parts observed in nature, but also the kind of whole formed by a community of observers (the epistemic dimension is already in play here). The case of the plant forms a stark contrast to the kind of mereological unity that should characterize the whole of the scientific community of botanists. In a review of recent botanical studies titled “Aufruf zur Einigkeit des Zusammenwirkens,” Goethe imagines the kind of societal whole requisite for understanding nature’s self-transformations:

So wie es keine Glaubensgenossen geben kann ohne Entsagung beschränkter Eigenheit, ob gleich jeder seine Individualität beibehält, eben so wenig kann in der höheren Wissenschaft lebendig zusammengewirkt und die eigentliche Verfassung der Natur-Stadt Gottes erkannt und, in soferne wir darin eingreifen, geregelt werden, wenn wir nicht als Bürger unsern Eigenheiten patriotisch entsagen und uns ins Ganze dergestalt versenken, daß unser tätigster, einzelner Anteil innerhalb dem Wohl des Ganzen völlig verschwinde, und nur künftig wie verklärt in Gesellschaft mit tausend andern der Nachwelt vorschwebe.<sup>58</sup>

Goethe carefully distinguishes between “beschränkter Eigenheit,” which must be ‘patriotically renounced’ for the sake of the common good of the whole, and “Individualität,” which each individual retains (“beibehält”) even within the whole.<sup>59</sup> Scientific collaboration is here figured as a vital activity (“lebendig zusammengewirkt”), each scientist a “Bürger” who seeks collectively to understand and sometimes even ‘regulate’ “die eigentliche Verfassung der Natur-Stadt Gottes.” Though each particular inquiry dissipates (“völlig verschwinde”) into an unforeseeable tangle of scientific investigations, one’s own individual activity re-emerges in posterity “wie verklärt in Gesellschaft mit tausend andern,” transfigured insofar as it has been inextricably interwoven with

---

<sup>58</sup> *FA I* 24, 533-534.

<sup>59</sup> This distinction is likely influenced by Wilhelm von Humboldt’s anthropological concept of *Individualität*, which he applied not only to individual human subjects and their education (*Bildung*), but to national cultures, languages, and different historical epochs. In his study of the eighteenth century, Humboldt thus claims that “Der Charakter des Einzelnen bestimmt, was das Ganze vermag” (387). In his study of the state, Humboldt will similarly embed the claim of the individual within the common good by claiming that “Liebe zur Konstitution” allows individuals to reconcile their “Eigenthümlichkeit” with civil society *without* thereby sacrificing it. Cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt. “Das achzehnte Jahrhundert” [1795/96]. In: *Werke* Bd. II. Berlin: Behr’s Verlag 1904.; Ute Tintemann & Jürgen Trabant (eds.). *Wilhelm von Humboldt: Universalität und Individualität*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink. 2012.

the efforts of other researchers to form a whole of knowledge greater than anything individually achievable.

That Goethe begins with a comparison between researchers and “Glaubensgenossen,” science and religion, is no accident, for his “Natur-Stadt Gottes” recalls Augustine’s *civitate dei*. Augustine conceived all of human history to be governed by the negotiation of the conflict between the City of God, an eternal normative ideal, and the terrestrial City of Man. Goethe’s paradoxical hyphen thus forms a conjunction between nature and the divine city. This citational reference invokes the divine city’s function as a normative ideal that stands in perpetual contrast to empirical society at the same time that it radically shifts register from a salvationally framed political history to a history of the natural sciences oriented toward the utopian transfiguration of knowledge via collaboration. The normative ideal of Goethe’s “Natur-Stadt Gottes” emerges here as a transhistorical society of researchers, one that extends beyond the presently living to encompass the dead who came before as well as those yet to contribute, a scientific-societal *telos* ever renewed and re-actualized in each individual inquiry.

In the vegetal as well as scientific domains, at the levels of the object of inquiry *and* the inquirers themselves, Goethe thus recognizes the ‘individual rights’ of parts within, sometimes even over and above, the whole, but his interest is continually drawn to more complex, ‘perfect,’ or ‘transfigured’ forms of organization and togetherness. Indeed, the epistemic motivation behind the socio-political metaphors of rights and legislative powers is the elucidation of a “Streben vollkommner zu werden” even within forms of (dis)organization that appear *below* the threshold of thoroughly complex (*vollkommen*) animal life. While the parts that make up a caterpillar, for example, are still relatively similar to one another, the butterfly into which it develops divides into three distinct “Systeme” insofar as the parts begin “ohneachtet ihrer innerlichen

Verwandtschaft bestimmte entgegengesetzte Charakter anzunehmen:” the head (“Haupt”), middle ‘breast’ (“Brust”), and body (“Leib”).<sup>60</sup> Higher forms of insect and animal life are more complex than vegetal life insofar as the parts are non-substitutable and therefore decisively differentiated. As Goethe characterizes “den Vorzug eines vollkommneren Tiers vor einem unvollkommneren, die Entschiedenheit ist es seiner Teile, die Sicherheit, daß keiner für den andern gesetzt, noch genommen werden kann, jeder vielmehr zu seiner Funktion bestimmt.”<sup>61</sup> This functional division of labor among different parts also implies the non-reversibility of their development in a stricter process-logic: “jeder folgende Zustand ist von dem vorhergehenden getrennt; kein Rückschritt möglich. Der Schmetterling kann sich nur aus der Raupe, die Blume hingegen aus und an der Pflanze entwickeln.”<sup>62</sup> In sum, the consequence is that the parts are not only dissimilar to one another, but also dissimilar to the whole they collectively form. This is because the parts of a plant fulfill all three functions of its vital activity (growth, nutrition, and reproduction), while the parts of an animal are functionally differentiated. In “Die Absicht wird eingeleitet,” Goethe designates this functional specification *subordination*: “Je ähnlicher die Teile einander sind, desto weniger sind sie einander subordiniert. Die Subordination der Teile deutet auf ein vollkommneres Geschöpf.”<sup>63</sup>

As indices of vital complexity or ‘perfection,’ distinctiveness and functional subordination qualify Goethe’s immediately precedent and more general remark (also in “Die Absicht”) that “Jedes Lebendige ist kein Einzelnes, sondern eine Mehrheit.”<sup>64</sup> Though Goethe claims that even an “Individuum” remains a “Versammlung” of independent living beings, he carefully notes that these beings remain “der Idee, der Anlage nach, gleich [...] in der Erfahrung aber gleich oder

---

<sup>60</sup> *FA I 24*, 278.

<sup>61</sup> *FA I 24*, 279.

<sup>62</sup> *FA I 24*, 277.

<sup>63</sup> *FA I 24*, 393.

<sup>64</sup> *FA I 24*, 392.

ähnlich, ungleich oder unähnlich.”<sup>65</sup> The morphological observer thus toggles between ideal and empirical planes of description in order to apprehend forms of unity at least potentially operative in a pluripotent living being. At the same time, the former discussion of vegetal politics and plant entelechy suggests that Goethe was also keen to discover a striving for multiplicity immanent within unity. As Goethe later notes in the “Nachträge zur Morphologie,” drawing on the same formula of the many in one: “unser ganzes Geschäft ist nun die einfachste Erscheinung als die mannigfaltigste, die Einheit als Vielheit zu denken. [...] aber eine Entwicklung im höheren Sinne müssen wir zugeben[,] das Viele im Einzelnen am Einzelnen.”<sup>66</sup> What was before articulated in terms of an observational gap between ideal identity and empirical diversity here takes shape as a pair of mirror operations: thinking a unity, the ‘simplest phenomenon,’ as a multiplicity (a descent from idea to experience) *and* recognizing “im höheren Sinne” how a manifold multiplicity nonetheless remains active ‘within’ a given unity (an ascent from experience to idea). Even here, however, the context of the passage is vegetal growth.<sup>67</sup> As will be discussed below, in select cases animal parts may similarly strive to overcome their subordination and overtake the whole that they compose, leading to monstrosity when they assert themselves or to beauty when they achieve a new degree of (partial) unity.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> *FA I* 24, 708-709.

<sup>67</sup> This emphasis on the context in which Goethe makes more general remarks about multiplicity vs. unity is important, for without it one can universalize beyond the scope of vegetal life, which lacks decisive individuation, to all living beings. Geulen, for example, claims that “Dagegen [gegen Kant] vermeidet Goethes Definition des vielgestaltigen Lebens sowohl die Dialektik von Teil und Ganzem wie auch jede teleologische Richtung zugunsten einer bloßen Ansammlung und heterogenen Aktivität mit unbekanntem Ziel” (18). Goethe’s morphology *does* concern itself with “die Dialektik von Teil und Ganzem,” but this mereological relation takes on a different structure or proto-structure within each different ontological realm (mineral, vegetal, animal, etc.). At the same time, Geulen’s endlessly helpful insight that exceptions draw Goethe’s attention more than phenomena that exemplify the rule in a straightforward manner helps explain how these mereological structures are ever re-organized, sometimes in such a way that they begin to uncannily approximate other levels of sub- or supra-organization (e.g., the proximity of certain kinds of vegetal organism to mineral formations discussed above).

<sup>68</sup> Hans Lipps conceived of subordination as allowing the animal organism in its irreducible wholeness (“Ganzheitsbezogenheit”) to come into view. Strictly speaking, subordination only becomes visible as the organism decays, when its wholeness begins to approach mechanism (131). In a fully realized state of health, the parts fade into

### 1b *Selfish Barnacles: Holistic Unity as Mereological Agon*

Goethe's remarks in other essays on the organization of animal parts suggest that the morphological observer may operate with the part/whole distinction as a heuristic tool rather than an ontological distinction, a means of framing a vital phenomenon in order to render it more intelligible. This becomes apparent in the least likely of places: Goethe's frequent contemplation of the animal as a 'world' unto itself. In the 1795 "Erster Entwurf einer allgemeinen Einleitung in die vergleichende Anatomie, ausgehend von der Osteologie," Goethe claims that "Wir denken uns also das abgeschlossene Tier als eine kleine Welt, die um ihrer selbst willen und durch sich selbst da ist."<sup>69</sup> This draws on Kant's notion of the organism's inner purposiveness, the idea that an animal's parts are both cause and effect of one another in a reciprocal co-determination (*nexus finalis*). This means that such parts organize *themselves* into a whole and can only be understood with reference to this self-organizing whole, the unifying concept of which (termed a *Naturzweck*) the organism itself immanently contains.<sup>70</sup>

Goethe is willing creatively to adapt such a mereological model, however, when confronted with a living being in its phenomenal multiplicity. In a dazzling 1823 essay on barnacles, "Die Lepadon," Goethe begins by pluralizing the organism in question, taking its parts as individual wholes in order to do justice to the unique living being before him: "Jede zweischalige Muschel, die sich in ihren Wänden von der übrigen Welt absondert, sehen wir billig als ein Individuum an."<sup>71</sup> Goethe is careful to qualify this by remarking that one sees "hier kein isoliertes Wesen, sondern verbunden mit einem Stiele oder Schlauch."<sup>72</sup> Unlike higher animals

---

wholeness, into the animal's life in its habitual self-enactment. Cf. Hans Lipps. "Die Subordination der Organe. Zur Philosophie der Biologie." In: *Die Wirklichkeit des Menschen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 1921. Pg. 127-152.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 234.

<sup>70</sup> Immanuel Kant. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Hamburg: Meiner. 2006. Pg. 280-281 (§65).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 610.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 611.

such as mammals, then, barnacles are both one organism and a community of organisms (as Goethe puts it, even each individual shell forms a “Mehrheit”).<sup>73</sup> Drawing on an essay by Carus as well as examining actual specimens brought from Jena, Goethe juxtaposes *Lepas anatifera* (the goose barnacle) with *Lepas polliceps* (the “Entenmuschel”) to sketch two opposed forms of self-organization, the first regular, symmetrical, and predetermined (“prästabiliert”), the second irregular, asymmetrical, and open-ended by virtue of being internally antagonistic. Unlike the goose barnacle, which grows exactly five shells in regularly spaced intervals, the *Lepas polliceps* will develop as many shells as it can, vigorously multiplying and varying itself until it runs out of free space. One can observe the traces of this potentially infinite productivity in the little ‘points’ that indicate potential shell formations on the barnacle’s stem: “Diese Punkte jedoch sind nur Schalen in der Möglichkeit, welche nicht wirklich werden,” though they remain in possession of “einen Antrieb wirklich zu werden” should more space present itself for their growth.<sup>74</sup> As in the case of a vegetal entelechy thrown off track by “Einzelstrebende” who seek greater independence and self-diversification (as is their ‘right’), Goethe here wonders at the exuberant vital activity of the ‘irregular’ barnacle in its compensatory function: “Hier bewundern wir die Geschäftigkeit der Natur den Mangel der ausreichenden Kraft durch die Menge der Tätigkeit zu ersetzen.”<sup>75</sup> *Lepas polliceps* persists despite insufficient space and a ‘lack’ of force such that the “Hauptpunkte der Schalwerdung” form “eine Art von winziger Perlenschnur um die Grenze der Ausdehnung [...], wo sodann aller Übertritt aus der Möglichkeit in die Wirklichkeit durchaus versagt ist.”<sup>76</sup> Even when its self-realization is inexorably hindered and futile, the ‘busyness’ (“Geschäftigkeit”) of

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> *FA I 24*, 611.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> *FA I 24*, 611-612.

nature leaves behind visible traces of potential activity in an expansionary movement that results in ornamentation (“Perlenschnur”).

Remarkably, Goethe claims that the barnacle’s space for growth is not insufficient simply due to *external* environmental factors, but due to an *internal* strife. Each potential shell exerts competitive pressure on its neighbors: “hier, bei genauer Betrachtung, scheint es als wenn jeder Schalpunkt sich eile, die nächsten aufzuzehren, sich auf ihre Kosten zu vergrößern, und zwar in dem Augenblick ehe sie zum Werden gelangen.”<sup>77</sup> Once in existence, however, even the smallest of shells cannot be eaten up by a “Nachbar,” leading Goethe to conclude that “alles Gewordene setzt sich mit einander ins Gleichgewicht.”<sup>78</sup> *Lepas polliceps* achieves such holistic balance only through the most ruthless internal competition, in which “mancher einzelne Punkt so viel Besitz und Raum sich anmaßt als er nur gewinnen kann.”<sup>79</sup> By the essay’s end, not only does each shell isolate itself from the surrounding world (“von der übrigen Welt absondert”), but one observes *Lepas polliceps* qua whole such that “man sodann oberwärts von Stelle zu Stelle kleine Welten sieht.”<sup>80</sup> The little dots indicative of thwarted shell-formation (the “Perlenschnur”) themselves morph into “kleine Welten.” Anything but one world unto itself, then, these aberrant barnacles are made up of many worlds, the ‘whole’ thereby constituted paradoxically achieving stability and unity only through an inner *agon*, in which each of its parts strives to become a ‘world,’ a kind of whole, of its own at the expense of other parts. A ‘balance’ is reached only insofar as the shells’ individual strivings cancel each other out, as it were.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> *FA I 24*, 612.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *FA I 24*, 610, 612.

<sup>81</sup> Tantillo tellingly refers to the shells, which compete with one another for “Besitz und Raum,” as “Hobbesian barnacles.” One might alternatively align *Lepas polliceps* with Adam Smith, for one does glimpse a kind of free market ideology at work here, one where the totality of individual self-interests are presumed to balance one another out for the greater good. Cf. Astrid Orle Tantillo. *The Will to Create. Goethe’s Philosophy of Nature*. Pittsburgh: UPP. 2002. Pg. 163-168.

The case of *Lepas polliceps* further underscores how the part/whole relation in morphological method lies downstream from the more conceptually primary relation between structure and genesis. Wholes are only ever constituted in time, as are their parts, and such processes occur in simultaneous interdependence on one another, for – in the case of the animal – the whole is through its parts, the parts only intelligible through the idea of whole. What is so unique about this barnacle and fixes Goethe’s attention is thus the genetic process through which even the failure of many parts (here, shells) to develop into wholes nonetheless leads to the emergence of a second-order whole. Visible traces of a stunted emergence, the “Hauptpunkte der Schalwerdung” empirically display remainders of a (non)becoming, fixing the incipient moment of an “Übertritt aus der Möglichkeit in die Wirklichkeit” in a mark that discloses to the eye of the mind the modal threshold between potentiality and actuality.<sup>82</sup> Given that this barnacle’s unique kind of wholeness takes the form of an inner unity-in-strife *between* its parts, each shell-point affords the possibility of observing a non-actualized possibility. One observes *pars pro toto*, in other words, the very instant of the whole’s antagonistic emergence as reflected in the striving of a part to become actual: “Wer das Glück hätte, diese Geschöpfe im Augenblick, wenn das Ende des Schlauches sich ausdehnt und die Schalenwerdung beginnt, mikroskopisch zu betrachten, dem müßte eins der herrlichsten Schauspiele werden die der Naturfreund sich wünschen kann.”<sup>83</sup> If the animal is a world unto itself, then this barnacle forms a world of many mutually competing worlds. The drama of this mereological abnormality is aestheticized into a theatrical presentation so worth seeing that Goethe is willing to put aside his usual distrust of scientific instruments in order to occupy a microscopic front-row seat.

---

<sup>82</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 611-612.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 612.



### *1.c Insubordinate Parts: The vita propria of the Animal Eye*

Though Goethe was fascinated by the aberrant *Lepas polliceps*, in the case of more complex mammals organized into mutually subordinated parts, his judgments are harsher. The essay “Fossiler Stier” (1821) juxtaposes two ways in which an animal part may overtake the whole in which it finds itself embedded. The independent life of the animal eye qua part constitutes the negative case, leading to ‘wild,’ ‘raw,’ and misshapen wholes as reflected in skulls from different mammal species. A prehistoric bull’s superfluously twisted horns constitute the positive case, one on which it is worth dwelling, for here Goethe does not so much aestheticize an ‘abnormal’ organic part of an organism as the organism aestheticizes *itself*. It is at this very juncture that the morphological observer’s own (human) eye for natural beauty comes into play, opening considerations that will lead Goethe to contemplate the kinds of wholes formed by ancient sculptures of horse heads from the Elgin marbles and St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice. A consideration of the animal eye’s mereological *insubordination* thus leads Goethe to a reflection on the human eye’s propensity for discovering beauty in nature and even surpassing it in the creation of a visual artwork.

“Fossiler Stier” begins with a lengthy citation of a comparison made in Wilhelm Körte’s “Urstier-Schädel” (1821) between the skull of a recently discovered prehistoric bull and a domestic one. In a sly, indirect reply to Körte, Goethe proceeds to recount how he, too, recently acquired two fossil skulls: the first genuinely prehistoric and found near Haßleben, subsequently brought to Weimar, then Jena, for reconstruction; the second a Hungarian ox skull brought to Weimar from Vienna. Sacrificing his own idiosyncrasies (*Eigenheiten*) in order to join the greater whole that is the scientific community, Goethe passes over the theoretical differences between himself and Körte in silence, instead focusing on commonalities: “indem wir sie [“jene[] Körtischen Betrachtungen”] unserer Überzeugung ganz gemäß finden, fügen wir noch einiges

Bestätigende hinzu.”<sup>84</sup> Körte found the domesticated bull “besonnener, williger, gutmütiger, ja verständiger; die Form im ganzen edler; die des Urstiers roher, trotziger, starrsinniger, stumpfer.”<sup>85</sup> Körte continues to engage in this rather capricious physiognomic mode of description, recounting how the “Urstier” transformed through generations until finally domesticated by man: “Ehe der Mensch war, war der Urstier, er war wenigstens, ehe der Mensch für ihn da war. Der Umgang, die Pflege des Menschen hat des Urstiers Organisation unstreitig gesteigert.”<sup>86</sup> Körte’s synchronic comparison of animal skulls morphs into a diachronic account of species change moored to a static teleological line of development that proceeds from the wild prehistoric bull to its ‘nobler’ domesticated variant. For Körte, the human is teleologically there ‘for’ the bull, as if the animal awaited the emergence of the human. Goethe would have rejected this anthropocentric focus on domestication (what would today be called artificial selection).

What certainly attracted Goethe’s attention to the passage, however, is the vital, even agentive activity Körte ascribes to the prehistoric bull.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Körte’s narrative imagination undermines his negative physiognomy of the prehistoric bull insofar as it imagines the animal to have already, *before* the appearance of man onto the scene of nature, begun domesticating itself, as it were. The creature is said by Körte to evince “immer stärkere tierische Verlangen, auch nach vorn hin bequem zu sehen [...] das Bestreben, leichter, klarer und noch weiter hin zu hören [...] der mächtige tierische Instinkt, für Wohlsein und Nahrung immer mehr Eindrücke der sinnlichen Welt in sich aufzunehmen.”<sup>88</sup> What remains the aftereffect of a ‘merely’ figurative language of motivation-ascription in Körte gains the consistency of scientific thought for Goethe. The prehistoric bull ‘strives’ to become more perfect (*vollkommen*) insofar as its sense organs

---

<sup>84</sup> *FA I 24*, 556.

<sup>85</sup> *FA I 24*, 554.

<sup>86</sup> *FA I 24*, 555.

<sup>87</sup> *FA I 24*, 556.

<sup>88</sup> *FA I 24*, 555. Emphasis added.

gradually become more complex, more reciprocally subordinated to one another so as to take in more of the external world through optical and auditory senses. In striving to open up its sensorium to receive the world, the bull transforms the unitary world of its own organism and its sensory channels. In contrast to Körte's just-so story, then, Goethe provides mereological reasons that account for *why* the prehistoric bull's form of organization differs from that of more domestic creatures: "Alle einzelne Glieder der wildesten, rohsten, völlig ungebildeten Tiere haben eine kräftige vita propria, besonders kann man dieses von den Sinnes-Werkzeugen sagen; sie sind weniger abhängig vom Gehirn, sie bringen gleichsam ihr Gehirn mit sich und sind sich selbst genug."<sup>89</sup> Unlike Körte, the word *ungebildet* here is not charged with the anthropocentric end of taming in mind (as in 'uneducated'), but with the Goethean sense of less complex (as in 'unformed'). Furthermore, the animal qua whole is not characterized as a narrative agent, but its parts, the sense organs themselves, evince a life of their own, even a self-sufficiency, that will gradually give way to subordination. Wholeness for Goethe is thus not a given, but an achievement, not a state, but a self-maintaining process on a spectrum ranging from the inwardly tensed vegetal unity open to self-dispersion to the strife-riven community of barnacles up to the more unitary world of the animal. Like the plant's striving to become more 'perfect,' the *Urstier* seeks greater subordination, a more absolute form of unity that results not in self-enclosure, but in the bull's sensorial opening up to the outer environment. At the same time, however, Goethe is careful to distinguish between logically distinct modes of mereological 'insubordination:' in the case of more indifferent (*gleichgültiges*) vegetal life, which does not exhibit proper individuation as animals do, parts more easily gain a life of their own, can be seen as other parts *in potentia* developmentally down- or upstream given the plant's reversible process-logic, while in the case

---

<sup>89</sup> *FA I 24*, 557.

of animal life, insubordination will be precariously poised between a monstrous tumescence of the part or the achievement of a more complex unity.

Goethe's argument calls on the visual evidence of three skulls aligned in an illustration from Eduard d'Alton's *Vergleichende Osteologie*, paying particular attention to the position of the eye cavities (Figure 1).<sup>90</sup> Of the Ethiopian pig, Goethe claims that one can observe "die Stellung des Auges, das, als wären die Schädelbeine ausgeschlossen, sich unmittelbar mit dem Hinterhauptsknochen zu verbinden scheint. Hier fehlt das Gehirn beinahe ganz [...] und das Auge hat gerade so viel Leben für sich als zu seiner Funktion nötig sein mag."<sup>91</sup> This ancient pig's eyes have their own *vita propria* or "Leben für sich," as if they possessed their own 'brain' rather than being functionally subordinated to a separate cerebral organ that would steer them. The pig's eye thus has greater independence from the whole skull. Goethe claims that the skulls of the *Babirussa* and *Tapir* (depicted immediately below on d'Alton's illustration) allow one to see how the position of the eye gradually descends, creating more space between the eye and the bones at the back of the skull, such that "noch ein mäßiges Gehirn zu supponieren wäre."<sup>92</sup> Unlike the Ethiopian pig, the eyes of such organisms are more subordinated to the brain, thus more dependent on the whole. Goethe then turns to Körte's illustration of the prehistoric bull to claim that "die Kapsel des Augapfels" are pushed to the side of the skull, "so daß der Augapfel als ein abgesondertes Glied an einem etwaigen Nervenapparat erscheinen müßte" (Figure 2).<sup>93</sup> This is in line with Körte's claim that the prehistoric bull strove to see more comfortably, such that "die Lage der Augenhöhlen des Urstier-Schädels und ihre Form allmählich verändert."<sup>94</sup> At the same

---

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Eduard Joseph d'Alton & Christian Heinrich Pander. *Vergleichende Osteologie: Die Skelete der Pachydermata abgebildet, beschrieben und verglichen*. Bonn: bei Eduard Weber. 1821. Pg. 43.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 557.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

time, the bull's eyes remain strikingly isolated at the peripheries of the skull, more differentiated but not yet fully subordinated.

At this juncture in the essay, the morphological observer's own eye exerts its *vita propria*: Goethe turns away from contemplating the organ of the animal eye and shifts his attention to another part in this whole, the prehistoric bull's horns, seeing in these horns an aesthetic phenomenon *within* the realm of nature. When seen in profile, one notices that the prehistoric bull's horns curve inward (Figure 2, top). Taking into account that one only sees the bony core of the horn, Goethe argues that, when the bull lived, its horns would have actually extended further, ultimately curling back to meet their site of origin on the skull: "nun krümmen sie sich einwärts und laufen in einer solchen Stellung aus [...] so würden sie in solcher Richtung wieder bis gegen die Wurzel der Hornkerne gelangen, in welcher Stellung also diese sogenannten Waffen dem Geschöpfe eben so unnütz werden müssen als die Hautzähne des Sus Babirusa."<sup>95</sup> Forming a kind of spiral ring rather than projecting their pointy ends forward, the horns 'overflow' (*auslaufen*) their own apparent instrumentality (the end of the animal's self-defense) to become "unnütz." Goethe's hatred of teleological ends in nature is well documented: as early as the "Erster Entwurf" (1795), Goethe insisted that "Man wird nicht behaupten, einem Stier seien die Hörner gegeben daß er stöße, sondern man wird untersuchen, wie er Hörner haben könne um zu stoßen."<sup>96</sup> Such telic ends (*Endzwecke*) are grounded in an anthropomorphic or theologically preordained external purposiveness, much like that invoked by Körte in his description of how the prehistoric bull awaited domestication by man. Goethe adamantly rejects such external ends that would explain an organic part's function without recourse to the whole's inner form of organization. Goethe does *not*, however, thereby reject an *inner* purposiveness or 'end' within the

---

<sup>95</sup> *FA I 24*, 557-558.

<sup>96</sup> *FA I 24*, 234.

whole of the animal. Rather than accounting for the horns in terms of the bull's inner purposiveness, however, Goethe here explains how they abdicate all instrumentality and become purposeless, i.e. aesthetic. The passage is worth quoting in full, for it presents one of the few cases in which Goethe celebrates how an insubordinate part might overtake the whole in the animal realm, leading not to a monstrously tumescent growth but to natural beauty:

Im allgemeinen werde hier bemerkt: das Lebendige wenn es ausläuft, so daß es wo nicht abgestorben doch abgeschlossen erscheint, pflegt sich zu krümmen, wie wir an Hörnern, Klauen, Zähnen gewöhnlich erblicken; krümmt nun und wendet sich schlängelnd zugleich, so entsteht daraus das Anmutige, das Schöne. Diese fixierte, obgleich noch immer beweglich scheinende Bewegung ist dem Auge höchst angenehm; Hogarth mußte, beim Aufsuchen der einfachsten Schönheitslinie darauf geführt werden [...] Hatte nun Hogarth die Schönheit bis in dieses Abstrakte verfolgt, so ist nichts natürlicher als daß dies Abstrakte, wenn es dem Auge wirklich erscheint, mit einem angenehmen Eindruck überraschen müsse.<sup>97</sup>

The same verbs (*auslaufen*, *sich krümmen*) used to describe the bull's horns now characterize "das Lebendige" as such, its aestheticizing propensity to overflow all potential instrumental ends and to curve inwards out of itself, escaping all mereological subordination. This does not lead to the part's dying off, to its severance from the whole, but to an excess of vital activity beyond the task of merely bringing the part's formation to completion ("wo nicht abgestorben doch abgeschlossen"). In the case of the bull, his horns take on the shape of Hogarth's serpentine line of beauty (Figure 3). The essay frames this observation such that it is not Körte's *drawing* that suggests Hogarth's abstractly ornamental pattern, but the horns themselves. In other words, this bovine fossil transforms in the mental eye of Goethe's imagination into a paradoxically petrified movement or imaginatively mobile petrification, a fixed mobility that testifies to what Goethe elsewhere termed "die ewige Mobilität aller Formen in der Erscheinung:" "[d]iese fixierte,

---

<sup>97</sup> *FA I 24*, 557.

obgleich noch immer beweglich scheinende Bewegung.”<sup>98</sup> The fossil hence becomes a testament not just to an extinct species, but to a purposeless excess of vital formative activity that turns in on itself to become aesthetic. The part’s de-instrumentalization crucially depends on this event of self-reference, a becoming more independent from the whole: “daß die Natur aus einer gewissen ernstesten, wilden Konzentration die Hörner des Urstiers *gegen ihn selbst kehrt*, und ihn dadurch der Waffe gleichsam beraubt, deren er in seinem Naturzustande so nötig hätte.”<sup>99</sup> What follows is an aestheticization in which the horn formation, once the animal is in a tamed state, gains “eine ganz andere Richtung[,] indem sie sich zugleich aufwärts, und auswärts mit großer Eleganz bewegt.”<sup>100</sup> This ‘elegant’ movement that transgresses beyond the horn’s original function does not hinder the animal by spiraling out of control, but reaches a kind of closure in novelty, the creation of a *new* part: after extending outward, “die Hornschale konzentriert sich immer mehr bis sie zuletzt, wo sie selbständig, über den Kern hinausragend als konsolidiertes organisches Wesen zum Abschluß gelangt.”<sup>101</sup> The horns gain a degree of independence qua part from the whole, become themselves a ‘consolidated’ organic being, a micro-whole, as it were. Such self-aestheticization of nature depends throughout the text on the operative term “Konzentration,” ‘wild’ yet ‘serious,’ capable of unleashing its excess energies without overflowing altogether, instead returning to reconsolidate itself, to “konzentriert sich” in new form. In the petrified mobility of this mereologically insubordinate transformation, Goethe sees how the emergence of natural beauty affords an intuition of “das Lebendige” itself as that very movement that transgresses all fixture of boundary in the shift from energetic expression to formal concentration. What Goethe intuits here,

---

<sup>98</sup> Goethe invokes this ‘eternal mobility’ in his discussion of the monstrous three-toed sloth in connection to d’Alton’s drawings, discussed below. Cf. *FA I* 24, 546.

<sup>99</sup> *FA I* 24, 559. Emphasis added.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

in other words, is how life itself comes to achieve form, not in an instant, but qua genetic process that involves a moment of ‘insubordinate,’ seemingly de- and proto-formative vital spontaneity.

Any domestication of nature in which humans might partake thus ultimately depends for Goethe on nature’s own striving to ‘ennoble’ itself in exceeding its immanent limitations, in allowing parts to exercise their rights at the risk of overtaking the whole, whether in monstrous deformation or beautiful excess. The thematic turn in “Fossiler Stier” from the *vita propria* of the animal eye to the bull’s beautiful fossil curlicues simultaneously represents a moment of scientific self-reflexivity, a re-turn to the human eye observing itself observe nature. Goethe’s observational focus on the gradually more subordinated position of the animal eye in d’Alton’s illustration (Figure 1; see Appendix of Images) hence morphs at this textual juncture into a second-order observation that situates the human eye’s own apprehension of beauty (“dem Auge höchst angenehm”) *within* the natural order. Goethe grounds Hogarth’s aesthetic abstraction of the line of beauty in a concrete optical sensation unique to the animal part of the human eye: “*so ist nichts natürlicher* als daß dieses Abstrakte, wenn es dem Auge wirklich erscheint...” In the same vein, human attempts to domesticate nature find themselves rooted – contra Körte – in nature’s own potential modes of ‘self-domestication,’ through which animals and even certain of their parts transform themselves for their own sake. The same syntagm invoked to explain Hogarth’s aesthetic phenomenon by reference to the human sense organ of the eye repeats to situate the human domestication *of* nature *within* nature: “*so ist nichts natürlicher* als daß der Landmann, bei sonstiger schöner Gestalt seiner Tiere, auch regelmäßige Bildung der Hörner verlangt.”<sup>102</sup> What began as an irregular natural formation now becomes regular *for humans* in an aesthetic respect, even leading Goethe to describe a machine preserved in a Jena museum that was used by

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.



herdsmen to steer horn growth into optically pleasing shapes.<sup>103</sup> The essay thus subtly shifts to reflect implicitly on how the visually imaginative human eye qua animal part may take on a life of its own, cultivating nature into a second nature, into art.

Just as the plant's entelechic self-realization depended on "die herrschende Gesundheit" of its governing stem, such that it maintains its unruly parts within a whole configuration, so human beings, too, possess their own immanent norm of health that would determine how their parts coalesce into a whole. For the human being, however, such a 'healthy' form of mereological organization takes shape as a whole comprised of micro-wholes, a capacious unity capable of withstanding, even requiring, that parts exert lives of their own: "Gesunde Menschen sind die in deren Leibes- und Geistes-Organisation jeder Theil eine *vita propria* hat."<sup>104</sup> Alongside the remark on the animal eye's *vita propria*, this is the only other use of the Latinate term in Goethe's oeuvre. What was an organizational feature of the 'wildest,' least formed animals recrudesces in metamorphosed shape as a central aspect of the human being's own anthropological nature. The mereological insubordination of an animal part that would ruin an organic whole can thus open onto the possibility of an aesthetic whole or even the kind of complex whole that is the human being, the parts of which live multiple lives of their own. The human here emerges as a mereological unity that contains multitudes.

---

<sup>103</sup> This account differs from that of Richards, who reads Goethe as a kind of Lamarckian precursor to Darwin. Richards interprets the essay's remarks on superfluous horn formation as an example of artificial selection that "also happened to produce a more beautiful formation" and "consequently became heritable" (482). This neglects the horn-part's self-relating liberation from the organic whole to become an aesthetic whole. Though Goethe does note that "das alte Geschöpf [läßt sich] als eine weit verbreitete untergegangene Stamm-Race betrachten" (FA I 24, 553), he nonetheless remained adamantly against all implications that species evolve into one another (and would certainly be against any mechanistic, Darwinian idea of natural selection based on external determinations of selective pressure). Attempts to read Goethe in retrospect as a kind of precursor to Darwin are highly questionable. As botanist and physician Ernst Meyer elaborates in "Erwiderung," written in response to "Probleme" sent to him in a letter by Goethe and published in the morphological notebooks (thus in a sense adopted as Goethe's own): "Es ist unmöglich, daß eine Art aus der andern hervorgehe [...] Wer aber sie [Abweichungen] für Arten nimmt, darf das Schwankende des ihnen willkürlich zugeschriebenen Charakters nicht der Natur beimessen, oder gar daraus *auf ein Schwanken der Arten überhaupt schließen*" (FA I 24, 587, emphasis added). Cf. Robert Richards. *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*. Chicago: UCP. 2008.

<sup>104</sup> From "Maximen und Reflexionen über Literatur und Ethik, Aus dem Nachlaß." Cf. WA I 42.2, 231.

### *1.d Aesthetic Insubordination: The Case of Robert Haydon's Horses*

It is worth dwelling further with the *vita propria* of the animal eye, whether bovine or human, for it leads Goethe to one of the only other essays in his morphological notebooks that addresses art explicitly and with regard to mereological relations. At the same time, turning to this last case of an artistically depicted horse's eye will allow us to elucidate one aspect of the fourth epistemic dimension of morphological method, namely that of the observer's active participation in the formative processes of nature and even, in the case of human aesthetic activity, the artist's capacity to expand creatively upon the lawfulness of nature in learning from it. In his discussion of the volume of d'Alton's comparative osteology in "Die Raubtiere und Widerkauer," Goethe recalls his previous assessment of the Ethiopian pig's unsubordinated eye, a case of a part's monstrous independence from the whole: "die vorragenden Augenhöhlen, bei monströser Stellung gegen das Hinterhaupt [gelten] als ein Zeichen der Wildheit und Roheit des Geschöpfs."<sup>105</sup> Rather than actually discussing d'Alton's work, however, Goethe draws on an essay published in an 1820 issue of *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum* by Heinrich Meyer (written 1819). Meyer's essay is, in turn, itself a discussion of an essay by Robert Haydon (in French translation), "On the Comparison between the Venetian Horse's Head, said to be by Lysippus, and the Horse's Head from the Parthenon, in the Elgin Collection" (1818).<sup>106</sup>

The key innovation of Meyer's essay vis-à-vis Haydon's lies in its reluctance to judge the more ancient sculpture from the Parthenon to be aesthetically superior to the later Venetian one. Making "kein Urteil über das Verhältnis des Wertes, welchen beide Denkmale gegen einander haben mögen," Meyer instead invokes "bloß Verschiedenheit des Stils [...], folglich auch der Zeit,

---

<sup>105</sup> *FA I* 24, 602-603.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Heinrich Meyer. "Vergleichung zweier antiker Pferdeköpfe." In: *Kunst und Alterthum*. Bd. 2, Heft 2. Pg. 88-98. Reprinted in: Ernst Grumach. *Goethe und die Antike*. Berlin: de Gruyter. 1949. Pg. 507-509; Robert Haydon. "On the Comparison between the Venetian Horse's Head, said to be by Lysippus, and the Horse's Head from the Parthenon, in the Elgin Collection." *Annals of the Fine Arts*. Vol. III, No. 9. 1818. Pg. 177-185.

welcher sie angehören. [...] denn beide sind vortrefflich.”<sup>107</sup> Where Haydon would set up a timelessly classical normative ideal for art, Meyer acknowledges the historicity of the aesthetic and thus that any aesthetic normative criterion remains immanent to a unique, historically specific style.<sup>108</sup> In his judgmental assessment, Haydon had focused in particular on the position of the eye in relation to the ear, concluding:

Thus it is seen that the horse, however elevated in character or poetical in conception, must have his eye projecting [...] and any representation of a horse whether in painting or sculpture, and at whatever age or whatever period, which has the eye sunk [...] is an unnatural and untrue representation of a horse.<sup>109</sup>

If one observes the drawing Haydon appended to his essay, one can see that the Elgin horse’s eye does indeed protrude, the Venetian horse’s eye appearing, as Haydon argues, more anthropomorphic and lax in comparison (Figure 4). Meyer’s own ekphrasis of the sculptures selects individually observed details from Haydon’s descriptions only to mobilize them toward an assessment of the expressive features of each rendering:<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Grumach. Pg. 509.

<sup>108</sup> Meyer’s disagreement with Hayden largely follows the same strategy that governs Goethe’s disagreement with Körte in “Fossiler Stier,” i.e. a strategy of replicating a thought experiment from a previously published essay, yet interpreting it differently the second time around, all while cloaking interpretive disagreement in a statement of professed collaboration. Körte compared two animal skulls, and Goethe likewise had two similar fossils brought to Weimar. Like Körte, Haydon conducts an ekphrastic rather than anatomical comparison of two horse heads, and Meyer notes that two plaster casts of the originals were shipped to Weimar, qualifying him to elaborate on Haydon’s comparison. Unlike Goethe, however, Meyer does not shy away from being quite explicit about his disagreement. One avenue of inquiry worth pursuing would be to track the diverse entries in Goethe’s periodical projects *Zur Morphologie* and *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum* that themselves parasitically draw on other publications, creatively reinterpreting them and thus allowing Goethe in his late age to exercise a kind of meta-editorial control over an increasingly unsurveyable field of scientific publications, achieving a kind of overview as well as strategically asserting his view through seemingly collaborative interventions that in fact often depart from the original publications’ arguments. Both journals operate according to a kind of meta-editorial publication practice of creative citation and pseudo-collaborative reinterpretation in print. Goethe’s essay “Myrons Kuh,” for example, calls on an entire background network of scholarship in order to creatively repurpose the disciplinary tools of a nascent *Alterthumswissenschaft*. The pseudo-scholarly article attempts to secure empirically Goethe’s normative ideal for visual art by situating in with an art-historical gap: the aesthetic reconstruction of a lost sculpture of antiquity that has never been seen, but did empirically exist. Myron’s lost cow sculpture forms an art historical lacuna for Goethe’s imagination and thus an anchor in historical empiricity that secures his normative ideal of classical beauty from the corrosive acid of its increasingly more pressing historicization.

<sup>109</sup> Robert Haydon. “On the Comparison between the Venetian Horse’s Head, said to be by Lysippus, and the Horse’s Head from the Parthenon, in the Elgin Collection.” *Annals of the Fine Arts*. Vol. III, No. 9. 1818. Pg. 184-185.

<sup>110</sup> Meyer’s essay draws on a tradition of animal physiognomy indebted to Tischbein and his collaborators (Lavater, Blumenbach, Christian Gottlob Heyne, the philologist who taught Friedrich August Wolf and A.W. Schlegel) that

Das Pferde aus Athen ist höher gedacht, gewaltiger, schnaubend, mit gerundeten vorliegenden Augen gespenstermäßig blickend. Die Ohren zurückgelegt, den Mund geöffnet, scheint es stürmisch vorwärts zu dringen, aber mit Macht angehalten zu werden. [...] Die Augen sind vortrefflich gestaltet und vollendet.<sup>111</sup>

For the Venetian horse, on the other hand, Meyer describes how “die Umrisse sind fließender, biegen sanfter aus und ein, das Their ist weit ruhiger und bezähmter dargestellt, freudigen Muthes, doch willig dem Zügel gehorchend.”<sup>112</sup> In such juxtaposition, the horses align to generate a polarity between the wild and the tame. The Athenian one gazes outwards in intense, wild concentration, as if it were about to thrust forward (“stürmisch vorwärts zu dringen”), and yet this insipient movement is held back and limited by the rider’s “Macht” so as to form (much like the petrified twists and turns of the bull’s horns) an image of plastically arrested mobility. Meyer sees in the Venetian horse, on the other hand, a more joyful equestrian disposition that ‘willfully obeys’ and holds itself back. Following Haydon’s description, and returning once more to the animal eye, Meyer notes that “Einige Abweichung von der Natur an dieser Stelle und Hinneigen zur Gestalt des menschlichen Auges läßt sich daher nicht leugnen.”<sup>113</sup> Unlike Haydon, however, Meyer does not for this reason denigrate the Venetian sculpture’s aesthetic worth. On the contrary, he calls on a mereological relation to explain its internal norm of assessment: “In solch milderem Sinne hat der Meister sich das Ganze gedacht und dazu das Verhältnis der Theile schicklich gewählt, die Augen blicken sanfter.”<sup>114</sup>

In the second volume of his *Zur Morphologie*, Goethe strategically reframes Meyer’s description in terms of his own anatomical considerations of the eye’s *vita propria*, the context now natural scientific rather than art historical. In particular, Goethe’s intervention consists in

---

cannot be sketched here. Cf. Peter Reindl. “Tischbeins Entwurf zu einer physiognomischen Systematik für den Historienmaler.” In: *Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein. Das Werk des Goethe-Malers zwischen Kunst, Wissenschaft und Alltagskultur*. Petersberg 2001. Pg. 75-102.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Grumach. Pg. 508.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Grumach. Pg. 509.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

filling in the gap left by Meyer by explaining the kind of whole formed by the *Athenian* horse's head and the role of the eye qua part within it.<sup>115</sup> The passage is worth quoting in full, for it systematically vacillates between considering the horse as an organic and/or an aesthetic whole:

An dem Elginschen Pferdekopf, einem der herrlichsten Reste der höchsten Kunstzeit, finden sich die Augen frei hervorstehend und gegen das Ohr gerückt, wodurch die beiden Sinne, Gesicht und Gehör, unmittelbar zusammen zu wirken scheinen und das erhabene Geschöpf durch geringe Bewegung sowohl hinter sich zu hören als zu blicken fähig wird. Es sieht so übermächtig und geisterartig aus als wenn es gegen die Natur gebildet wäre, und doch jener Beobachtung gemäß hat der Künstler eigentlich ein Urpferd geschaffen, mag er solches mit Augen gesehen oder im Geiste verfaßt haben; uns wenigstens scheint es im Sinne der höchsten Poesie und Wirklichkeit dargestellt zu sein.<sup>116</sup>

In "Fossiler Stier," Goethe had claimed that "Sinnes-Werkzeugen" in particular "bringen ihr Gehirn mit sich und sind sich selbst genug" in wilder, less organized animals from prehistoric times.<sup>117</sup> Rather than a monstrous independence of the sense organs qua parts from the whole, the Elgin horse evinces optical and aural organs that are so fully subordinate to the whole that they seamlessly collaborate.<sup>118</sup> The horse's individual parts, in other words, 'fade' back into the intensified wholeness of the animal's activity. Unlike taste, which obliterates the sensed object in sensing it, or touch, which must make contact with the sensed in the act of sensing, sight and audition are non-interventionist senses, their channels here unified into a higher mode of world-

---

<sup>115</sup> Already in Italy, Goethe had seen the horses in St. Mark's in person, wondering in a diary entry from Oct. 6, 1786: "Die Pferde auf der Markuskirche in der Nuage. Treffliche Gestalten! [...] Ein herrlicher Zug Pferde. Ich möchte einen rechten Pferdekennner darüber reden hören" (*FA I* 15, 702). Goethe sent the image appended to Haydon's essay (Fig. 4) to an actual "Pferdekennner," the Jena professor of veterinary sciences Theobald Renner, who acquired in 1818 a plaster casting of the Venetian horse from Paris for Goethe. Like Goethe, Renner also thought Haydon was too harsh in judging the Venetian horse.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 603.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 557.

<sup>118</sup> Goethe channels Meyer's ekphrasis in his adjective "geisterartig" (Meyer had referred to the Elgin horse's intense gaze as "gespenstermäßig blickend"). Goethe also departs, however, from Meyer's argument in giving a functional-merereological account of *why* the Athenian horse is so 'sublime.' Surreptitiously contra Meyer, Goethe takes up Hayden's rather lengthy discussion of why the Elgin horse's eyes must protrude and be placed near the ear. Hayden spent much time in his essay on physiological considerations of how horses have elongated pupils that allow them to see behind as well as in front of their bodies, trying to prove that the Athenian horse is better physiologically equipped than the Venetian one. Where Meyer categorically ignores Hayden's physiological flights of fancy, Goethe remobilizes them in service of Meyer's own aesthetic aims contra Hayden. Goethe himself wrote to Haydon, having his letter translated into English: "Those of use at Weimar, who love and admire the arts, share your enthusiasm for the remains of the most glorious period, and hold ourselves indebted to you for having enabled us to participate, to such a degree, in the enjoyment and contemplation of those works" (Feb. 16, 1819; *WA IV* 31, 94).

receptivity.<sup>119</sup> Where Haydon sees a faithful, even consummate imitation of nature, Goethe sees the artist's imagination as obeying a morphological regularity so as to surpass nature ("gegen die Natur gebildet") insofar as she comprehends with the eyes of the mind ("im Geiste verfaßt") the idea of the horse, "ein Urpferd" that so totally subordinates its parts to the whole as to exceed natural mereological configurations. A transition from organic to aesthetic wholes is here achieved.

In other words, the Elgin horse evinces style in the robust Goethean sense. A short aside is here in order. In "Einfache Nachahmung der Natur, Manier, Stil" (1789), Goethe distinguished between three modes of artistic production, each mode in turn internally differentiated in terms of the artwork's appropriate genre, the artist's psychological type, and the mode's relationship to the other two. Imitation is associated with the still life, depictions of "toten oder stillliegenden Gegenständen von ruhigen, treuen, eingeschränkten Menschen."<sup>120</sup> One might think here of Paulus Potter's *The Young Bull* (1647), a painting beloved in the nineteenth century depicting a cow's head so lifelike that the painterly detail with which each stroke of hair was set on canvas verges on obsession. Manner is associated with a more clever (one might say *geistreich*) type of artist psychology, with one who sees patterns among disparate objects and "erfindet sich selbst eine Weise, macht sich selbst eine Sprache, um das, was er mit der Seele ergriffen, wieder nach seiner Art auszudrücken."<sup>121</sup> The idiosyncrasy of subjective encounter with nature characterizes artistic manner, which will express the *felt* whole inwardly experienced only via artistic choice and selectivity, i.e. by systematically filtering out and even eliding some of the *natural* whole's

---

<sup>119</sup> For this reason, Goethe elsewhere claimed that one could write a *Tonlehre* alongside the *Farbenlehre*: "Wie zwei Flüsse, die auf einem Berge entspringen, aber unter ganz verschiedenen Bedingungen in zwei ganz entgegengesetzte Weltgegenden laufen, so daß auf dem beiderseitigen ganzen Wege keine einzelne Stelle der andern verglichen werden kann, so sind auch Farbe und Ton." Cited in: Hans Lipps. "Goethes Farbenlehre." In: *Die Wirklichkeit des Menschen. Werke* Bd. 5. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. Pg. 108-124, here: pg. 114.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *HA* 12, pg. 31.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

constituent parts, which “müssen aufgeopfert werden” in order for the work’s manner to come forth.<sup>122</sup> According to Goethe, landscapes are well suited for mannered artists, and one might imagine Caspar David Friedrich in this role.<sup>123</sup> Style, on the other hand, returns to nature in intensified fashion while at the same time cutting itself off from it. The artist penetrates to the ‘essence’ of things *in* subjectively grasping them, for style rests “auf den tiefsten Grundfesten der Erkenntnis.”<sup>124</sup> Goethe’s typology is more complex than it may seem, for, as he notes, all three modes are “genau miteinander verwandt,” such that “eine in die andere sich zart verlaufen kann.”<sup>125</sup> As the painters of Dutch still lives mentioned by Goethe attest, an imitative artist painting, say, roses may nonetheless achieve ‘style’ “wenn er zu seinem Talente noch ein unterrichteter Botaniker ist.”<sup>126</sup> Each genuine artwork hence partakes of all three modes simultaneously, each related to one another and hierarchized differently depending on the artwork in question. In the case of the Elgin horse’s head, then, the Greek sculptor has also, like a morphological zoologist, intuited the lawfulness operative in the formation of the kind of animal whole that it is. The mental apperception of this lawfulness – of an “Urpferd” – grants the artist the ability to invent novel horses that might not naturally exist, but *could* in an artwork.

In a conversation with Eckermann from October 20, 1828, Goethe returned to the Elgin horse and remarked that one should not conclude that Greek artists imitated a ‘more perfect’

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> This assessment is meant for heuristic orientation and is unfair to Friedrich, who shared the very last of the *Preisaufgaben* granted by the *Weimarer Kunst-Freunde* and was discussed at length in *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum* by Meyer, who disagreed with the way Friedrich would saturate his landscapes in an ethereal religious aura, but nonetheless praised his naturalism and astute eye for living formations. Cf. Meyer. “Siebente Weimarerische Kunstausstellung vom Jahre 1805. In: *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*. 3. Jahrgang. Bd. 1. 1806. Pg. 1-12; Meyer. “Neu-deutsche religiös-patriotische Kunst.” In: *FA I* 20, 123-4 [orig. in: *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum in den Rhein- und Mayngenden*. I.2. 1817.]

<sup>124</sup> *HA* 12, pg. 32.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. The adjective ‘zart’ represents a *terminus technicus* in Goethe’s lexicon. As Hennig demonstrates, the concept characterizes the ‘delicate’ points of transition in metamorphic development as well as the “Verzahnungen” between conceptual oppositions that end up being constitutively interwoven upon closer inspection (the term mediates between object- and observer-levels as well). Cf. John Hennig. “Goethes Begriff ‘ZART.’” *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*. Vol. 24, No. 1 (1980), pg. 77-102.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

nature than that which is currently present, as if such ancient horses actually did empirically exist in the past and have now simply gone extinct. Rather, for Goethe such artists of genuine style had gained a practical aesthetic capacity in coming to know nature's own formative lawfulness, "so daß sie [die Künstler] sich mit persönlicher Großheit an die Natur wandten."<sup>127</sup> Perplexed, Eckermann asks for an explanation, and Goethe invokes the artist's *own* nature:

Man muß etwas seyn, um etwas zu machen. [...] Wer aber etwas Großes machen will, muß seine Bildung so gesteigert haben, daß er gleich den Griechen im Stande sey, die geringere reale Natur zu der Höhe seines Geistes heranzuheben, und dasjenige wirklich zu machen, was in natürlichen Erscheinungen, aus innerer Schwäche oder aus äußerem Hinderniß, nur Intention geblieben ist.<sup>128</sup>

In surpassing nature, the artist simultaneously gives himself over to self-transformation, to an intensification of his own "Bildung," the term here poised at the very edge between the senses of human cultivation and natural formation. At the same time, the artist departs from nature in order to return to it in a higher sense, bringing to phenomenal actualization what remained 'mere intention' in nature: the idea of the horse. Rather than being limited by its epistemic reference (*Rückbezug*) back to nature, then, the aesthetic domain is here radically open-ended yet not therefore arbitrary precisely insofar as it remains true to nature's intentions by realizing them in unexpected, *unintended* directions as discovered by the artist. This is the case for the Elgin horse, sculpted "als wenn es gegen die Natur gebildet wäre." The aesthetic deed manages to realize sensuously and thereby ramify an idea that *necessarily* remains "nur Intention" in nature. Remarkably, Goethe carefully notes that this is not only due to a deficiency intrinsic to the hydra-like empirical realm of phenomenal multiplicity ("aus äußerem Hinderniß"), but also due to a 'weakness' within nature itself and its inner capacity for self-realization ("aus innerer Schwäche").

---

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Grumach. 511.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.



In a sense, nature needs art in order to realize most fully its own idea; art in turn is only possible because of the lack intrinsic to nature.

*1.e Scaling Observation: The Symbolic Unity of the Sciences*

In the context of the morphological notebooks, this complex of considerations centered around the Elgin horse's eye and ear raises the question of the relation between Goethe's natural science and his aesthetic views. If part/whole relations may serve as methodological tools used heuristically to frame vital phenomena, then what ensures that the morphological observer does not simply *project* wholeness onto the organism or entity in question, taking an apparent organic aggregate as an aesthetic whole? A remark from the historical section of the *Farbenlehre* articulates the difficulty and bites the bullet:

da im Wissen sowohl als in Reflexion kein Ganzes zusammengebracht werden kann, weil jenem das Innere, dieser das Äußere fehlt, so müssen wir uns die Wissenschaft notwendig als Kunst denken, wenn wir von ihr irgend eine Art von Ganzheit erwarten. Und zwar haben wir diese nicht im Allgemeinen, im Überschwänglichen zu suchen, sondern wie die Kunst sich immer *ganz in jedem einzelnen* Kunstwerk darstellt, so sollte die Wissenschaft sich auch jedesmal *ganz in jedem einzelnen* Behandelten erweisen.<sup>129</sup>

If objective knowledge (“Wissen”) lacks the ‘internality’ of first-personal participatory experience, if subjective reflection (“Reflexion”) lacks the ‘external’ traction of multifarious objective phenomena, then science needs an aesthetic perspective in order to achieve some sort of unity between the inner and the outer, the first-personal and the recalcitrance of the real. Goethe here acknowledges the necessary proximity of natural science and art at the same time that he calls attention to the impossibility of ever conflating the two. To do so would fabricate a projected or imposed form of wholeness “im Allgemeinen, im Überschwänglichen.” To take science as art

---

<sup>129</sup> Ernst Meyer quoted this passage from the *Farbenlehre* in his response to problems sent to him by Goethe and published in the second volume of *Zur Morphologie* as “Problem und Erwiderung.” This convoluted publication context – Goethe quoting Meyer quoting Goethe – can itself be understood as a citational strategy elsewhere employed with a view to establishing some sort of provisional or heuristic wholeness in the scientific fields of Goethe's own day. Goethe himself attempts here to achieve some sort of unity within his morphological writings by calling on collaborators such as Ernst Meyer to carry out what has remained “nur Intention” in his own work.

instead implies that the morphological scientist must reflexively apply her own methodological tools to morphological method itself, i.e., heuristically framing a scientific investigation of putative wholes itself *as* a whole. This liberates the morphological observer to operate at a distinct scale of observation and bracket out the others by allowing one scale of organizational analysis to stand for the rest: “ganz in jedem einzelnen,” as Goethe twice repeats. Goethe did just this when he saw the prehistoric bull’s extravagant horns as themselves a “konsolidiertes organisches Wesen” or when he considered *Lepas polliceps* to be a whole itself made up of many “kleine Welten.”<sup>130</sup>

This should not be taken to imply that morphological method imposes a holistic structure onto nature that is not actually present; rather, the wholeness of nature *in toto* functions as a kind of regulative maxim that underwrites other forms of (micro)wholeness at different scales of observation. The formal scalability of wholeness allows the morphological observer to contemplate a whole on any given scale as a part within a greater configuration on a higher scale, or, alternately, to contemplate a part as itself a whole when seen on a lower scale. As Goethe puts this:

Das große überkolossale der Natur eignet man so leicht sich nicht an, [...] denn wir haben nicht reine Verkleinerungsgläse, wie wir Linsen haben um das unendlich kleine zu gewahren. Und da muß man doch noch Augen haben [...] Da jedoch die Natur *im größten wie im kleinsten* sich immer gleich ist und eine jede trübe Scheibe so gut das schöne blaue darstellt wie die ganze Weltüberwolkende Atmosphäre so find ich es gerathen auf Musterstücke aufmerksam zu sein und sie vor uns zu legen. Hier nun ist das Ungeheure nicht verkleinert, sondern im Kleinen und ebenso unbegreiflich als im Unendlichen.<sup>131</sup>

An article of Goethean faith, the constancy of nature – “im größten wie im kleinsten sich immer gleich” – ensures here that methodological toggles between different scales of observation occur on a sort of vertical continuum. In particular, observation remains grounded in objective

---

<sup>130</sup> *FA* I 24, 559 & 612.

<sup>131</sup> From “Paralipomena I. Naturphilosophie.” Cf. *WA* II 11, 373. Emphasis added.

phenomena via “Musterstücke” exemplary of lawful regularities operative at a greater scale, even at work in wholes so expansive that they are unfathomable. Key here is that such natural exemplars themselves exemplify a certain non-exemplifiability present at a greater scale. Morphological method thus does not turn a blind eye toward the empirical non-observability of the meta-whole of nature, but operationally preserves the blind spot on a microcosmic scale in a concrete object: “nicht verkleinert, sondern im Kleinen und *ebenso unbegreiflich* als im Unendlichen.” Goethe found one such exemplar in *Lepas polliceps*, concluding his brilliant essay with an invocation of how this barnacle enables the observer to catapult past intermediary observational scales to reach human and even divine levels of nature:

Da ich nach meiner Art zu forschen, zu wissen und zu genießen, mich nur an Symbole halten darf, so gehören diese Geschöpfe zu den Heiligtümern welche fetischartig immer vor mir stehen und, durch ihr seltsames Gebilde, die nach dem Regellosen strebende, sich selbst immer regelnde und so *im kleinsten wie im größten* durchaus Gott- und menschenähnliche Natur sinnlich vergegenwärtigen.<sup>132</sup>

Goethe’s term for the kind of natural exemplar that enables the morphologist’s simultaneous occupation of two disparate, yet ultimately connected, observational scales is ‘symbol.’ At the same time, such ‘symbols’ are only ever encountered when *embodied* in idiosyncratically selected, concrete material objects: scientific fetishes (“fetischartig”).<sup>133</sup> Such methodological jumps in

---

<sup>132</sup> *FA I* 24, 612-613. Emphasis added.

<sup>133</sup> The fetish for Goethe marks a concrete object that exemplifies an otherwise rare and unobservable natural lawfulness precisely insofar as it *deviates* from it. In Palermo, for example, Goethe found a fetishistic embodiment of *Steigerung* that emerges in miraculous and apparent discontinuity from its previous stages of formative development. The passage is worth quoting in full, for it delineates the exact sense in which Goethe uses the term “fetischartig” in the quote above on aberrant barnacles: “Eine Fächerpalme zog meine ganze Aufmerksamkeit auf sich; [...] zuletzt trat ein Zweiglein mit Blüthen hervor, und erschien als ein sonderbares, mit dem vorhergehenden Wachstum in keinem Verhältniß stehendes Erzeugniß, fremdartig und überraschend. Auf mein Ersuchen schnitt mir der Gärtner die Stufenfolge dieser Veränderungen sämtlich ab, [...]. Sie liegen wie ich sie damals mitgenommen, noch wohlbehalten vor mir und ich verehere sie als Fetische, die meine Aufmerksamkeit zu erregen und zu fesseln völlig geeignet, mir eine gedeihliche Folge meiner Bemühungen zuzusagen schienen” (*WA II* 6, 119-120). Goethe here aligns apparent vegetal discontinuity *in* continuity with the promise that his own potentially discontinuous scientific “Bemühungen” will take developmental shape as a “gedeihliche Folge,” ending in an intensification akin to the palm’s. Goethean scientific fetishes thus function to commemorate a moment in the observer’s own, personal scientific investigation, fusing the enthused surprise of epistemic discovery with the discovered phenomenon so as to operate in future times of academic despair as a kind of consoling ‘fetish.’ Goethe later, in the role of antiquarian

scale are dependent on the operational preservation of the non-observable at the heart of the observed. The “seltsames Gebilde” of this inwardly striving barnacle paradoxically manages to exemplify a non-exemplifiable wholeness regulative *throughout* nature insofar as it sensuously renders present how nature includes within its scope a transgressive striving for irregularity. This exuberant self-multiplication and aesthetic de-instrumentalization, like that of the prehistoric bull’s horns, finally regulates *itself* and reaches some (at least provisionally) stable formation (the normative dimension is at work here, discussed further below).

To frame a vital, even inorganic, phenomenon *as* a whole may hence disclose an intuition of an *actual* ontological whole, or it may simply allow science to proceed in surveyable fashion, taking its own inquiry as a whole. In any case, the meta-discipline of morphology seeks to find “einen neuen Standort [...] woraus die natürlichen Dinge sich mit Leichtigkeit und Bequemlichkeit betrachten lassen.” This requires finding symbolic exemplars in nature through “Operationen des Geistes, [die] der menschlichen Natur angemessen und angenehm sind, so daß auch ein fehlgeschlagener Versuch darin selbst noch Nutzen und Anmut verbinden könnte.”<sup>134</sup> The serene, contemplative standpoint of *theoria* must be just as much invented as discovered in modernity, and for Goethe this is not cause for despair, but an intellectual challenge of the highest worth. Perhaps for this reason even “ein fehlgeschlagener Versuch” has its own use, even charm, for the community of morphological observers not settled or at home in any discipline, but dwelling in the interstices between them.

---

rather than natural scientist, thanks Voigt for some ancient Roman coins by writing that “Dergleichen so würdige als unschuldige Liebhabereyen sind als die wahren Fetische, als Hausgötter anzusehen, die uns in der Zeit der Noth und des Dranges an frohe, athemreiche Zeiten erinnernd, diese im Gemüth wiederherstellen und den schönsten Trost gewähren” (Jan. 11, 1814; *WA* IV 24, 98). Böhme discusses the Goethean fetish as an objectification of history, but does not devote sufficient attention to their epistemic function of demonstrating the rule in an exemplary irregularity and thereby providing a kind of scientific consolation insofar as they materially crystallize and thereby preserve the fleeting moment of scientific discovery, of recognizing the norm in the abnormal. Cf. Hartmut Böhme. “Fetisch und Idol. Die Temporalität von Erinnerungsformen in Goethes *Wilhelm Meister, Faust* und *Der Sammler und die Seinigen*.” In: *Goethe und die Verzeitlichung der Natur*. Ed. Peter Matussek. München 1998. Pg. 178-202.

<sup>134</sup> *FA* I 24, 368-369.

## 2. Interlude: The environmental dimension

The environmental dimension will be discussed, for the most part, in a close analysis of Goethe's account of ancient sloth species in the second primary section on normativity. For now, it will suffice to review briefly some basic aspects of the environmental dimension without granting it extensive consideration:

1. Organized wholes, organisms above all, *interface* with their environment by actively maintaining a border that distinguishes them from it.
2. Animals in particular, as inwardly purposive self-organizing wholes, stand in an open-ended relationship of reciprocal conditioning to their environment, thus evincing an outwardly directed purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit nach außen*).
3. The distinction between an organism and an environment can take on a perspectival relativity depending on the scale of morphological observation. For example, a plant, though itself a self-maintaining whole, may be taken together with the entire vegetal realm as an environment for animal life.

In "Die Absicht [wird] eingeleitet," Goethe accentuates "ein wichtiger Grundsatz der Organisation," namely the principle that "die ganze Lebenstätigkeit verlangt eine Hülle, die gegen das äußere rohe Element, es sei Wasser oder Luft oder Licht, sie schütze."<sup>135</sup> Life cannot operate on a surface, but consists in a vital activity that inwardly maintains the distinction between the inner and the outer. This perpetual replenishment of the organism's protective border to the environment involves, however, life's continual giving itself over to the non-living via "ewig sich absondernde, abgestoßene, dem Unleben hingeebene Hüllen, hinter denen immer neue Hüllen sich bilden, unter welchen sodann, oberflächlicher oder tiefer, das Leben sein schaffendes Gewebe hervorbringt."<sup>136</sup> Importantly, the organism only ever distinguishes itself *from* its environment *within* the environment. In this regard, the environment is a condition for the organism's generation of the distinction between organism/environment. Goethe was careful to reject all externally teleological accounts that would see the water, for example, as having been

---

<sup>135</sup> *FA I* 24, 395.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

created ‘for’ fish or the fish ‘for’ the water, instead opting for the co-emergence and reciprocal conditioning of organism and environment: “Der Fisch ist für das Wasser da, scheint mir viel weniger zu sagen als: der Fisch ist in dem Wasser und durch das Wasser da.”<sup>137</sup> The self-integrity of both organism and environment is only possible through their reciprocal co-determination. As Goethe puts this, “Eben dadurch erhält ein Tier seine Zweckmäßigkeit nach außen; weil es von außen, so gut als von innen gebildet worden.”<sup>138</sup>

As was the case with the part/whole distinction, the organism/environment distinction can take on a heuristic function correlative to the morphological scale of observation in question. Goethe begins with the inorganic realm in which environmental media or ‘elements’ remain but ‘vehicles’ facilitating mineral reconfiguration rather than environments proper. He continues, however, to move up the scale of nature:

wie man nur erst die unorganisierten, undeterminierten Elemente als Vehikel der unorganisierten Wesen angesehen, so wird man sich nunmehr in der Betrachtung erheben und wird die organisierte Welt wieder als einen Zusammenhang von vielen Elementen ansehen. Das ganze Pflanzenreich z.E. wird uns wieder als ein ungeheures Meer erscheinen, welches eben so gut zur bedingten Existenz der Insekten nötig ist, als das Weltmeer und die Flüsse zur bedingten Existenz der Fische, [...] ja wir werden zuletzt die ganze tierische Welt wieder nur als ein großes Element ansehen, wo ein Geschlecht auf dem andern und durch das andere, wo nicht entsteht doch <sich> erhält.<sup>139</sup>

Rather than ascribing to a more traditional doctrine of the *scala naturae* characterized by vertically arranged, hierarchized ontological districts of being, Goethe introduces perspectival relativity at each ‘step’ of the scale: the elemental environment from which the plant qua

---

<sup>137</sup> From the “Versuch einer allgemeinen Vergleichungslehre.” Cf. *FA I* 24, 212.

<sup>138</sup> This outwardly directed purposiveness of the animal was a major point of contention for Goethe that brought him into (perceived) disagreement with more philosophical accounts of life. In a letter to Schiller from January 6, 1798, Goethe relates his reading of Schelling’s *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*, confessing to Schiller: “Sie wissen wie sehr ich am Begriff der Zweckmäßigkeit der organischen Naturen nach innen hänge, und doch läßt sich ja eine *Bestimmung* von außen und ein *Verhältniß* nach außen nicht läugnen [...] Mir will dünken, daß wenn die eine Partei von außen hinein den Geist niemals erreichen kann, die andere von innen heraus wohl schwerlich zu den Körpern gelangen wird” (*WA IV* 13, 10). Here it is not the organism’s self-integrity that depends on interface to the environment, but the terms of the very inquiry into living beings that depend on reciprocal co-determination. Cf. *FA I* 24, 212-213.

<sup>139</sup> *FA I* 24, 214.

organism distinguishes itself may be observed at a higher scale such that the entire vegetal realm becomes an environment for the more organized insect.<sup>140</sup> A natural surround only ever counts as an environment relative to a particular organism *as well as* to the particular investigator's scale of observation.<sup>141</sup> Goethe resolves the tension generated by the fact that organisms distinguish themselves *from* their environment *within* their environment by calling on the morphological observer to herself become aware of how her own act of observation perspectively generates an environment insofar as she takes or 'sees' something *as* something ("die organisierte Welt wieder *als* einen Zusammenhang von vielen Elementen *ansehen* [...] Das ganze Pflanzenreich [...] *als* ein ungeheueres Meer [...] die ganze tierische Welt [...] *als* ein großes Element ansehen").

## 2. The Normative Dimension

1. The observation of holistically emergent (or dissipating) complexity – of metamorphosis – requires two distinct, yet interrelated, levels of description: that of the empirical phenomena in time and that of the non-empirical structure over and above them. Goethe called the latter a "Typus," but also the more intuitive "Urbild" and the more heuristic "allgemeine[s] Schema." It is the 'ideal' structure governing the lawful genesis of empirical structure.
2. The type is an epistemological tool for making sense of nature's unity in unfathomable diversity, for it is the invariant schema within the flexible bounds of which variable structures are generated. Goethe hence calls it a norm of description that allows one to set up meaningful comparisons between, say, the same kind of bone alternately positioned and reshaped in different animal skeletons from diverse species.
3. As intuited form *and* descriptive norm of observed empirical phenomena, the type functions as a structural principle characterized by *generative potential* and *explanatory power*.
  - a. The generative potential of the type qua intuited form lies in how the observer gains the ability to 'invent' new, unheard of formations that may not exist, but *could* given their accord with the apprehended normative idea.

---

<sup>140</sup> Goethe here anticipates Luhmann's account of the relativity of the system/environment distinction: "Ihr [der System/Umwelt-Differenz] Entweder/Oder ist kein absolutes, es gilt vielmehr nur systemrelativ, aber gleichwohl objektiv. Es ist Korrelat der Operation Beobachtung." Cf. Niklas Luhmann. *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 2001. Pg. 244.

<sup>141</sup> Uexküll similarly moves in this direction, speaking of the organism's *Innenwelt* in addition to its *Umwelt*, how the organism perceives its *own* environment given the manner in which it actively distinguishes itself from it and how its perceptual apparatus apprehends it. Cf. Jakob von Uexküll. *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere*. Berlin: Julius Springer. 1909.

- b. The explanatory power of the type qua descriptive norm lies in its capacity to account for the abnormal, for deviations, in terms of how the type manifests itself under the unique empirical conditions of appearance that hold in a given environment or context.

Goethe's definition of the *Typus* is worth quoting in full, for it allows us to get a grip on the elasticity unique to morphological concepts in general. The definition takes the form of a rhetorical question in the subjunctive:

Sollte es denn aber unmöglich sein, da wir einmal anerkennen, daß die schaffende Gewalt nach einem allgemeinen Schema die vollkommeneren organischen Naturen erzeugt und entwickelt, dieses Urbild, wo nicht den Sinnen, doch dem Geiste darzustellen, nach ihm, als nach einer Norm unsere Beschreibungen auszuarbeiten und, indem solche von der Gestalt der verschiedenen Tiere abgezogen wäre, die verschiedensten Gestalten wieder auf sie zurückzuführen?<sup>142</sup>

Three synonyms here characterize the type: on the side of nature, it operates as an “allgemeine[s] Schema” according to which nature (“die schaffende Gewalt”) generates organisms; on the side of the subject's knowing of nature, it is an “Urbild” present to “dem Geiste” (*not* to empirical sense perception); and as a methodological tool, it functions as a “Norm” to which the investigator refers her formal descriptions of variable empirical individuals. The type (like morphological concepts more generally) thus systematically links ontology, epistemology, and methodology.<sup>143</sup> Goethe here also explicitly reflects on how this concept mediates between the general and the individual: “Das Einzelne kann kein Muster vom Ganzen sein, und so dürfen wir das Muster für alle nicht im Einzelnen suchen. Die Klassen, Gattungen, Arten und Individuen verhalten sich wie

---

<sup>142</sup> From the more discursively unfolded “Vorträge über die drei ersten Kapitel des Entwurfs einer allgemeinen Einleitung in die vergleichende Anatomie, ausgehend von der Osteologie.” (1796). Cf. *FA I* 24, 270.

<sup>143</sup> I disagree with Tantillo's claim that the type is merely a heuristic device or “an artificial construct,” rather seeing it as a distinct form of unity (a particular kind of a concept) mediating between methodology and natural ontology. Goethe would have also encountered the idea of a general type or schema for animal life in Kant's third critique (this is the exact passage where the syntagm “Abendteuer der Vernunft” comes from, quoted by Goethe in “Einwirkung neuer Philosophie”). Interestingly, however, for Kant the type granting all natural life unity is conceived as a regulative tool that allows the natural scientist to remain empirical; for Goethe, it will operate as a normative idea that allows the scientist to move past the empirical realm. Cf. Tantillo. *The Will to Create*. Pg. 105; Dieter Schlenstedt & Marion George. “Typisch/Typ(us).” In: *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*. Stuttgart: Metzler. 2005. Pg. 191-247.



die Fälle zum Gesetz; sie sind darin enthalten, aber sie enthalten und geben es nicht.”<sup>144</sup>

Individual animals relate to the type as cases to their law, meaning that empirical individuals may exemplify the law, but never disclose it *in toto*; rather, they only ever become recognizable and intelligible *as* such cases in light of the law. This explicitly emphasizes the normative dimension while simultaneously characterizing the kind of conceptual generality in play here. The ‘law’ or ‘idea’ of the type does not set an internal limit to the potential variety of particular cases of which it may make sense. For this reason, the type cannot be abstracted out from an empirical overview or statistical sum of individuals, for “sie enthalten und geben es nicht.” Particular cases will always evince features that cannot be rendered normatively intelligible. Rather, the type represents an open-ended form of generality that may be ‘actualized’ in new contexts again and again, just as a law may be interpreted to apply in radically different ways to novel legal situations or a word may be ‘projected’ onto ever-new contexts of meaningful usage. One never empirically finds the type in nature, just as one never mentally represents to oneself a ‘mere’ concept without an attendant intuition or a rule without an attendant application. Such concrete universals are only ever exhibited in the particulars that bear them in a given context. A particular individual will thus only become intelligible when situated within the dynamic interplay between ideal type and empirical environment.

The type’s explanatory power to render deviations intelligible *as* deviations from itself qua natural rule is closely intertwined with the generative potential it discloses to the morphological observer, who, as it were, gains insight into nature’s own rulebook. In “Erster Entwurf einer allgemeinen Einleitung in die vergleichende Anatomie, ausgehend von der Osteologie” (1795), Goethe notes that, having set up the type, “Man wird alsdann die möglichen Abweichungen dieser Form teils aus dem Begriff, teils aus der Erfahrung herleiten und

---

<sup>144</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 270.

abstrahieren können.”<sup>145</sup> Formal deviations can thus in part be *conceptually* inferred, not only empirically encountered. Such conceptual insight (knowing that) grants the artist in particular the ability (the know-how) to carry forth nature’s intention beyond her generative resources, even to depart from nature’s intention altogether. As Goethe says of artists who have come to know the lawful stages of plant metamorphosis, “sie [naturkundige Bildner], vorzüglich, müssen erst, mit geistigen Augen, in dem vorbereitenden Organe das Erwartete, das notwendig Folgende, in dem Abweichenden die Regel erblicken.”<sup>146</sup> The sculptor of the Elgin horse’s head mentally apprehended just this, leading Goethe to claim that the artist plastically actualized an “Urpferd” that never empirically existed, but that aesthetically renders present a possible exemplification of the horse’s normative type in a manner more ‘real’ than nature ever could, hence appearing as a kind of deviation insofar as it is hyper-exemplary, transforming the horse’s nature in realizing its concept more fully.

Just as the artist with style may produce aesthetic deviations from nature that remain, in a sense, ‘valid’ insofar as their hypothetical possibility can be conceptually generated via the norm of the type, so the scientific observer learns *more* from nature’s irregular deviations than from regular cases that exemplify the law in a straightforward manner. The *gap* between ideal type and its empirico-contextual exemplification is of special epistemic value and therefore attracts special

---

<sup>145</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 252.

<sup>146</sup> From the “Nacharbeiten und Sammlungen” (1817) to the metamorphosis of plants, largely inspired by Georg Jäger’s *Über die Mißbildungen der Gewächse, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Theorie der Mißentwicklungen organischer Körper* (1814). David Wellbery elucidates this passage in the context of Goethe’s claim that the morphological observer becomes capable of an intellectual participation (*geistige Teilnahme*) in nature’s own lawful, formative processes. As Wellbery puts it, “Erkenntnis der Form eines Gegenstandes [...] ist Nachvollzug der Genese des Gegenstandes aus seiner Idee” (262). Cf. *FA I* 24, 461; David Wellbery. “Zur Methodologie des intuitiven Verstandes. Anmerkung zu Eckart Försters Goethelektüre.” In: *Übergänge – diskursiv oder intuitive? Essays zu Eckart Försters “Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie.”* Ed. Johannes Haag und Markus Wild. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 2013. Pg. 259-274.

attention on the part of the morphological observer.<sup>147</sup> Even monstrous irregularities provide insight into nature's rule precisely insofar as they deviate all the more from it: "Monstrositäten lassen sich ansehen als Versuche welche die Natur zu Gunsten des Beobachters anstellt."<sup>148</sup> The exemplificative relationship between normative type and anomalous individual is hence cognitively asymmetrical: no norm can predict the full range of its anomalous exceptions, but the latter always imply and flesh out the norm. Goethe himself reflects on this cognitive asymmetry prevalent in normatively deviant type-exemplifications in a letter to Nees von Esenbeck from April 2, 1828 regarding illustrations of the *os intermaxillare* bone Goethe discovered:

so will ich meine Gedanken gern einmal wieder auf diesen Gegenstand wenden, um bey dieser Gelegenheit den Begriff des Typus, nach dem sich alles bildet, wieder in Anregung zu bringen. Denn es scheint wunderbar, ist aber den Beschränkungen des menschlichen Geistes ganz gemäß, daß man die Consequenz der Idee nicht in der Erscheinung verfolgen mag, sondern daß man sich an Ausnahmen ergötzt, in ihnen ergeht und die Wissenschaft wie das Leben verschleifet.<sup>149</sup>

One could read this passage as claiming that exemplification as a state of exception (*Ausnahme*) is the norm of the norm given the finitude of the human intellect ("Beschränkungen des menschlichen Geistes").<sup>150</sup> Despite this apparent epistemic finitude, however, Goethe nonetheless frames the precarious tethering of the empirical exception to the normative type within a more

---

<sup>147</sup> This gap becomes more prominent in the case of the *Idee*, which Goethe more often associates with a *Kluft* (as in "Bedenken und Ergebung"), the *Typus* instead associated more often with contradictions and exceptions (*Ausnahmen*).

<sup>148</sup> During his time in Dornburg, Goethe translated a large section of Augustin Pyrame de Candolle's *Organographie végétale, ou description raisonné des organes des plantes* (1827) that he planned to include (and thus claim in a sense as his own) within a never-completed *Versuch über die Metamorphose*. With regard to deviant 'monstrosities' of nature, de Candolle says in Goethe's translation: "Gehen wir also von der Überzeugung aus daß die natürliche Anlage regelmäßig sei und daß das Ungeregelte sich von verschiedenen störenden Ursachen herschreibt, so finden wir daß die Monstrositäten, wenn wir die Veranlassung derselben zu erforschen wissen, uns gerade dadurch zur näheren Einsicht in das Regelmäßige führen." Cf. *FA I* 24, 684.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *WA IV* 44, 55-56.

<sup>150</sup> In her discussion of Goethe's morphological characterization of d'Alton's rodents, Geulen has demonstrated just how precarious the distinction between rule and exception is by tracking the twists and turns of the term *Schwanken*, which almost takes on the status of a *terminus technicus*, itself oscillating uncomfortably between word and concept. As Geulen puts it, in the case of the *Nager*, "das Schwanken und Oszillieren *zwischen* Norm und Ausnahme *ist* letztlich die ausnahmslose Norm." Goethe often pairs such *Schwanken* with its sister concept: *Stetigkeit* (see footnote 7). The discussion above will accordingly shift emphasis to the inscrutable *Konsequenz* tethering exceptions to the norm in the background rather than the more foregrounded *Schwanken* that phenomenally prevails between them. Cf. Eva Geulen. *Aus dem Leben der Form. Goethes Morphologie und die Nager*. Berlin: August Verlag, 2016, pg. 70.

comprehensive “Consequenz” between appearance and idea, a link that may itself not come to intelligible appearance. Already in the “Entwurf” from 1795, Goethe invokes the same methodological need to postulate such a consequentiality in natural formations in order not to lose sight of the norm altogether:

Indem wir jenen Typus aufstellen und als eine allgemeine Norm, wonach wir die Knochen der sämtlichen Säugetiere zu beschreiben und zu beurteilen denken, setzen wir in der Natur eine gewisse Konsequenz voraus, wir trauen ihr zu daß sie in allen einzelnen Fällen nach einer gewissen Regel verfahren werde. Auch können wir darinnen nicht irren.<sup>151</sup>

The repetition of ‘certain’ (“eine *gewisse* Konsequenz,” “nach einer *gewissen* Regel”) underlines just how vague and open Goethe left the general norm’s content. Indeed, here the very distinction between an enabling *assumption* at the level of methodology (“setzen wir [...] voraus”) and a quasi-religious article of faith or at least ‘trust’ rooted in natural ontology (“wir trauen ihr zu”) is blurred. This raises what Geulen has called the “Gretchenfrage” of Goethe’s morphology, namely the question of whether the (proto-)structures apprehended via morphological techniques are constructed or discovered by the observer’s intervention. Such a dichotomy between projection vs. ontology, however, is a very modernist notion. The norm as Goethe invokes it here is not some spooky metaphysical entity that must be localized once and for all on one side of the subject/object divide. It is, rather, inherent to what it means to apprehend a natural form. The normative *Typus* just *is* a natural life-form’s principle of intelligibility, and to ask whether it is constructed or discovered, subjectively projected or ontologically intrinsic, is akin to asking the question of where exactly the number ‘3’ exists when one counts three apples (would the number be in our minds and projected ‘onto’ the fruit, or would the number inhere ‘in’ the apples themselves?).

---

<sup>151</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 244.

One avenue of solution Goethe found to the problem of navigating the normative gap in anomalous exemplifications or even outright exceptions was to develop a concept of freedom germane to the domain of natural life. This is accomplished through a spatialization of the normative type into a conceptual space within which the metamorphic activity of the type can be accounted for as free. If “die Natur, zwar mit höchster Freiheit wirkend, sich doch von ihren Grundgesetzen nicht entfernen kann,” then Goethe accounts for nature’s ‘freedom’ through a spatial semantics that explains *why* such freedom does not decay into mere arbitrariness or capriciousness (which would be the case if one lost sight of the norm altogether).<sup>152</sup> As Goethe puts this in the “Entwurf,” immediately after stating his assumed trust in the consequentiality with which nature exemplifies the norm: “Allein die lebendige Natur könnte dieses einfache Bild [den Typus] nicht in das Unendliche vermannigfaltigen, wenn sie nicht einen großen Spielraum hätte, in welchem sie sich bewegen kann, ohne aus den Schranken ihres Gesetzes herauszutreten.”<sup>153</sup> Ultimately a thought of Kantian provenance, freedom here means being bound by the law, for its very *limitations* (“Schranken”) demarcate and thereby open up a conceptually articulated space within which an *unlimited* range of expressive possibilities is disclosed (“in das Unendliche vermannigfaltigen”). A linguistic analogy may help clarify the difference between arbitrary or negative freedom (freedom *from* external constraints) and the kind of positive freedom (freedom *for*) that Goethe here invokes (albeit in anti-Kantian fashion insofar as he applies it to nature, for Kant strictly a realm of external efficient causes). Precisely by binding myself to the norms of grammar, say, does it become possible for me to produce an indefinite number of *novel* utterances, to say things that no one has ever said before *and* for other people nonetheless to understand them. Norms are enabling limitations, generative constraints; binding oneself to

---

<sup>152</sup> From the “Nacharbeiten und Sammlungen,” cf. *FA I* 24, 462.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 244.

grammatical norms thereby repays the language-user in a bonanza of positive expressive freedom, in the capacity to produce novel, radically original speech acts.<sup>154</sup> Analogously, in the realm of nature, the *Typus* functions as a normative circumscription that limits and thereby defines a space of metamorphic exemplification, hence enabling the possibility of novelty and ‘infinite’ variegation.

Tracking Goethe’s invocations of the type as dynamic conceptual space will allow us to better understand the normative gap prevalent in all exemplifications and thus the elusive “Konsequenz” between exception and norm, experience and idea. In his late letter to von Esenbeck, Goethe associated the thought that every exemplification may come to seem an exception with limitations on the side of the knowing subject (the observer), but Goethe elsewhere locates the norm’s tendency toward exception on the side of productive nature (the observed). In a letter to Johannes Müller from November 24, 1829 prompted by the Geoffrey-Cuvier debate in Paris, Goethe writes:

Ein Typus sollte anerkannt werden, ein Gesetz, von dem in der Erscheinung nur Ausnahmen aufzuweisen sind: eben dieß geheime und unbezwingliche Vorbild, in welchem sich alles Leben bewegen muß, während es die abgeschlossene Grenze immerfort zu durchbrechen strebt.<sup>155</sup>

The vital movement of nature within the conceptual space of the type strives (“strebt”) to *transgress* the very limitations definitive of what it is. What it means for something to be alive emerges here within the space between the normative type of a life-form and its empirical exemplification: vitality (*Lebendigkeit*) comes into view as a striving for self-transgression and subsequent recognition of “dieß geheime und *unbezwingliche* Vorbild” (emphasis added). This is a recognition that even a transgressive exception to the norm only inaugurates a new one or

---

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Robert Brandom. “Freedom and Constraint by Norms.” *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 16, No. 3 (July 1979), pg. 187-196; Charles Taylor. “To Follow a Rule.” In: *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995, pp. 165-180.

<sup>155</sup> *WA* IV 46, 170.

expands the conceptual space of the past one, transforming that norm in the process. Goethe will continually invoke such spatial prepositions (“in welchem,” “innerhalb”) in order to think the conceptual space’s interior as one constituted by an inner centrifugal propensity, an immanent pressure pushing up against the space’s supple bounds: “Auch hier ist die grenzenlose Willkür innerhalb des gesetzlichen Kreises auffallend und die Ausnahmen bilden sich zur Regel.”<sup>156</sup> The use of a reflexive verb here (*sich bilden*) deserves remark. In “Die Absicht [wird] eingeleitet,” which opens *Zur Morphologie*, Goethe abandoned the word *Gestalt* due to its rigid fixture for the sake of the more processual term *Bildung*, given that the latter takes reference “sowohl vom dem Hervorgebrachten, als von dem Hervorgebrachtwerdenden.”<sup>157</sup> If normative exceptions may *morph themselves* into a new rule, then metamorphic formation (*Umbildung*) relates not just to living beings, but to the cognitive processes of concept-formation and -transformation themselves, to the very tools used by observers to get a (necessarily fleeting) grip on vital phenomena. In his essay on the debate between Georges Cuvier and Étienne Geoffroy de St. Hilaire about whether the animal kingdom could be lead back to four or simply one type(s), Goethe hence explicitly states that the norm of the type is itself ‘alive,’ a living norm:

Sehen wir aber die Abweichungen, Missbildungen, ungeheure Missgestalten, so erkennen wir: daß die Regel zwar fest und ewig, aber zugleich lebendig sei, das die Wesen, zwar nicht aus derselben heraus, aber doch innerhalb derselben sich ins Unförmliche umbilden können, jederzeit aber, wie mit Zügeln zurückgehalten, die unausweichliche Herrschaft des Gesetzes anerkennen müssen.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>156</sup> From the “Nachträge zur Metamorphose der Pflanzen” (1828). Cf. *FA I* 24, 701.

<sup>157</sup> *FA I* 24, 392.

<sup>158</sup> In his essay, Goethe agreed with Étienne Geoffroy de St. Hilaire’s view that there was a single *unité du plan* underlying the animal kingdom. The clearest overview of the debate, situating it in the previous and subsequent history of biology, is Toby Appel’s *The Cuvier-Geoffrey Debate*. In an exhaustive monograph on the essay, Kuhn explores how Goethe casts Cuvier and Geoffroy into polarized roles qua scientific types, Cuvier more analytic, Geoffroy more synthetic, interestingly aligning this polarity with that between Antonio and Tasso. Synthetic and analytic conceptual operations are further comprehended by Goethe as vital processes caught in a perpetual alternation akin to the heartbeat or breathing in systole and diastole. This latter figure eludes a synthesis of synthesis and analysis for the sake of an oscillation. Weatherby interprets a number of passages from the essay with a view to Goethe’s ‘organology’ in its vexed relation to Hegelian natural philosophy. Cf. *HA* 24, 825; Toby A. Appel. *The Cuvier-Geoffrey Debate: French Biology in the Decades Before Darwin*. New York/Oxford: Oxford UP. 1987; Dorothea Kuhn. *Empirische und ideelle Wirklichkeit. Studien über Goethes Kritik der französischen Akademiestreites*.

Completely to exit outside the bounds of the type's conceptual *Spielraum* is impossible. Rather, only when nature remains within such limits while *simultaneously* striving to transgress them may life transform itself in the most varied, even deformative manner (“sich ins Unförmliche umbilden”). The “unbezwingliche[s] Vorbild” that is the type's enabling norm appears here in a more explicitly normative key as “die unausweichliche Herrschaft des Gesetzes.” This ineluctable limitation may seem to render life's striving for self-transgression impossible, but nature's creativity lies precisely in its vital persistence in the face of such futility. If the norm (“die Regel”) operative in/as the type is *itself* alive (“lebendig”), then the life of the concept consists in the metamorphic traversal of the normative gaps between type and exemplification, allowing the morphological observer to see monstrous empirical deviations from the concept (“ungeheure Missgestalten”) *within* the logical space of hypothetical possibilities framed by the concept itself (“innerhalb derselben”). The very borders of this conceptual space are thus being constantly redrawn, transgressively stretched from within, their perpetual renegotiation definitive of life itself.

Vital exuberance emerges here as a *creatively* futile striving for self-transgression, a kind of spontaneity emergent in a normatively bounded space that enables a genuinely free expressive plenitude of potential de-, re-, and transformations of one and the same type. The self-realization of the living may result in such vital exuberance, in a higher degree of achieved complexity or inner variety-in-unity, even in superfluous beauty. Such was the case with the prehistoric bull's horns, which exceeded the animal's inner purposiveness to become purposeless and thus aesthetic. In the case of the rose and other double-flowered plant varieties that exhibit flowers within flowers (“gefüllte Blumen”), Goethe interestingly speaks of nature as actually succeeding in

---

Graz/Wien/Köln: Hermann Böhlau. 1967; Leif Weatherby. *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ. German Romanticism between Leibniz and Marx*. New York: Fordham UP. 2016. Pg. 279-315.



transgressing its own self-positing limit, thereby striving towards greater perfection: “Die Natur überschreitet die Grenze[,] die sie sich selbst gesetzt hat, aber sie erreicht dadurch eine andere Vollkommenheit, deswegen wir wohlthun uns hier so spät als möglich negativer Ausdrücke zu bedienen.”<sup>159</sup> Such examples should be taken against the background, however, of more frequent cases of vital spontaneity that end for Goethe in aberrant monstrosity rather than beauty, as the example of the three-toed sloth or Ai shall demonstrate.<sup>160</sup>

### **2.a Das innere Unvermögen: *The Case of the Three-Toed Sloth***

In order to understand the living norm more fully, it will be necessary to elucidate how vital exuberance qua striving for self-transgression itself remains a dynamic immanent to the more global self-determination of the living. To this end, it will be helpful to juxtapose two texts from the morphological notebooks that both deal with the relation between normative type and empirical exemplification in the case of animal metamorphosis: the didactic poem “Athroismos” (~1798/99, later titled “Metamorphose der Tiere” when included in the 1821 collection *Gott und Welt*) and Goethe’s review of a volume of d’Alton and Pander’s *Vergleichende Osteologie* on “Die Faultiere und die Dickhäutigen abgebildet, beschrieben und verglichen” (1822). This juxtaposition will allow salient features of the normative dimension of morphological method to come into view, above all the inner purposiveness of the organism, its potentially precarious relation to the outer environment, as well as the supple contours of the conceptual space demarcated by the living norm. The two texts may seem to align themselves at extremes: on the

---

<sup>159</sup> From the “Nacharbeiten und Sammlungen” to the metamorphosis of plants. Cf. *FA I* 24, 462.

<sup>160</sup> In the animal realm, deviation does not so easily allow itself to be rescued via recourse to nature’s own (self-)aestheticization. As a legitimately insubordinate part within the animal whole, the extravagantly useless curls of the prehistoric bull’s horns form the (rarer) exception rather than the rule. Goethe is far more open to misshapen plant deviations because the vegetal realm does not evince proper individuation, as the animal one does. It is thus important to keep in mind that each domain of the living evinces its own logical form of unity; the mereological instability of a plant is logically distinct from the mereological insubordination of an animal part within the whole, which is far more precarious, for the animal organism forms what Goethe termed “die absoluteste Einheit.” Cf. “Vorträge über die drei ersten Kapitel des Entwurfs einer allgemeinen Einleitung in die vergleichende Anatomie, ausgehend von der Osteologie” (1796). Cf. *FA I* 24, 271.

one hand, a poem from Goethe's classical period celebrating the animal's inner self-determination in light of the normative type in its eidetic purity, harmonically in tune with its environment; on the other hand, the late Goethe's characterization in scientific prose of the three-toed sloth or Ai as a misshapen deviant 'enslaved' to the external determinations of its newfound environment. This could amount to a difference between distinct periods in Goethe's development or to one between the kind of harmonization achievable by an aesthetically autonomous poem as opposed to a prose discussion heteronomously indebted to another scientific text. Upon closer inspection, however, the juxtaposition reveals an underlying conceptual imbrication, for both texts immanently deal *on their own* with the thresholds between type and environmental manifestation, poetry and prose: "Athroismos" belongs to the tradition of the *Lehrgedicht*, itself a 'prosaic' genre that Goethe and others of his age considered closer to rhetoric than poetry proper, while Goethe's text on the sloths itself feels the need to call on 'poetic expression' in order to account for the Ai's normative aberrancy in otherwise properly scientific prose. Furthermore, both texts evince a deep semantic kinship, mobilizing the same socio-political metaphors to render animal metamorphosis intelligible in light of a living norm. Goethe's strategy of conceptual spatialization will here give way to a more problematic poetic operation, that of the concept's figurative personification.

The case of the three-toed sloth generates such difficulties for Goethe's morphological mode of observation, for it is not only the individual organism, but its very normative type that appears to undergo metamorphosis. Commentators have accordingly marshaled elements of Goethe's account in an attempt to cast him as a precursor to Darwin's evolutionary thought.<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>161</sup> With regards to the Ai sloth and elsewhere, Richards sees Goethe all too often as a stage on the way to Darwin, while Tantillo claims that the Ai overcompensates in adapting *itself* to its environment, as if it possessed a will of its own. My own account of the sloth is indebted to Tantillo's, though it renders the 'as if'-character more prominent, tying it to the Kantian notion of the organism's inner purposiveness, which Goethe will here demonstrate can go awry

Goethe, however, very carefully qualifies his account of the animal's transformation, setting up a hypothetical imagined narrative that renders the Ai's deviant features intelligible as a choice made by the animal. It is also at just this moment that the essay's prose itself chooses to dwell on the threshold to poetic expression:

Man erlaube uns einigen poetischen Ausdruck, da überhaupt Prose wohl nicht hinreichen möchte. Ein ungeheurer Geist, wie er im Ozean sich wohl als Walfisch dartun konnte, stürzt sich in ein sumpfig-kiesiges Ufer einer heißen Zone; er verliert die Vorteile des Fisches, ihm fehlt ein tragendes Element, das dem schwersten Körper leichte Beweglichkeit, durch die mindesten Organe, verleiht. Ungeheure Hülfsglieder bilden sich heran, einen ungeheuren Körper zu tragen. Das seltsame Wesen fühlt sich halb der Erde halb dem Wasser angehörig und vermißt alle Bequemlichkeit die beide ihren entschiedenen Bewohnern zugestehen. Und es ist sonderbar genug, daß diese Sklaverei, ‚das innere Unvermögen sich den äußern Verhältnissen gleich zu stellen‘, auch auf seine Abkömmlinge übergeht, die, obgleich im entgegengesetzten Sinne, ihre Herkunft nicht verleugnen.<sup>162</sup>

The “seltsame[s] Wesen” of the Ai finds itself displaced, falling into (“stürzt sich”) a new state.

This catastrophe of a sudden environmental change is the key event to which Goethe will refer the creature's deviant features, thereby processualizing them as effects of a vital activity gone awry.

Already as a large, whale-like creature in the water, however, the Ai was “[e]in ungeheurer Geist” that, upon falling into a new terrestrial environment, became ever more monstrous, forming “[u]ngeheure Hülfsglieder” with which to bear its “ungeheuren Körper” on land. This ‘spirit’ forms a body in accord with its originally ‘monstrous’ or ‘immense’ nature not to be at home in its given aqueous environment.<sup>163</sup> Goethe here activates the etymological sense of the word

---

when not limited by the external environment. Geulen interestingly only mentions the sloth text once in a quick parenthetical remark, perhaps because it represents one of Goethe's decidedly negative assessments of animal deformation. Geulen focuses on the far more ambivalent case of the rodents, also based on a volume of d'Alton and Pander's *Vergleichende Osteologie*. Cf. Astrida Orle Tantillo. *The Will to Create: Goethe's Philosophy of Nature*. Pittsburgh: UPP. 2002. Pg. 104-151; Robert J. Richards. *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*. Chicago: UCP 2002. Pg. 476-486.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 547.

<sup>163</sup> In a sense, the creature here metamorphosing into the Ai annihilates its original purpose, transgressing the bounds of its own concept qua form of life *without* thereby reaching a stable formation on land, instead becoming *ungeheuer*. This is in line with Kant's own definition of *das Ungeheuer*, conceived via its contrast to the quantitative sublime: “Ungeheuer ist ein Gegenstand, wenn er durch seine Größe den Zweck, der den Begriff desselben ausmacht,

*ungeheuer*, relating it to *geheuer* in the sense of ‘familiar,’ ‘comfortable,’ ultimately tied to the same root as *heim* in *unheimlich*.<sup>164</sup> In its ambivalent (non-)belonging – “halb der Erde halb dem Wasser angehörig” – this uncanny creature remains incapable of belonging to the “entschiedenen Bewohnern.” This results in an organism the very form of which is tied not to freedom, but to unfreedom, not to traditionally animal capacities that are unselfconsciously self-determining (e.g. sentience and self-locomotion), but to a paradoxically manifest *incapacity*: “diese Sklaverei, ‘das innere Unvermögen sich den äußeren Verhältnissen gleich zu stellen.’” Goethe here quotes from d’Alton’s text, but surreptitiously obscures the degree to which his own account radically diverges from its textual source. Such covert disagreement is a common tactic on view throughout *Zur Morphologie* and *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum*, as the example of Körte in “Fossiler Stier” and Meyer’s relation to Haydon in his own “Vergleichung zweier antiker Pferde-Köpfe” evinced.

D’Alton claimed that the prehistoric giant sloth (“Riesen-Faulthier,” Figure 5) adapted à la Lamarck in response to environmental catastrophes, such as an earthquake or flood, to evolve into the Ai (Figure 6), eventually into the Unau (Figure 7). In contrast, Goethe uncouples the Ai from such evolutionary chains of descent, instead imagining that an aqueous “Geist” metamorphosed into the Ai. On Goethe’s account, each sloth species possesses its own unique history rather than

---

vernichtet” (§26, 117). Before the boundlessness of the sublime, the subject’s feeling of inferiority qua sensuous being recoils to awaken the feeling of superiority over nature insofar as the subject becomes conscious of her own supersensible faculty of reason (in the case of the mathematical sublime, this takes the specific shape of reason’s superiority to the imagination). Kant notes here that artworks and organisms cannot be sublime, for they are tied to the concept of a purpose, whether external or internal, respectively; only ‘raw nature’ “bloß sofern sie Größe enthält” may afford an experience of the sublime. While the ‘colossal’ for Kant designates a sub-aesthetic form of boundlessness in which anything that might represent a concept necessarily remains inadequate to the greater concept, *das Ungeheuere* represents the inverse: a form of boundlessness in which the objective phenomenon itself ‘annihilates’ the purpose its concept seeks to actualize, the concept thus being inadequate to its object rather than the object inadequate to the concept. As Schmitz notes, for Goethe (contra Kant) the sublime can tip over into *das Ungeheuere*, associated with a labilization of personal identity. Cf. Kant. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Stuttgart: Meiner. 2006; Hermann Schmitz. “Das Ganz-Andere: Goethe und das Ungeheuere.” In: *Goethe und die Verzeitlichung der Natur*. Ed. Peter Matussek. München: C.H. Beck. 1998. Pg. 414-435.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. “Ungeheuer.” *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. Vd. 24, Sp. 691.

morphing into the others on a transspecies continuum.<sup>165</sup> As a consequence, Goethe alters the environmental switch that takes place: d’Alton had surmised that the creature began life as an underground “collosale[r] Maulwurf” forced onto the light of the terrestrial surface by a flood that made his original subterranean home uninhabitable.<sup>166</sup> In contrast, Goethe imagines that a whale-like animal moved out of water onto “ein sumpfig-kiesiges Ufer.” What was in d’Alton’s account merely an animal reaction triggered by an external environmental displacement may seem to morph in Goethe’s recounting into an unmotivated narrative decision emanating from within the organism.<sup>167</sup> Goethe does not, however, ascribe the Ai genuine narrative agency, as if it were somehow a self-conscious creature. While d’Alton hypothesizes a causal sequence that may have occurred, Goethe poetically imagines a catastrophe, calling on “einigen poetischen Ausdruck, da überhaupt Prose wohl nicht hinreichen möchte.” This imagined catastrophe (*Sturz*) takes place as a kind of mythic Fall in the animal’s prehistory: the Ai “stürzt sich in ein sumpfig-kiesiges Ufer einer heißen Zone; er verliert die Vorteile des Fisches.”<sup>168</sup> Goethe calls upon this imaginative poetic resource in order to think of how a contingency in the animal’s past might have contributed to its further development.

---

<sup>165</sup> The issue of how Goethe reframes d’Alton’s proto-evolutionary claims of descent cannot be discussed at length here, but Goethe does note that the Ai’s “Abkömmlinge” do not ‘deny’ their origin (“ihre Herkunft nicht verleugnen”). Once the originary metamorphosis occurs, the resultant deformation achieves a degree of stability and persistence in being ‘handed down’ (“überliefert”) to its descendants. In “Problem und Erwidern,” Goethe accounts for these two aspects of transformation in terms of two ideal-natural drives: “die Idee der Metamorphose[,] eine höchst ehrwürdige, aber zugleich höchst gefährliche Gabe von oben. Sie führt ins Formlose; zerstört das Wissen; löst es auf,” on the one hand, and, on the other, a counterbalance, “der Spezifikationstrieb, das zähe Beharrlichkeitsvermögen” that ensures that achieved and specified (de)formations strive to persist in being. These two ‘drives’ are specified by Goethe (once again) in conceptual-spatial terms as a *vis centrifuga* and a *vis centripeta*, respectively. The two texts juxtaposed above – Goethe on (d’Alton on) the Ai and “Athroismos” – can be thought of as exemplifying twinned de- and re-centering drives of formal dissolution and stabilization. Cf. *FA I* 24, 547.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Dr. E. D’Alton. *Das Riesen-Faulthier. Bradypus Giganteus, abgebildet, beschrieben und mit den verwandten Geschlechtern verglichen*. Bonn: Bei Eduard Weber. 1821. Pg. 11-12.

<sup>167</sup> This is Tantillo’s line of argument. Cf. Tantillo. *The Will to Create: Goethe’s Philosophy of Nature*, 2002.

<sup>168</sup> One might compare the semantics of the fall (*sich stürzen*, *Sturz*, etc.) so central here with the recurrent falls in Goethe’s *Die natürliche Tochter*, which begins with Eugenie’s fall from a horse only to conclude with the collapse of the symbolic aristocratic order within which she hoped to appear.

Beyond the anti-evolutionary decoupling of the Ai from other sloth kinds, the environmental switch from land to water, and the poetic imagination of a catastrophe, Goethe's fourth and final alteration consists in an overarching conceptual shift that takes place behind the seemingly assenting citation. For d'Alton, as for Buffon before him, the sloths were, well, slothful: life underground required the animal to find food "nur mit Anstrengung seiner Kräfte," while the newfound surface environment affords the animal "Nahrung, die es ohne Aufwand von Kräften im Ueberflusse vorfand," such that "aus Mangel der Thätigkeit" the creature loses its "Lebensregsamkeit."<sup>169</sup> For d'Alton, the Ai eventually goes extinct out of laziness, as it were: its organic parts desubordinate themselves and lose distinctiveness in a case of retrograde metamorphosis. As Goethe re-imagines this scenario, the three-toed sloth's problem was not that it was too slothful, but that it was *too active*:

Jener ungeheuere Koloß, der Sumpf und Kies *nicht beherrschen*, sich darin *nicht zum Herren machen* konnte, überliefert, durch welche Filiationen auch, seiner Nachkommenschaft, die sich aufs trockene Land begibt, eine gleiche Unfähigkeit, ja sie zeigt sich erst recht deutlich, da das Geschöpf in ein reines Element gelangt, *das einem inneren Gesetz sich zu entwickeln nicht entgegen steht*. Aber wenn je ein geistloses schwaches Leben sich manifestiert hat, so geschah es hier; die Glieder sind gegeben, aber sie bilden sich nicht verhältnismäßig, sie schießen in die Länge, die Extremitäten als wenn sie, *ungeduldig* über den vorigen stumpfen *Zwang*, sich nun in *Freiheit* erholen wollten, dehnen sich *grenzenlos* aus und ihr Abschluß in den Nägeln sogar scheint *keine Grenze* zu haben. Die Halswirbel vermehren sich und indem sie sich aus einander selbst erzeugen, deuten sie auf den *völligen Mangel von innerem Halt*; wie denn auch der Kopf sich klein und hirnlos erweist. Daher man denn wohl sagen dürfte, daß *in Bezug auf den eigentlichen inneren höheren Typus* das Riesenfaultier weit weniger ein Ungeheuer sei als der Ai.<sup>170</sup>

Goethe greatly praised the illustrations that accompanied d'Alton's volumes, and it would help to compare the above passage to its correspondent image (Figure 6).<sup>171</sup> Goethe concludes his entire

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Dr. E. D'Alton. *Das Riesen-Faultier. Bradypus Giganteus, abgebildet, beschrieben und mit den verwandten Geschlechtern verglichen*. Bonn: Bei Eduard Weber. 1821. Pg. 11-12.

<sup>170</sup> *FA I 24*, 547-548. Emphasis added.

<sup>171</sup> The depiction of animal skeletons encompassed by slightly darkened silhouettes attracted Goethe's attention in particular. d'Alton and Pander's *Verleichende Osteologie* was released as a *Prachtausgabe* containing massive

discussion of the Ai with a reference to the type, the general norm to which he refers his description of the skeletal form. This reference to the type allows him to claim that the giant sloth (“Riesen-Faultier”) deviates less from the norm. At the same time, however, Goethe does not so much describe as he narrates, bringing the Ai’s skeletal form into imaginative life as a processual activity of self-metamorphosis that has lost all autotelic guidance. The new terrestrial environment, now a fully dry and thus “reines Element,” leads to this derailment of entelechy, for the organism’s inner purposiveness no longer finds itself over against an environment that would crucially condition it (instead an “Element [...], das einem inneren Gesetz sich zu entwickeln *nicht* entgegen steht”). Its lawful self-determination ‘opened up,’ as it were, by the new environment, the Ai’s inner purposiveness runs amok, not leading to the prehistoric bull’s beautifully superfluous horns, which turned back in on themselves to achieve a degree of micro-wholeness, but to malformation.

If the Ai’s narrative begins in a departure from aqueous home, then it never finds fulfillment in a return home or in a newfound home. What ensues instead is the tale of a missed opportunity: the Ai could not ‘master’ (“nicht beherrschen”) its newfound environs, could not make itself a ‘ruler’ therein (“sich darin nicht zum Herrn machen konnte”). This failure is itself “überliefert” to its descendants, becoming the Ai’s eventual “Unfähigkeit” to interface

---

illustrations that Goethe intuited alongside d’Alton’s insights as themselves constitutive of new moments of natural creation that ‘intensified’ and ‘enlivened’ life by rendering it more perspicuously intelligible: “Mit Recht betrachte ich daher die neuen Aufschlüsse, die Sie [d’Alton] uns über Constanz und Versatilität organischer Bildung schenken und erwarten lassen, als neue Schöpfungs-Momente, die, das Lebendige erst recht belebend, eine höhere Bildung steigend hervorbringen. Nehmen Sie meinen besten Dank für die baldige Sendung” (from a letter to d’Alton, Dec. 28, 1820; *WA* IV 54, 57). More than extravagant adulation, the passage demonstrates that for morphological method, to study the extinction of such deceased animal life forms means, in a sense, bringing them back to imaginative life: understanding creation’s extinction is itself a creative act. In line with his own *poetic* account of the Ai, Goethe elsewhere calls attention to the necessary use of aesthetic means of representation in scientific work, noting how “d’Alton’s Arbeit [...] das Gewordene und zwar nach dessen Vollendung und Untergang darstellt und zugleich das Innerste und Äußerste, Gerüst und Überzug, künstlerisch vermittelt vor Augen bringt und aus dem Tode ein Leben dichtet” (from a letter to Carus and d’Alton, Jan. 7 1826; *WA* IV 40, 228-9). Intuition (*Anschauung*) becomes ‘lively’ (*lebendig*) precisely when it apprehends external phenomena as animated by an inner lawfulness that permeates their very appearance.

harmonically with its terrestrial surround. A narrative non-event here undergoes subtle hypostatization into a kind of deficient capacity now deviantly capable of giving rise to re-actualizations of a failure, of a non-act. The subsequent description-cum-narration leaves it unclear as to whether Goethe retells the Ai's ontogenetic or phylogenetic development, but in any case subsequent formative events now take place in a run-on sentence that conveys a series of metonymically related iterations, all versions of the same non-act: not even self-transgression, which requires a self-imposed limitation in the first place in order to occur, but limitless over-extension: the extremities "dehnen sich grenzenlos aus" only for their "Abschluß in den Nägeln," to appear "keine Grenze zu haben." A traditional narrative action-sequence can reach closural fulfillment: the beginning event might be a lack, such as a kidnapped beloved or a missing magical object, that sets up the frame for the subsequent sequence of events that will interlock toward a correspondent end, through which the lack is fulfilled in the reunion of lover and beloved or in the retrieval of the object, alternately in its destruction. The tale of the Ai's metamorphosis, however, begins not with a positivizable lack (a determinate something that is missing and could somehow be found), but with an utter lack (something *is* missing, but it is nothing, a no-thing): the Ai simply leaves home. For all of its self-transformation, no real development occurs for this three-toed sloth: at the end of Goethe's account, the Ai is "ein Ungeheuer," just as the original organism began – even in its home environment – as "[e]in ungeheurer Geist." The Ai's metamorphosis thus represents a kind of aborted *Steigerung* and can accordingly only be narrated as the story of a non-event, the poetic tale of something that did not happen. In a scientific rather than narrative register, this is how its incapacity must be understood: not as a capacity to actualize possible formations purposively guided in a processual logic, but as a capacity to actualize the Ai's originary non-act, its failure to 'master' its terrestrial environment,



in turn tied to the catastrophe of its environmental switch to water.<sup>172</sup> It is for this reason that Goethe terms the Ai an “Ungeist:” “Wir möchten ihn [den Ai] einen Ungeist schelten, wenn man ein solches lebenslästerliches Wort brauchen dürfte; auf alle Weise jedoch ist es ein Geist der sich in seiner Hapterscheinung nicht manifestieren kann.”<sup>173</sup> The Ai’s (*Un*)*Geist* manifests itself, actualizes its incapacity, insofar as it withdraws – the phenomenal appearance of a self-withdrawal from appearance.<sup>174</sup>

Goethe’s micro-narrative masquerading as a description does, however, take on the overarching end of a character study, a physiognomic characterization of the Ai. Though Goethe begins by stating that the Ai could not ‘master’ its newfound environment, the text suggests that the Ai could ultimately not master *itself*: no genuine center of agency is effective here, for the Ai fails to ‘manifest’ its own concept, hence a form of ‘spiritless’ life. In Kantian parlance, the Ai’s parts do not – unlike other animals – organize themselves into a whole that contains its own

---

<sup>172</sup> One might think here of Agamben on the notion of incapacity: “To be free is [...] to be capable of one’s own impotentiality, to be in relation to one’s own privation” (183). I think this valorization of Aristotelian *adynamia* only makes sense when read in conjunction with select literary cases such as Melville’s *Bartleby*. At the same time, the idea of a capacity’s actualizing the potential *as potential* closely approaches Goethe’s own account of insipience as a moment of beauty in arrested animal self-locomotion (see footnote 174). Cf. Giorgio Agamben. “On Potentiality.” In: *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: SUP. 1999. Pg. 177-184; Agamben. “Bartleby, or On Contingency.” In: *Ibid.* Pg. 243-274.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 546.

<sup>174</sup> An earlier piece shared with Schiller addresses the animal’s phenomenal appearance and potential beauty: “Inwiefern die Idee: Schönheit sei Vollkommenheit mit Freiheit, auf organische Naturen angewendet werden könne” (1794). The idea of beauty, insofar as it can be applied to organic natures, is for Goethe that moment in which future animal self-motion is apprehended as incipient in the present. The incipience of movement allows one to see, for the blink of an eye, that the organism *as a whole* is *free*. This temporal moment of beauty unites metaphysical opposites, contracts a conceptual polarity intrinsic to the idea of a capacity. As Goethe continues: “Man sieht also daß bei der Schönheit *Ruhe* mit *Kraft*, *Untätigkeit* mit *Vermögen* eigentlich in Anschlag komme” (*ibid.*; emphasis in original). Goethe emphasizes the unity of potency and act as a threshold *phenomenon*, the coming to appearance of the modal threshold negotiated by every capacity’s exercise. The beautiful moment thus actualizes the potential *as potential* rather than act, allows a general capacity to disclose *itself* before its particular exercise. At its incipient moment, then, a capacity enacts the whole of its freedom for exercise rather than any particular exercised act. Goethe here cites ancient depictions of the lion regally laying down, at rest. The lion is not depicted running or hunting or biting into an antelope, which would make it agreeable, or frightening, but sitting yet poised, beautiful, as if he could leap to accomplish *any* of the latter activities. The lion’s freedom of movement as such comes to appearance in the threshold movement of incipience. In the case of the three-toed sloth, the organism does not phenomenally conceal its necessity, as more ‘perfect’ (*vollkommenere*) organic natures, above all man, do, but rather allows it to come to appearance, resulting in the paradoxical appearance of a withdrawal from appearance. If the Ai were caught or represented in an insipient moment of self-motion, it would phenomenally disclose the totality of its unfreedom, actualize its capacity’s incapacity rather than any one particular organic act or function.

purposive unity (its concept or *Naturzweck*) within itself. Instead, the reflexive verbs in Goethe's account immediately shift from the entire organism to its parts: the "Glieder [...] bilden sich," "Halswirbel vermehren sich [...] sich aus einander selbst erzeugen." Above all, the Ai's extremities gain a *vita propria* destructive of the animal, preventing it from forming a proper whole: "die Extremitäten als wenn sie *ungeduldig* über den vorigen stumpfen *Zwang*, sich nun in *Freiheit* erholen wollten, dehnen sich." The creature's malformation – its status as a self-disorganizing whole incapable of fully phenomenally manifesting the concept of its unity – is tied to this specific kind of 'freedom,' more accurately termed a negative freedom that knows no inner limitation: "den völligen Mangel von innerem Halt." The Ai thus represents a case in which the animal's inner self-determination is overcome by a successful self-transgression that results not in vital or even aesthetic exuberance, but in unfree form. Goethe hence intuited the Ai to be a creature ensconced in a "Sklaverei" of its own making, for its 'spiritless' life consists in the actualization of an "Unfähigkeit," a catastrophic "Unvermögen." Where d'Alton had the Ai rendered extinct through an externally triggered slothfulness, its "Mangel der Thätigkeit," Goethe re-imagines the Ai to be *too impatiently active* ("ungeduldig"), its inner purposiveness thrown off by its new terrestrial environment so as to lose its ingrained entelechic pathway of development and instead find itself totally *unlimited* and therefore totally enslaved to its own caprice. The originary non-act of moving onto land will hence determine the course of the Ai's metamorphosis, triggering a series of changes that are deformative and unfree not because certain required developmental steps are just missing or rearranged, as if a mechanical process or algorithm were simply interrupted or interfered with. Rather, the animal's formative activity remains caught in a kind of impatient busyness (*Geschäftigkeit*), in an activity unmoored from the living norm, one that does not transform the norm but that abandons it altogether, thus not a genuine activity

(*Tätigkeit*) at all. For this reason, Goethe claims that the Unau (Figure 7) evinces a freer formation more adequate to a terrestrial environment due to the animal's greater degree of achieved 'self-composure': "Merkwürdig dagegen ist, wie im Unau der animalische Geist sich schon mehr zusammen genommen, sich der Erde näher gewidmet, sich nach ihr bequemt."<sup>175</sup>

### **2.b Bewegliche Ordnung: Poetic Form and Natural Norm in "Athroismos"**

The socio-political semantics with which Goethe articulates the relationship between the three-toed sloth's form and its unfreedom – that the Ai could "nicht beherrschen" its newfound environs, "sich darin nicht zum Herrn machen konnte" – recalls the remarkable transition in the earlier poem "Athroismos" from a didactic account of animal metamorphosis to a celebration of human freedom in its robust normative sense. The poem concludes in a thematic elevation into the sphere of human action and even political rule: "Dieser schöne Begriff von Macht und Schranken, von Willkür / und Gesetz, von Freiheit und Maß, von beweglicher Ordnung [...]. Keinen höhern Begriff erringt der sittliche Denker, / Keinen der tätige Mann, der dichtende Künstler; der Herrscher, / Der verdient es zu sein, erfreut nur durch ihn sich der Krone" (V. 50-56).<sup>176</sup> If Goethe's account of the Ai began with an invocation of "die ewige Mobilität aller Formen in der Erscheinung," then that prose text finds its necessary counterpart in Goethe's didactic poem centered on the concept of an equally "beweglicher Ordnung."<sup>177</sup> At the same time, just as Goethe felt the need to call on "einigen poetischen Ausdruck" in a scientific discussion, "da Prose wohl nicht hinreichen möchte," so "Athroismos" problematizes the distinction between poetry and prose insofar as it partakes in the vexed tradition of the *Lehrgedicht*, which can be said to have gone extinct as a literary genre during the course of Goethe's lifetime. Seen against this

---

<sup>175</sup> *FA* I 24, 548.

<sup>176</sup> *FA* I 45, 500 (complete poem pg. 498 – 500). All subsequent citations refer to this edition (verses in parentheses in body).

<sup>177</sup> *FA* I 24, 546.

background, “Athroismos” emerges as a didactic poem written under the historical conditions of its own generic impossibility.

Before turning to the poem’s transformative participation in its generic tradition, it will help to dwell immediately with the way in which both texts address the mobile order of nature, the supple contours of the conceptual space delimited by the living norm. The poem is comprised of four strophes: the first strophe performs an interpellation of the reader and invocation of nature in the manner of Lucretius, directly addressing a plural “ihr” (V. 1) to ascend vertically to a highest peak from which to contemplate nature, here and throughout the poem personified as a divine maternal goddess. The second strophe recounts basic tenets of Goethean zoology: the idea of the animal’s inner purposiveness (V. 12-13); the “Urbild” or *Typus* (V. 14-15); the organism’s interface with its environment (V. 16-28); and finally the relationship between normative limitation and complexity or ‘perfection’ (*Vollkommenheit*; V. 29-32). The third strophe stages an argumentative objection to the concluding normative point of the second, dismissing the objection through a second address that calls on the reader to see for herself the principle of the animal’s formative *Etat* or budget, an amount of force that the formative drive (*Bildungstrieb*) must expend and distribute among the animal’s different parts. The fourth strophe then, as already noted, shifts thematic register and poetic tone to celebrate the ‘beautiful concept’ of a normatively mobile order characterized by a synthesis of apparent conceptual opposites (power and limitation, law and caprice, freedom and measure). The address to the reader from the first and third strophes here continues as the poem reflects on its own didactic speech situation by naming the concept it seeks to communicate. A key shift in the technique of poetic personification also occurs, for the divine, eternal ‘mother’ of nature invoked in the first strophe morphs in the fourth into “die heilige Muse” (V. 52). This final reflexive moment calls attention to the main question raised by

the poem's strophic segmentation, that of what poetically motivates the thematic leap in the last strophe from the order of nature to the order of human societal organization and poetic art, from given norms to self-given norms. Does Goethe simply see the same kind of freedom at work among animals and in human individuals, thereby naturalizing society and art? Should one then take his account of the Ai literally, casting Goethe into the role of a simpleminded vitalist who ascribes animals free wills to transform themselves? The poem resolutely answers these questions in the negative. Anything but a vitalist, Goethe found a poetic (or a poetically didactic) rather than a straight theoretical solution to the problem of nature's freedom and its delicate relation to the realm of human freedom proper.

The transition between the second and third strophes is of particular relevance to the Ai's malformation, its unfree form. It is at this juncture that the poem stages an argumentative objection to the grounding of organic complexity in normative limitation. The text remobilizes the strategy of conceptual spatialization on view throughout the morphological notebooks, but pairs it in novel fashion with a poetic personification of nature's formative drive:

Doch im Innern befindet die Kraft der edlern Geschöpfe  
Sich im heiligen Kreise lebendiger Bildung beschlossen.  
Diese Grenzen erweitert kein Gott, es ehrt die Natur sie:  
Denn nur also beschränkt war je das Vollkommene möglich.

Doch im Inneren scheint ein Geist gewaltig zu ringen,  
Wie er durchbräche den Kreis, Willkür zu schaffen den Formen  
Wie dem Wollen; doch was er beginnt, beginnt er vergebens. (V. 29-35)

The poem is thoroughly organized by coordinating conjunctions conclusive and demonstrative in character, lending the syntactic whole the appearance of a discursively unfolded argument. This argumentative hypotaxis only extends to the first three strophes, as it is overcome in the more paratactic fourth. The following list of argumentative conjunctions (often at a verse-line's very beginning) italicizes the ones present above: "Wagt ihr, also bereitet ... so reicht mir die Hand

... : denn ... Und ... So ist ... es sei nun ... Oder ... in jeglichem Falle ... Auch ... So ist ... : denn ... Also ... Und ... *Doch* ... *Denn* ... *Doch* ... *doch* ... Denn ... jedoch schon ... Siehst du also ... so frage nur gleich ... suche ... Denn ... Und daher ist ... Denn ...” The *doch* particle clearly concentrates itself at the moment of objection cited above, occurring three times in just seven lines. Goethe’s penchant for calling the Ai an *(Un)Geist* on multiple occasions (rather than a *Tier* or *lebendiges Wesen*) recalls this earlier “Geist” (V. 33) that capriciously seeks to transgress the ‘holy circumscription’ of the normative type’s internality. The poem addresses this possibility of an unfree organic form by itself ‘breaking through’ the bounds of its own poetic form, a thoroughgoing dactylic hexameter inspired by Knebel’s translation of Lucretius.<sup>178</sup>

Doch im Innern befindet die Kraft der edlern Geschöpfe	- u - u u - u u - u - u u - u
Sich im heiligen Kreise lebendiger Bildung beschlossen.	- u - u u - u u - u u - u u - u

[...]

Doch im Inneren scheint ein Geist gewaltig zu ringen,	- u - u u - u - u - u u - u
Wie er durchbräche den Kreis, Willkür zu schaffen den Formen	- u u - u u - - u u - u u - u

Though both verse pairs open with “Doch im Inner(e)n,” the clear echo conceals a subtle metrical difference that resounds within the lexical identity in a kind of prosodic counterpoint. The second line cited above semantically articulates the formal closure of the norm’s “heilige[r] Kreis[.]” in a line with four full dactyls, a crisp hexameter much metrically ‘cleaner’ than the others in the poem, which are plagued by an excess of trochees.<sup>179</sup> The perfect coincidence of lexical and

<sup>178</sup> Knebel sent the first translated book of *De rerum natura* to Goethe, who replied: “Indem ich es durchlas hat sich manches bey mir geregt, denn seit dem vorigen Sommer habe ich oft über die Möglichkeit eines Naturgedichts in unsern Tagen gedacht, und seit der kleinen Probe über die Metamorphose der Pflanzen bin ich verschiedentlich aufgemuntert worden” (Jan. 22, 1799). Though written in close vicinity (~ 1798/99) to the “Metamorphose der Pflanzen” in the elegiac distich, “Athroismos” was not published until inclusion in *Zur Morphologie* Bd. 1, Heft 2 (1821), later in *Gott und Welt* under the new title “Metamorphose der Tiere.” Before inclusion in the first publication context, however, Goethe wrote in his diary for Nov. 10, 1806: “Hexameter zur Morphologie” (*WA* III 3, 178). An undated draft of the poem exists, suggesting that Goethe returned to the poem in 1806 and revised it metrically.

<sup>179</sup> Goethe recommended that Knebel send his hexameters to August Wilhelm Schlegel or Wilhelm von Humboldt, but Knebel adamantly refused; while Goethe sent his final drafts of *Hermann und Dorothea* to both philologists and fully internalized Humboldt’s metrical advice on hexameters for “Achilleis,” he never collaboratively outsourced the metrical revisions for “Athroismos,” perhaps explaining why these hexameters are remarkably natural, even casual, liberated from the philological scrupulousness to which Goethe exposed his other hexametric attempts. Nisbet

metrical boundaries in the word “**heil-ig-gen**” acoustically aids in this regard (other words are throughout the poem truncated or left unfolded for metrical effect, the lexical constantly subordinated to the metrical level of organization; above this can be observed in the trochaic, because truncated, “**Inn-ern**” or the dactylic, unfolded “**Inn-er-en**,” a strategy that results in the archaicizing “**be-reit-et**” at the poem’s very first line for the sake of the extra syllable at word’s end). The second correspondent verse pair ‘breaks through’ the normative limitation of the hexameter by forming an elegiac distich; the spirit’s subjunctive transgression “durchbräche” thereby finds itself prosodically realized. Poetic form metrically deviates at just the moment that the text semantically addresses the organism’s inner potential for deviantly unfree formation. This first becomes audible in the *Hebungsprall* “**Kreis, Willkür**,” constituting a moment in which the poem itself capriciously departs from its own metrical patterning. While most verses in the poem contain at least three to four dactyls, the syntagm “scheint ein Geist [ge-]” (V. 33) introduces a series of three monosyllabic words that plant trochees in a line with only two dactyls. Such monosyllabic stretches further recur in the third strophe to grant the reader’s own will a capricious openness of prosodic interpretation. The next line hence reads: “Willkür zu schaffen den Formen, / *Wie dem Wollen*, **doch was er** beginnt, beginnt er vergebens” (V. 34-35, emphasis added). This latter line could be scanned:

– u – u – **u** – u – u – u – u

or

– u – u **u** – u – u – u – u

In yellow above is the monosyllabic syntagm, stressing the word “doch” in the first case and leaving it unstressed in the second. At a prominent start-position in the second strophe and its

---

provides an excellent reconstruction of Knebel’s adamant rejection of Voß’s approach to prosodic translation. For Knebel, it was of the utmost importance to keep the hexameter audible and speakable in recitation. He thought that the new prosody in the wake of Voß was rendering classical meters a matter more for the philologist’s trained eye than the reader’s ear. Cf. H.B. Nisbet. “Von Knebel’s Hexameter Translation of Lucretius.” *German Life and Letters*. 41:4 July 1988. Pg. 413-425.

counterpart in the third, “Doch” (V. 29, 33) was stressed twice, priming the reader’s ear to carry on the poem’s own formal self-transgression at the particle’s third occurrence. The reader may thus exploit the inherent metrical ambivalence of the monosyllabic word to yield seven stresses in a line that itself semantically addresses the will’s derailment into negative freedom. Alternately, one could read the line according to the second, proper scansion, as if the former lines themselves ‘began in vain’ with a metrically foregrounded “Doch,” now demoted – alongside the argumentative objection, the organism’s potential deformation – into an unstressed syllabic vehicle of the poem’s overriding metrical form.

What semantically remains in the subjunctive case (“*scheint* ein Geist [...] Wie er *durchbräche*”) as a merely hypothetical possibility finds itself performatively realized in a rich prosodic counterpoint, in an audible break out of the hexameter into the distich that re-attunes the reader’s ear to depart from the recurring dactyl towards the sound of monosyllabically composed trochees. The Ai’s unfree life-form thus finds a counterpart in the iconic performance of a metrical deviation that lasts but one line but may aurally ripple outwards, as the Ai’s initially capricious decision to leave water had consequences for its subsequent metamorphosis and even descendants. The act of versification was thus deeply fraught for Goethe, laden with difficulties conceptual in nature and not just a matter of poetic technique or rhetorical ornamentation. The slightest prosodic re-attunement – a switch in emphasis, an extra letter here, a monosyllabic word there – can have vast consequences for the poem’s argument. Versification as a conceptually transformative operation takes on particular prominence in the case of “Athroismos” due to its status as a didactic poem putatively ‘parasitic’ or dependent on the conceptual content of Goethe’s morphology. Indeed, commentators have continually noted that the poem’s verses can be readily correlated to their correspondent prose passages, but none have addressed the creative



transformation wrought by the act of versification.<sup>180</sup> In the “Erster Entwurf” (1795), Goethe reorganizes the exact same normative semantics on view in the verses analyzed above:

Hier sind die *Schranken* der tierischen Natur, in welchen sich die bildende *Kraft* auf die wunderbarste und beinahe auf die *willkürlichste* Weise zu bewegen *scheint*, ohne daß sie im mindesten fähig wäre den *Kreis zu durchbrechen* oder ihn zu überspringen. Der Bildungstrieb ist hier in einem zwar *beschränkten*, aber doch wohl eingerichteten *Reiche* zum *Beherrscher* gesetzt. Die Rubriken seines Etats, in welche sein Aufwand zu verteilen ist, sind ihm vorgeschrieben, was er auf jedes wenden will, steht ihm, bis auf einen gewissen Grad, *frei*.<sup>181</sup>

The passage’s spatialized normative vocabulary survives the act of versification to enter the final poem, but the economic metaphors (“so kann die Natur nie bankrott werden”) does not. The poem instead re-articulates the principle of the formative drive’s budget in terms of a balance that can be tipped into “die Last des Übergewichts,” which “vernichtet / Alle Schöne der Form und

---

<sup>180</sup> No one, for example, has pointed out the eruption of the distich into the otherwise thoroughly hexametric “Athroismos.” In an otherwise solid discussion of the poem, Arz claims that the poem’s conceptual linkage of limitation and perfection itself applies to the formal limitation of this ‘classical’ poem, but does not pay any attention to the text’s actual formal patterning, leaving a claim about poetic form on a purely semantic level that only corroborates prejudices about the holistic unity and self-composure of Goethe’s ‘classicist’ poetry. Rather than assuming a kind of holistic poetic unity, the text achieves it; to this end, it deliberately stages formal irritations for itself to overcome performatively. In general, “Athroismos” has received much less commentary compared to its chronological and thematic neighbor, “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen,” which is not quite a didactic poem, but an elegy that encompasses human love within a cosmic eros animating all of nature. Perhaps because of this didactic generic status, commentators such as Neubauer tend to discuss “Athroismos” as if it were a prose text. Eppers helpfully correlates the poem’s verses to the correspondent prose passages from the “Erster Entwurf” (1795), but his entire argument is premised on the poem’s invocation of the principle of the animal’s formative budget or *Etat* and the underlying economic metaphors of that principle. A comparison to the poem’s original draft (paralipomena to *WA I* 3, 89-91) demonstrates, however, that Goethe carefully avoided all economizing metaphors in the poem’s final metrical version; they are only present in the prose and verse draft (Nisbet also makes this point about the *Etat*’s figurative de-economization in the final poem). This is again a case of interpreters collating the poetic text to its prose template without actually reading the difference made by the act of versification as well as more local semantic shifts in figurative register. Krämer is one of the few interpreters to read the poem as a *Lehrgedicht*, juxtaposing the poem with Erasmus Darwin’s *The Temple of Nature*, which Goethe read with Schiller. Darwin’s poem was a key source for Goethe’s “Metamorphose der Pflanzen” (Goethe complained to Schiller that Darwin had addressed almost every topic in his didactic poem on plants, except, that is, for vegetation itself; Goethe also criticized Darwin’s personification of plants). Cf. Maike Arz. “Metamorphose der Tiere.” In: *Goethe-Handbuch in vier Bänden. Bd. 1: Gedichte*. Ed. Regine Otte & Bernd Witte. Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler. 1996. Pg. 458-463; John Neubauer. “Athroismos – Metamorphose der Tiere.” In: *Goethe-Gedichte. Zweiunddreißig Interpretationen*. Ed. Gerhard Saurer. Hanser. 1996. Pg. 181-190; Arne Eppers. “Zwischen Biologie und Ökonomie: Goethes Vorstellungen über die Grenzen des Wachstums im Lehrgedicht ‘Athroismos.’” *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*. Vol. 23, No. 3 (2013). Pg. 524-542; H.B. Nisbet. “Lucretius in Eighteenth-Century Germany. With a Commentary on Goethe’s ‘Metamorphose der Tiere.’” *Modern Language Review*. Vol. 100 (2005). Pg. 115-133; Olav Krämer. “Transformationen des wissenschaftlichen Lehrgedichts um 1800. Erasmus Darwins *The Temple of Nature* und Johann Wolfgang Goethes *Metamorphose der Tiere*.” In: *Das Wissen der Poesie: Lyrik, Versepiik und die Wissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Henning Hufnagel & Olav Krämer. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter. 2015. Pg. 37-68.

<sup>181</sup> *FA I* 24, 233-4. Emphasis added.

alle reine Bewegung” (V. 38-39). The intermediate draft of the poem, on the other hand, still speaks of an “Aufwand” (V. 43), of nature weighing its formative resources “mit scharfer Wage” (V. 27), employing a quantificational vocabulary in order to versify later passages from the “Erster Entwurf” that explain why the snake has no extremities due to its excessive length, why the frog’s small body is necessitated by the thinned out extension of its limbs.<sup>182</sup> Unlike that draft, the final poem instead transforms the prose passage into a metrically performative argumentative objection, ultimately opting for an example not present in the prose template. The poem introduces this novel example by means of readerly exhortation and personification: the reader should see for herself why nature could not have formed a horned lion, for she already expended too much energy on the lion’s fully toothed, massive jaw (V. 36-49). The act of versification thus transforms a scientific proposition, the indicative statement of a morphological principle *about* what is the case, into a poetic event that evinces the principle’s truth-value by performatively *making* it the case in a tensed counterpoint between metrics and semantics.

This should not, however, obscure the degree to which Goethe’s scientific prose itself *already* contains a poetic element. This is the personification of the formative drive as “in einem wohl eingerichteten Reiche zum Beherrscher gesetzt.” The poem’s third strophe similarly personifies the formative drive as “ein Geist” who appears “gewaltig zu ringen” (V. 33). In the second strophe, the formative drive appeared not as such a hypostasized agent, but grammatically bound to a genitive bearer (“die Kraft *der* edlern Geschöpfe,” V. 29, emphasis added). Though it might seem to be a rather primitive, simplistic rhetorical figure, personification became deeply problematic, yet necessary, for Goethe in a natural scientific context of writing, ultimately raising the question of how the investigator’s very act of naming might constitute a concept rhetorically, as a side effect of figuration. In the short essay “Bildungstrieb” (likely dating to 1817 and

---

<sup>182</sup> *WA I* 3, 89-91 (paralipomena); *FA I* 24, 235.

published in the first volume of *Zur Morphologie*), Goethe intervenes in the debate between advocates of epigenesis and of preformation by calling attention to the language used by Blumenbach to conceive of a formative drive that would account for how inorganic matter organizes itself into organic life. With Kant on the side of the epigenists, Goethe discusses the names granted to this mysterious activity conceptually meant to move one past the threshold separating the inorganic and the living (e.g., Caspar Friedrich Wolf's *vis essentialis*). Goethe ultimately argues that the very concept of a formative drive is one yielded through a poetic operation of anthropomorphic personification:

Das Wort Kraft bezeichnet zunächst etwas nur Physisches, sogar Mechanisches, und das was sich aus jener Materie organisieren soll bleibt uns ein dunkler unbegreiflicher Punkt. Nun gewann Blumenbach das Höchste und Letzte des Ausdrucks, er anthropomorphisierte das Wort des Rätsels und nannte das wovon die Rede war, einen *nisus formativus*, einen Trieb, eine heftige Tätigkeit, wodurch die Bildung bewirkt werden sollte. Betrachten wir das alles genauer, so hätten wir es kürzer, bequemer und vielleicht gründlicher, wenn wir eingestünden, daß wir, um das Vorhandene zu betrachten, eine vorhergegangene Tätigkeit zugeben müssen und daß, wenn wir uns eine Tätigkeit denken wollen, wir derselben ein schicklich Element unterlegen, worauf sie wirken konnte, und daß wir zuletzt diese Tätigkeit mit dieser Unterlage als immerfort zusammen bestehend und ewig gleichzeitig vorhanden denken müssen. Dieses Ungeheure personifiziert tritt uns als ein Gott entgegen, als Schöpfer und Erhalter, welchen anzubeten, zu verehren und zu preisen wir auf alle Weise aufgefordert sind.<sup>183</sup>

Quasi-anthropomorphic personification emerges here as an operation of concept-formation that allows Goethe to think that which necessarily must be assumed to precede “das Vorhandene.” To think an ordinary organic formation, one must assume a precedent formative activity (“eine vorhergegangene Tätigkeit”) and that which it acts upon (an “Element” or “Unterlage”). Activity and medium here relate in a kind of hylomorphic unity (indeed, Goethe appends a visual schema to his essay relating “Stoff” to “Form,” the key mediating term being “Leben”).<sup>184</sup> This means

---

<sup>183</sup> *FA I* 24, 451-452.

<sup>184</sup> The mereological section already noted that Goethe does not deny the inorganic realm its own sort of participation “an dem allgemeinen Lebenshauche der Natur,” suggesting that he saw Blumenbach’s formative drive as actually operative in nature, unlike Kant, who took it as a merely regulative maxim that the otherwise empirical natural

that the activity conceptually defines itself relative to the material medium, the medium in relation to the activity acting upon it (i.e., the formative drive is only formative with respect to its inorganic medium, that medium only a medium with respect to this formative activity): both are “immerfort zusammen bestehend und ewig gleichzeitig vorhanden.” Personification (“anthropomorphisierte,” “personifiziert”) thus takes shape as a synthetic operation that thinks the hylomorphic unity of distinguishable yet not separable conceptual moments in their ‘eternal simultaneity’ and reciprocal co-dependence rather than their mutual exclusion and thus irresolvable paradox. Beyond yielding this otherwise inarticulable conceptual unity, poetic personification elicits a pious wonder before the life of nature at the very moment when the morphological observer brushes up against an epistemic limit. If genuine concepts cannot articulate a hylomorphic unity of opposites (here, formal activity and material medium), then the personification of such a unity “tritt uns als ein Gott entgegen” that we must praise and honor precisely insofar as we do not understand it, for its existence must nonetheless be assumed in order to for us scientifically to go on and apprehend the genesis of the given phenomenon.

While the prose passage on which the third strophe of “Athroismos” is based personified the formative drive as a “Beherrscher” rather than an immense deity, in its fourth strophe the poem will literalize what remained a mere metaphor in prose, turning to “der Herrscher, / der verdient es zu sein” (V. 55-56). In other words, the poem ends in a de-personifying conclusion by turning to actual human persons. What remained a ‘mere’ metaphor subordinated to the didactic

---

scientist could operate with to begin making sense of how organic life emerges out of the inorganic. Karl Schlechta argues in this regard that both Goethe and Aristotle did not posit a deep ontological difference between the organic and inorganic. As Aristotle claimed that matter ‘desires’ form, so Goethe claimed that “der Naturforscher überzeugt ist, daß alles nach Gestalt strebt, und auch das Unorganische erst für uns einen wahren Wert erhält, wenn es eine mehr oder weniger entschiedene Bildsamkeit auf eine oder die andere Weise offenbart” (cited in Schlechte 69). The laws of their respective modes of organization will differ, of course. A key difference from Aristotle found by Schlechta is Goethe’s concentration on deviations from the normative ideal. Cf. Karl Schlechta. *Goethe in seinem Verhältnis zu Aristoteles*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 1938; Claus Günzler. “Die Bedeutung des aristotelische Hylemorphismus für die Naturbetrachtung Goethes.” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*. Bd. 2, Heft 2 (April – June 1967). Pg. 208-241.

end of a scientific treatise in prose thus becomes a genuine expansion of poetic insight, a pretheoretical leap from the natural to the societal in the fourth strophe. Before this moment, however, the poem launches with a divinizing personification of the animal's normative determination:

Wagt ihr, also bereitet, die letzte Stufe zu steigen  
Dieses Gipfels, so reicht mir die Hand und öffnet den freien  
Blick ins weite Feld der Natur. Sie spendet die reichen  
Lebensgaben umher, die Göttin; aber empfindet  
Keine Sorge wie sterbliche Frau um ihrer Gebornen  
Sichere Nahrung; ihr ziemet es nicht: denn zwiefach bestimmte  
Sie das höchste Gesetz, beschränkte jegliches Leben,  
Gab ihm gemess'nes Bedürfnis, und ungemessene Gaben,  
Leicht zu finden, streute sie aus, und ruhig begünstigt  
Sie das muntre Bemühen der vielfach bedürftigen Kinder;  
Unerzogen schwärmen sie fort nach ihrer Bestimmung. (V. 1-11)<sup>185</sup>

Across the transition from first to second sentence, a quiet shift in nature's status from genitive possessor to grammatical subject occurs: "ins weite Feld *der* Natur. *Sie* spendet" (emphasis added). Nature quickly morphs into "die Göttin," an eternal rather than mortal mother whose principal activity is here articulated twice: on a conceptual plane, a double determination of natural law ("zwiefach bestimmte / Sie das höchste Gesetz, ..."), itself doubled in an apposition as a normative limitation on the living ("... beschränkte jegliches Leben"); on a figurative plane, the maternal donation of a gift disseminated throughout nature as nature itself ("spendet die reichen / Lebensgaben umher," "streute [...] aus," "begünstigt"). The natural law's double determination is refigured into the personified register in the verse "Gab ihm gemess'nes Bedürfnis, und ungemessene Gaben" (V. 8). The plenitude of this divine maternal gift is so vast as to include lack itself: nature gives "Bedürfnis," an intrinsic need, the gift of a lack inscribed into the core of animal life. Such need remains qualified here as 'measured,' countered by the 'immeasurable' and proper "Gaben" or capacities that allow the animal to assimilate its

---

<sup>185</sup> *FA I* 45, 498.

environment, to feed, grow, and reproduce. What could have been articulated conceptually as a tension between the organism's inner capacities and its intrinsic environmental need, the inscription of its outer realm within itself, is thus unified in the figure of a gift capable of encompassing capacity as well as need, the inner as well as the outer, via the divine agency of mother nature. Otherwise 'neutral' and even simplistic rhetorical figures such as personification hence become deeply problematic in the context of the didactic poem; they can no longer be taken for granted, for their figuration might distort the discursive articulation of conceptual didactic content or, as Goethe suggested in his remarks on Blumenbach's personification, paper over underlying tensions in conceptual systems.<sup>186</sup>

The transition between second and third strophes staged a poetic (de)formation at the very moment that the animal's potentially retrograde metamorphosis was addressed, and the transition between first and second strophes is similarly charged with a tensed imbrication of the conceptual and the figurative. If in the first strophe animals were "vielfach bedürftige Kinder" who "schwärmen [...] fort nach ihrer Bestimmung" (V. 10-11), according, that is, to nature's

---

<sup>186</sup> Commentators such as Nisbet note that the poem's invocation of nature draws on Lucretius's in *De rerum natura*. In Knebel's translation, the entire poem begins "Mutter der Aeneaden, o Wonne der Menschen und Götter, / Holde Venus!" (V. 1-2, pg. 4). In the final version of the translation, Knebel includes a prose synopsis and discussion of each book in the poem, interestingly addressing the technique of personification with which the whole begins: "Daß Lukrez hier den Begriff der ganzen Natur in der Person einer Göttin vereinigt darstellt [...] darf keinen wundern [...] Diese persönliche Darstellung ist nicht etwa ein leeres, dichterisches Bild; sie umfaßt vielmehr alle Gefühle, welche die reizende Natur darbietet, und schmückt das Gedicht mit den glänzendsten Farben der Poesie" (3). Given that Lucretius did not actually believe in Venus, conceiving of the Gods as reposed in the serene indifference of *ataraxia*, the invocation of Venus poses a problem for his didactic poem. *De rerum natura* reflects on its own didactic speech situation when it metaphorically describes poetry as the 'honey' with which to communicate to the reader the 'bitter medicine' of Epicurean philosophy (I, V. 936-950, Englert trans.). This may seem to subordinate the poetic function to the didactic-communicative one, but later passages in the poem describe the letteral play of syllables in poetic language as itself mimicking the play of atoms in the void, suggesting that the poem's own form can performatively convey a cosmic order (I, V. 1013-23, Englert trans.). Goethe would have also encountered Erasmus Darwin's account of personification in *The Lives of Plants*, discussed in correspondence with Schiller. For Darwin, poetic personification represents figuration that can occur in the background, below the reader's threshold of conscious awareness due to the subjectivizing tendencies of grammar, while in painting, personifications are unavoidably foregrounded in depicting an anthropomorphic or visual actor. Cf. Lucretius. *Von der Natur der Dinge*. Übersetzt von Karl Ludwig von Knebel. Leipzig: bei Georg Joachim Göschen. 1831; Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things: De Rerum Natura*. Trans. Walter Englert. Newburyport: Focus Philosophical Library. 2003; Catherine Packham. "The Science and Poetry of Animation: Personification, Analogy, and Erasmus Darwin's *Loves of the Plants*." In: *Romanticism*. Vol. 10, Issue 2. Pg. 191-208.

normative determination, then in the second strophe these children are already matured, generating themselves rather than being birthed by a mother. Nature thus toggles back to the de-personified status of a ‘merely’ figurative phrase (“Schoß der Natur”) in order for the poem to didactically articulate the concept of the animal’s inner purposiveness:

Zweck sein selbst ist jegliches Tier, vollkommen entspringt es  
Aus dem Schoß der Natur und zeugt vollkommene Kinder.  
Alle Glieder bilden sich aus nach ew’gen Gesetzen  
Und die seltenste Form bewahrt im Geheimen das Urbild.  
So ist jeglicher Mund geschickt die Speise zu fassen  
Welche dem Körper gebührt, es sei nun schwächlich und zahnlos  
Oder mächtig der Kiefer gezahnt, in jeglichem Falle  
Fördert ein schicklich Organ den übrigen Gliedern die Nahrung.  
Auch bewegt sich jeglicher Fuß, der lange, der kurze,  
Ganz harmonisch zum Sinne des Tiers und seinem Bedürfnis. (V. 12-21)

No longer cared for by an eternal mother figuratively distinguished from “sterbliche Frau” (V. 5), animal life unfolds here “nach ew’gen Gesetzen” (V. 14) instead. The animal “Mund” and its correspondent “Speise” in the environment take on the roles of the animal’s ‘gifted’ inner capacities and its “Bedürfnis.” Mouth and foot, qua parts, organize themselves harmonically to form a whole, enter into a state of self-maintaining health. The poem here departs from its figurative register of maternal dependence precisely when discussing the concept of inner purposiveness, the animal being’s *independence* qua self-organizing purposive whole (“Zweck sein selbst”). But this state of affairs does not remain stable for long: the poem continually toggles between conceptual and figurative registers, between articulating inner purposiveness as the *given* law of animal life and re-articulating it as a divine maternal *gift*:

So ist jedem der Kinder die volle reine Gesundheit  
Von der Mutter bestimmt: denn alle lebendigen Glieder  
Widersprechen sich nie und wirken alle zum Leben.  
Also bestimmt die Gestalt die Lebensweise des Tieres,  
Und die Weise zu leben sie wirkt auf alle Gestalten  
Mächtig zurück. So zeigt sich fest die geordnete Bildung,  
Welche zum Wechsel sich neigt durch äußerlich wirkende Wesen. (V. 22-32)

The poem oscillates here between the hetero- and self-determination of the animal life form: “Von der Mutter bestimmt [...] Also bestimmt die Gestalt.” The poem turns from the animal’s health, its self-maintenance before an external environment assimilated into itself in feeding, to the environment’s feedback influence on the animal’s own formation. This reciprocal co-determination of organism and environment receives poetic expression in a chiasmus: “... *Gestalt die Lebensweise ... / ... die Weise zu leben ... Gestalten.*” At the same time, the sentence expressing this reciprocity spills over the verse limit to escape the closure of the chiasmus by *beginning* a new metrical line with a grammatical *end* – “Mächtig zurück.” – that itself refers the reader backwards. This retroactive effect constitutes a structural figure mobilized at key moments throughout the poem; it can be termed the *retrospective beginning*. This particular retrospective beginning non-semantically articulates the conceptual imbrication of environment and organism in its concatenation of grammatical and metrical boundaries. Even the entire poem begins with an end: “Wagt ihr, *also* bereitet, die *letzte* Stufe zu steigen” (V. 1, emphasis added), which has led commentators to conclude that the poem remains a fragment planned as part of a larger *Lehrgedicht* on natural science.

Tracking the poetic personification of nature as a maternal divinity (and of animals as her children) or, alternately, of the natural law’s normative determination of animal life, allows us to isolate the animating *conceptual* tension with which Goethe’s didactic poem grapples. Throughout, personification allows the text to think through the *givenness* of natural norms as the mythic bequeathal of a divine maternal *gift*. Animal life thus finds itself (figuratively, mythically) determined from without by the “Göttin” to be self-determining from within. Before settling on the invocation of Kantian inner purposiveness via the word “Zweck,” the poem’s draft began what would become the second strophe: “Also bestimmte sich selbst die Form vollkommener



Thiere” (V. 18).<sup>187</sup> If animal life forms nonetheless “schwärmen [...] fort nach *ihrer* Bestimmung” (V. 11, emphasis added), then this didactic poem uses personification as a figurative tool to think through the mythic givenness of natural law as the paradoxical hetero-determination of animal life to be self-determining.

The final strophe transforms this personified maternal nature into the muse in order to reflect on its own didactic speech situation. The poem abandons its argumentative syntax in a paratactic jubilation reliant on semicolons rather than coordinating conjunctions, almost taking on the quality of an enthused listing of increasingly exultant synonyms that in each repetition subtly shift semantic register:

Dieser schöne Begriff von Macht und Schranken, von Willkür  
Und Gesetz, von Freiheit und Maß, von beweglicher Ordnung,  
Vorzug und Mangel, erfreue dich hoch; die heilige Muse  
Bring harmonisch ihn dir, mit sanftem Zwange belehrend.  
Keinen höhern Begriff erringt der sittliche Denker,  
Keinen der tätige Mann, der dichtende Künstler; der Herrscher,  
Der verdient es zu sein, erfreut nur durch ihn sich der Krone.  
Freue dich, höchstes Geschöpf, der Natur, du fühlst dich fähig  
Ihr den höchsten Gedanken, zu dem sie schaffend sich aufschwang,  
Nachzudenken. Hier stehe nun still und wende die Blicke  
Rückwärts, prüfe, vergleiche, und nimm vom Munde der Muse,  
Daß du schauest, nicht schwärmst, die liebliche volle Gewißheit. (V. 50-61)

The exhortation with which the poem began, calling on the reader to ascend to “die letzte Stufe / dieses Gipfels” (V. 1-2), turns out to lead not to an outlook over and above nature (“öffnet den freien / Blick ins weite Feld der Natur,” V. 2-3), but rather to a view inward, to an embedding of man and his epistemic capacity to know within the order of nature itself. The figure of the retrospective beginning here ends the poem in grammatical sentences that spill over hexametric boundaries to open onto new lines of verse: “du fühlst dich fähig / Ihr den höchsten Gedanken [...] / **Nachzudenken**. Hier stehe nun still und wende die Blicke / **Rückwärts**. ...” Man realizes

---

<sup>187</sup> *WA I 3*, 89-91 (paralipomena).

his own uniquely rational life form insofar as he *re-cognizes* (*nachdenken*) nature's own creative cognition, for nature herself has 'soared' up to reach the concept in a manner termed "schaffend," actualizing the concept in its very comprehension. The superlative register thus associates the 'highest' concept of a normatively mobile order with the human being as the "höchstes *Geschöpf*," as one creature among many in natural creation. The entire didactic aim of the poem is to communicate this concept to the reader, and yet the poem concludes in a performative paradox. Just as the animal was heteronomously determined (by the mythic mother) to be self-determining, so the human being here is simultaneously *granted* the concept by the muse ("die heilige Muse / *Bringt* harmonisch ihn dir") while he must also discover it *for himself*, on his own ("Keinen höhern Begriff *erringt* ..."). The same adjective used here to characterize the poetic communication qua activity of the muse ("harmonisch," V. 53) was before employed to characterize the animal's self-locomotion: "Auch bewegt sich jeglicher Fuß, der lange, der kurze, / Ganz harmonisch zum Sinne des Tiers" (V. 20-21). As the eruption of the distich within the hexametric whole demonstrated, the mobile order of the poem's own metrical feet, whether "der lange, der kurze," does not quite move so harmonically "zum Sinne des [Gedichts]," instead prosodically staging para-conceptual irritations to the poem's own semantic claims.<sup>188</sup> This is why the text characterizes its own poetic performance as taking place "mit *sanften* Zwänge belehrend," for the poem's global didactic communication itself partakes of the mobile order actively mediating between freedom and measure, gentleness and compulsion.

To return to the paradox of that didactic situation, the reader remains caught between passivity and activity, both being brought the concept and discovering it on her own. In this

---

<sup>188</sup> Jarvis provides another example of reading verse as a para-conceptual counterpoint to semantic content in the case of Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*. As Jarvis argues, didactic poems present exemplary test cases for making sense of how 'mere' poetic form thinks, given that such didactic poems are presumably less 'poetic' than more flagrantly figurative ones, heteronomously bound to a given doctrine (*Lehre*). Cf. Simon Jarvis. "Bedlam or Parnassus: The Verse Idea." *Metaphilosophy*. Vol. 43, Nos. 1-2. Jan. 2012. Pg. 71-81.

regard, the poem interpellates the reader to turn inward and rejoice in her own knowledge; the mode of address continually returns to the joy of the concept (*die Freude des Begriffs*): “Dieser schöne Begriff [...] erfreue dich hoch [...] der Herrscher [...] erfreut nur durch ihn sich der Krone [...] Freue dich, höchstes Geschöpf, der Natur” (V.50-52, 55-56, 57). The poem here takes up a common refrain from Lutheran church songs often sung at Christmastime to rejoice at the coming birth of Christ – “Freue dich, o Christenheit!” – in order to transform it into a pagan gospel rejoicing at the human subject’s own freedom embedded *within* the normatively mobile order of nature rather than transcending it altogether.<sup>189</sup> The poem’s didactic communication hence takes on the aspect of a Spinozist *evangelion*; the doctrinal content of key principles from Goethean zoology now morphs via the interpellation of readerly affect into heterodox glad tidings. To think this ‘beautiful concept’ of a mobile order, then, is not only for man to rethink nature’s own creative thoughts, but to enter a higher affective pitch of subjective being. Joy here, in other words, is not a mere emotion among others, not a hetero-affection characterized by a necessarily fleeting pleasure in jubilant ecstasy, but a state of ontological awareness. For Spinoza, joy (*laetitia*) is the affect that guides a finite mode such as the human mind’s striving (*conatus*) to persevere in being; joy constitutes “that *passion by which the Mind passes to a greater perfection,*” to an increase in the power to be.<sup>190</sup> Drawing on Spinoza, Fromm distinguishes between joy and pleasure (*Vergnügen*) as follows: “Freude ist eine Begleiterscheinung produktiven Tätigseins. Sie ist kein ‘Gipfelerlebnis,’ das kulminiert und abrupt endet, sondern eher ein Plateau, ein

---

<sup>189</sup> Rather than transcending, for the poem carefully places a comma (elided in earlier commentaries such as the Weimar edition, but present in the Hamburg and Frankfurt editions) *between* “Geschöpf, der Natur,” such that the ‘highest creature’ rejoices *in* nature as object of the verb “freue dich” rather than being genitively attributed to nature herself as the highest of her creatures in a *scala naturae* model. The full text of the Lutheran song reads: “O du fröhliche, o du selige, gnadenbringende Weihnachtszeit! / Welt ging verloren, Christ ist geboren: / Freue, freue dich, o Christenheit!” Cf. *Neue Sammlung alter und neuer Lieder, die in den preußischen Kirchen gesungen werden, auch einiger Gebete, Gott zu ehren, und der gemeinen öffentliche und häusliche Andacht zu befördern, ausgefertigt*. Königsberg: Dan. Fried. Schulz. 1820. Pg. 78-80 (also: 258f., 496f., 534f.).

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Spinoza. *Ethics*. In: *The Collected Works*. Vol. 1. Ed. & trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: PUP. 1985. Pg. 500-501. Emphasis in original.

emotionaler Zustand, der die produktive Entfaltung der dem Menschen eigenen Fähigkeiten begleitet.”<sup>191</sup> Like Spinoza, Aristotle also conceived of a unique kind of pleasure intrinsic to the unfolding of human activity: “Pleasure completes the activity not as an inherent state does, but as an end which supervenes as the bloom of youth does on those in the flower of their age.”<sup>192</sup> The activity – in the case of “Athroismos,” the cognitive act of noetically participating in nature – does not *aim* for joy, but in its self-fulfillment cannot help but epiphenomenally generate it. Such joy supervenes on the act of knowing the concept, forming its necessary affective correlate, the success-marker of its truly being learned and understood by the human life form. The reader, in other words, here comes to an affectively marked first-personal knowledge of what was before solely the case for the ‘lower’ animals observed from without: “Zweck sein selbst ist jegliches Tier” (V. 12), including the human. The human’s uniquely distinct purpose is to understand inner purposiveness ‘from the inside,’ as it were, so as to rethink nature’s own active thoughts and self-consciously potentiate her normatively mobile order within the human order of society and art.<sup>193</sup>

---

<sup>191</sup> Erich Fromm. *Haben oder Sein. Die seelischen Grundlagen der neuen Gesellschaft*. München: dtv. 1979. Pg. 144-145.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. In: *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Vol. 1. Trans. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: PUP. 1984. Pg. 3982 (Book X, 1174b1)

<sup>193</sup> In his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (from 1797, just one or two years before “Athroismos”), Schelling came to a similar solution, arguing that man first-personally comes to know an inner purposiveness within himself as real, this concept otherwise only subjunctively attributable to organisms *as if* they actually possessed it: “wir verlangen zu wissen, nicht, wie eine solche Natur außer uns entstanden, sondern, wie auch nur die *Idee* einer solchen [i.e., innerlich zweckmäßigen] Natur *in uns* gekommen sei; nicht etwa, wie wir sie willkürlich erzeugt haben, sondern wie und warum sie ursprünglich und *notwendig* in allem, was unser Geschlecht über Natur von jeher gedacht hat, zugrunde liegt. Denn die Existenz einer solchen Natur *außer mir* erklärt noch lange nicht die Existenz einer solchen Natur *in mir*” (150, emphasis in original). The human being’s first-personal knowledge of a more universal natural inner purposiveness overcomes Kantian strictures on it as a regulatory maxim for reflective teleological judgment. This Schelling argument would have been read by Goethe, who studied the introduction to Schelling’s work and discussed it in letters to Schiller (cf. footnote 109). Though not accounting for it in terms of the first person, Karen Ng gives a remarkably clear reconstruction of how important Schelling’s point was for Hegel’s critique of Fichte, who only comprehended self-consciousness as a subjective identity of subject and object. To comprehend self-consciousness as an *objective* subject-object identity might seem to be solved by allowing self-consciousness to encounter another self-consciousness that would allow it to become objective, but this encounter between self-relating centers of activity leads in the Master/Slave dialectic to necessary struggle. Instead, a more immediate solution is necessary: self-consciousness qua subjective object-subject must encounter an objective subject-object that is *not* itself another self-consciousness. As Ng demonstrates, for German idealism this unselfconscious yet self-relating objective subject-object is natural life. Self-consciousness must encounter life in order to become objective to

Anything but a celebration of man over and above the animals, Goethe's poem attempts to think the anthropological difference as one between different life forms encompassed within the greater locus of animal existence.

There remains, however, a difference nonetheless. At the very end of the first strophe, such animals were characterized as unruly, even 'uneducated' children who swarm forth according to their maternal-normative determination: "Unerzogen schwärmen sie fort nach ihrer Bestimmung" (V. 11). The poem concludes by invoking the same term not to sketch a disorganized movement, but in the sense of an empty enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) now overcome by the human being: "und nimm vom Munde der Muse / Daß du schauest, nicht schwärmst, die liebliche volle Gewißheit" (V. 60-61). The reader, in the course of this didactic poem, has been educated "mit sanftem Zwange" (V. 53): no longer among the animals that remain "Unerzogen," the human has learned how to contemplate and even enact nature's mobile norm. At the same time, "die liebliche volle Gewißheit" with which the poem ends recalls "die volle reine Gesundheit" (V. 22) that was granted "jedem der Kinder" by 'mother' nature (this is the only repetition of the modifier *voll*). The cognate lexical signatures point to the performative paradox of the poem's didactic communication. The reader is called on to discover first-personally the concept within himself and thereby establish a link to the animal realm (simultaneously reflecting on that tether), *but* the poem must elicit such independence from the reader via an imperative address that keeps him dependent on the maternal muse: "prüfe, vergleiche, und nimm vom Munde der Muse" (V. 60). No longer is the animal's "Mund geschickt die Speise zu fassen" (V. 16) in question here, but the muse's mouth, as if she were feeding the reader a kind of cognitive

---

itself, to conceive of itself as primarily this objective living being. This allows for an asymmetric dependence relation between subject and object for which Fichte's more monological philosophy cannot adequately account. Cf. Schelling. *Werke*. Bd. 1. Leipzig 1907. Pg. 107-153; Karen Ng. "Leben, Selbstbewusstsein, Negativität: Zum Verständnis von Hegels These der spekulativen Identität." *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. Vol. 64, no. 4. 2016. Pg. 522-550.

nourishment, this ‘lovely certainty.’ Like the animals’ hetero-determination to be self-determining, or the mythic gift of the natural norm’s givenness, the human animal must similarly be heteronomously educated into autonomy, overcoming his ‘uneducated’ enthusiasm (unlike other animals) to re-cognize and intellectually partake in nature’s normatively mobile order, practically expanding it to ever-widening spheres of human activity (“der tätige Mann,” V. 55), ethical reflection on such activity (“der sittliche Denker,” V. 54), its organization under political rule (“der Herrscher,” V. 55), and even poetic art itself (“der dichtende Künstler,” V. 55).

Far from escaping the orbit of animal life altogether to affirm man’s noumenal freedom, then, the poem conceives of the human being as a specifically practical rational life-form whose definitive vital activity consists in transforming its own norm in action. This occurs not arbitrarily, but as a ramification of the beautiful concept of a mobile order, as a potentially self-transgressive and therefore precarious expansion of the conceptual space of the living norm. Goethe elsewhere hinted at an understanding of *human* action as itself norm-bound on the model of life’s inner purposiveness. Writing in 1819 on the occasion of the opening of a nearby veterinary school in Jena by Theobald Renner (owner of a large collection of animal skeletons), Goethe wrote:

Eine unterbrochene, doch nie getilgte Tätigkeit fand hierin ihre angemessenste Belohnung: denn bei jedem redlichen, ernstlichen Handeln, wenn auch anfangs Zweck und Beruf zweifelhaft scheinen sollten, finden sich beide zuletzt klar und erfüllt. Jedes reine Bemühen ist auch ein Lebendiges, *Zweck sein selbst*, fördernd ohne Ziel, nützend wie man es nicht voraussehen konnte.<sup>194</sup>

Quoting his own didactic poem in a prose passage, Goethe here comprehends human scientific endeavor – *any* “reine[s] Bemühen” – as encompassed within the natural order in a broad sense, part of “das muntre Bemühen der vielfach bedürftigen Kinder” (V. 10). Human activity is not, of course, vital activity in a crudely empirical, biological sense; rather, practical endeavor gains a life of its own insofar as it perseveres in remaining “redliche[s], ernstliche[s] Handeln,” in

---

<sup>194</sup> From the “Nachträge zur vergleichenden Anatomie.” Cf. *FA I* 24, 485. Emphasis in original.

remaining ‘true to itself’ by being committed to its inner norm, the idea of the inner purpose animating the whole that is the activity’s unfolding. As such an end unto itself, however, vital endeavor manages to ‘challenge’ (“fördernd”) the agent carrying it out, but not in such a way that presumes some overarching, externally instrumental (rather than inner) end (“ohne Ziel”). This implies that vital-practical action cannot be useful (“nützend”) in any immediate or straightforward sense, only in terms of an unforeseeable future efficacy. The activity’s liberation from extrinsic goal-oriented instrumentality depends, however, on remaining ‘alive’ to its inwardly purposive norm, its ‘idea.’ Perhaps for this reason, Goethe insisted: “Wenn man also fragt wie ist Idee und Erfahrung am besten zu verbinden? so würde ich antworten: praktisch!”<sup>195</sup>

Seen in terms of the genre-history of the *Lehrgedicht*, “Athroismos” further becomes legible as a didactic poem written under the conditions of its increasing historical impossibility.<sup>196</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> From the “Nachträge zur Metamorphose.” Cf. *FA I* 24, 713.

<sup>196</sup> The didactic poem may seem to be a heteronomous literary genre, but for Schelling it overcomes its instrumental end of teaching by taking that end up into its very form. This is akin to how, in architecture, a building may inwardly overcome its instrumental end of providing shelter by rendering that necessary constraint integral to its aesthetic whole rather than imposed from without: “die Forderung an das Lehrgedicht wäre nur die, in dem Werk selbst die Absicht aufzuheben, so daß es um seiner selbst willen zu seyn scheinen könne. Dieß wird aber nie der Fall seyn können, als wenn die Form des *Wissens* im Lehrgedicht für sich fähig ist ein Reflex des All zu seyn. Da es eine Forderung ist, die an das Wissen, unabhängig von der Poesie, schon für sich selbst betrachtet gemacht wird, ein Bild des All zu seyn, so liegt schon im *Wissen* für sich die Möglichkeit, als *Form* der Poesie einzutreten” (495). To render its own didactic content and extrinsic end of teaching but part of its ‘form,’ the didactic poem must teach *through* its doctrine rather than straightforwardly teaching its doctrine and thereby remaining beholden to it. For knowledge to become absolute and thus poetic in form would mean for the universe to be totally represented in knowledge, knowledge itself a kind of representational reflex of the cosmos. The absolute character of such knowledge lies in the indifference between its represented and representing, its actual cosmic being and its scientific discursive articulation. The absoluteness of the content of such knowledge implies that “so kann auch in der Idee nur Ein absolutes Lehrgedicht seyn, von dem alle einzelnen bloße Bruchstücke sind” (Schelling 495). This leads Schelling to argue that no real didactic poems truly exist, all generic exemplars (including that of Lucretius) remaining but ‘fragments’ of the absolute didactic poem yet to come. The writing of such an absolute didactic poem would for Schelling represent nothing less than the culmination and totality of scientific knowledge, such that science ‘returns’ to the poetic condition from which it initially departed. This explains why Goethe’s own didactic poem strategically *must* begin with an end (“Wagt ihr, also bereitet, die *letzte* Stufe zu steigen,” V. 1). Via the structural figure of the retrospective beginning, “Athroismos” invokes a greater whole within which the entire text would form but a part at the same time that its final, fourth strophe leaps to reflect that greater whole within the part. “Athroismos” thus forms a poetic whole insofar as it remains part of a hypothetically posited greater whole, Schelling’s absolute didactic poem. The text’s apparent fragmentariness is not a defect arbitrarily explained by the circumstances of its writing, then, but the necessary fulfillment of an inner generic constraint. After Schelling, to participate in the generic tradition of the *Lehrgedicht* is to remain but a part of a greater text yet to come: the genre’s normative fulfillment becomes a progressively unreachable telos in being bound to exactly one possible exemplar, such that successful generic

In a discussion of didactic poetry, Hans Blumenberg outlines three transhistorical normative criteria for the genre: a lack of unique poetic form (itself drawn from Goethe's 1827 meditation on the *Lehrgedicht*); a resultant generic mimicry of the epic; and the intimate co-implication of *theoria* and *eudaimonia*. The first two aspects point to the didactic poem's "parasitäre Daseinsweise," both with regards to doctrinal content as well as to poetic form.<sup>197</sup> The Age of Goethe legitimated the genre insofar as it began to think of the poem's didactic content as itself poetic, the poet as possessor of a unique affective mode of access to otherwise inarticulable knowledge. As Blumenberg puts his third, most pressing criterion: "der Gegenstand muß noch eine weitere Eigenschaft haben, die Beziehung auf die Lebenswirklichkeit, genauer: auf das Glück des Menschen, der von der neuen Lehre erreicht werden soll."<sup>198</sup> The didactic poem thereby overcomes the suspicion of mere rhetoricity by allowing for the happiness or consolation afforded by the doctrine to confirm that doctrine's truth-value in a positive feedback loop, rendering "den antiken Fundierungszusammenhang von Theorie und Eudaimonie ganz plausibel."<sup>199</sup> Lucretius did this by teaching his readers the divine indifference of *ataraxia*, even ending *De rerum natura* with a grotesque account of the Athenian plague, as if the atomistic explanation of its causes as well as of the demonstrated futility of fearing death would allow the reader to overcome the trauma. In other words, Lucretius ends with the Athenian plague in order to challenge the reader to exercise his own *ataraxia* as acquired in the course of reading his didactic poem. In greater historical proximity to "Athroismos," a poem such as "Die kleine Fliege" (1736) from Brockes's *Irdisches Vergnügen im Gott* (1721-1748) ends by expanding out of the

---

exemplification takes shape as a necessary self-fragmentation, one that in turn mirrors the disciplinary fragmentation of specialized knowledge. Cf. F.W.J. Schelling. "Philosophie der Kunst" [1802-1803]. In: *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Bd. 2: 1801-1803. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 1985. Pg. 495.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Blumenberg's contributions to the discussion of Fabian in: *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste. Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen*. Ed. Hans-Robert Jauf. *Hermeneutik und Poetik*. München: Wilhelm Fink. 1968. Pg. 553-555 (here: 554).

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.



microscopic attention to the fly's iridescent, almost metallic body onto a contemplation of creation as a legible divine order, establishing a link between theory and *eudaimonia*: "Hast du also, kleine Fliege, / Da ich mich an dir vergnüge, / Selbst zur Gottheit mich geleitet."<sup>200</sup> Though similarly devoted to animal formations, Goethe's "Athroismos" remains curiously abstract in its pronouncements, often still tethered to morphological propositions from the "Erster Entwurf." In reflecting on its didactic speech situation in the final strophe, "Athroismos" reframed its own doctrinal content as a kind of pagan gospel that called on the reader to exult in a 'beautiful concept.' If "Athroismos" qua didactic poem thus discovers knowledge rather than simply versifying it (indeed, discovers a concept *via* versification), then this explains its strategic placement in its publication context. In the first volume of *Zur Morphologie*, "Athroismos" poetically fills an epistemic gap in Goethe's scientific system, the text situated between the "Erster Entwurf," strictly limited to animal life, and "Dem Menschen wie den Tieren ist ein Zwischenknochen der obern Kinnlade zuzuschreiben." A kind of para-conceptual poetic suture, the editorial placement of the poem between these essays allows the notebooks to think the discontinuity of man within an overarching animal continuity.<sup>201</sup>

Rather than purporting to achieve absolute knowledge or a historically definitive scientific system, morphology and its didactic poeticizations would rather rest content with collecting what lies at the margins between all disciplines. Only the epistemic leap of the fourth strophe establishes a link between contemplative *theoria* and the morphological observer's own *eudaimonia*, a joy of the concept intuited "mit einer ursprünglichen [Begeisterung], die der

---

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Barthold Heinrich Brockes. *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott. Naturlyrik und Lehrdichtung*. Ed. Hans-Georg Kemper. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1999. Pg. 23.

<sup>201</sup> In *Gott und Welt* (1821), the poem is re-titled "Metamorphose der Tiere" and placed between "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" and the short "Epirrhema," on the one hand, and the equally short "Antipirrhema" and "Urworte. Orphisch," on the other. Commentators frequently take the "Urworte" to represent a poem on the metamorphosis of the human being, again situating "Metamorphose der Tiere" in a mediating position between the vegetal and the human, containing within itself a reflection on the transition from animal to human life.

Erkenntniß voraneilt.”<sup>202</sup> The same primordially epistemic enthusiasm capable of poetically liberating a truth from its inarticulate affective premonition was at work when Goethe invoked “einigen poetischen Ausdruck” to make sense of the three-toed sloth’s normative aberrancy. Far from departing from the poetic altogether, morphological method strategically seeks poetic solutions such as personification or prosodic counterpoint when encountered with an unfathomable epistemic limit, as when Goethe ends “Bedenken und Ergebung” by seeking “in die Sphäre der Dichtkunst [zu] flüchten.”<sup>203</sup> In the case of the prosaically didactic poem “Athroismos” and the poetic prose used to imagine the Ai’s misshapen metamorphosis, this epistemic limit was found at the threshold where life exhibits (or fails to exhibit) what Schelling termed ‘autonomy in phenomenal appearance,’ the revelation of a proto-form of freedom in nature. Morphological method not only accommodates, then, but constitutively requires such pre-theoretical epistemic enthusiasm, the jubilant glad tidings of a truth-event that may seem argumentatively ungrounded, but manages to remain part of a normatively mobile order by exuberantly expanding it in poetic practice. The epistemic enthusiasms of poetry thereby manage to reflect *pars pro toto* an absolute totality of knowledge never realizable yet nonetheless necessary qua postulate.

#### 4. Interlude: The Epistemic Dimension

Though the epistemic moment of morphological method has been addressed at length in the final part of the mereological section, it will help to get a few further aspects of Goethe’s epistemology into view.

1. As a Janus-faced principle – its generative potential related to how nature produces and maintains diversity in unity, its explanatory power related to how humans understand that unity in and despite diversity – the norm of the type leads to a curious epistemic entanglement between nature’s know-how and human knowing-that, between pragmatic and propositional knowledge.

---

<sup>202</sup> Cf. August Wilhelm Schlegel. “Schillers ‘Die Künstler.’” In: *Sämtliche Werke*. Ed. Eduard Böcking. Bd. 7. *Sprache und Poetik*. Leipzig: Weidmännische Buchhandlung. 1846. Pg. 2-23 (here: 4).

<sup>203</sup> Cf. *FA I* 24, 450.

2. Given this epistemic entanglement, the morphological observer must allow herself to ‘sync’ with phenomena as they transform in time to give themselves over to otherness. The temporalization of form thus implies not just a dynamization of observed structures, but a correspondent shift in the observer’s attentive practice. Goethe often characterizes this temporality as a simultaneity of the simultaneous and the successive, potentially leading to “eine Art Wahnsinn” (*FA I 24, 449*).<sup>204</sup>
3. An element of nature always remains undisclosed, unobservable, and incomprehensible (*unerforschlich*), such that the morphological observer recognizes an epistemic limit, often associated with the *Urphänomenen* behind which one cannot penetrate. This limit does not, however, hinder investigation, but calls for a certain humility and quasi-religious piety in the observer, as Goethe’s divinizing personification of the formative drive (*Bildungstrieb*) demonstrated.
4. Scientific endeavor is comprehended within the order of the living, knowledge-production itself a kind of vital activity. The desire to know and conceptualize nature must hence be understood as itself part of the unique nature of the practical life form of the human being.

The epistemic dimension of Goethe’s morphology has been widely addressed in the secondary literature, above all by Eckart Förster. Rather than rehearsing this material here, the past discussion has primarily focused on the mereological and normative dimensions. For now, it will suffice to expand on a point made by the poem “Athroismos” in its fourth strophe: that the act of knowing nature, of morphological observation, itself belongs to the order of nature, specifically to the uniquely *practical* human life form.

The mereological section discussed at length how the artist gains a capacity to ramify potential deviations from the living norm in his aesthetic formations, such as the sculpture of the Elgin horse’s head. In an unsent letter to Robert Haydon himself, Goethe thus praised how these ancient ruins might influence British painters by allowing their aesthetico-formative capacities to ‘intensify’ (*steigern*) so as to re-actualize the artwork’s norm in a novel historical-national context: “so läßt sich voraussehen, wie hoch sie [englische Maler] ihre Talente steigern können,

---

<sup>204</sup> Goethe elsewhere articulates this higher-order temporal experience in terms of the “Gleichnis” of reading ancient manuscripts, at first in cursive (“Kurrentschrift”), then in “Abbréviaturen.” Nature simultaneously reveals and conceals her phenomena through a *diachronization* that expands what might be better understood ‘sped up’ or congealed in a simultaneous moment, on the one hand, and a *synchronization* that contracts what could be better apprehended as an unfolded process, on the other. From the “Versuch aus der vergleichenden Knochenlehre daß der Zwischenknochen der obern Kinnlade dem Menschen mit den übrigen Thieren gemein sei” (1784). Cf. *WA II 8, 136*.

wenn sie nunmehr auch das Gefühl für Formen, welches aus diesen Marmorüberresten sich uns aufdringt, bei sich lebendig und praktisch werden lassen.”<sup>205</sup> The ‘formal feeling’ elicited by such sculptures exceeds the bounds of aesthetic reception to morph into a vital-practical capacity (“lebendig und praktisch”) to ramify their form in unexpected creative directions. Goethe elsewhere explicitly imbricates contemplative insight with this acquiring of a nascent capacity: “Jeder neue Gegenstand, wohl beschaut, schließt ein neues Organ in uns auf.”<sup>206</sup>

This move from theoretical to practical knowing can occur in reverse direction, however, so as to observe human activity (including the scientific activity of morphological observation) as itself the manifestation of the human life form that constitutively distinguishes itself from mere organism *within* the domain of the living. This forms a departure from more philosophical (e.g. Kantian) accounts that would see man no longer as a rational *animal*, but as a noumenally free rational being (Goethe is closer to Herder’s anthropology in this regard). The end of “Athroismos” suggests this continuity with the natural domain in its expansion from the realm of animal life forms to the practical-ratinoal life form unique to the human being. Goethe quoted that poem when he claimed, in the context of scientific endeavor, that “Jedes reine Bemühen ist ein Lebendiges, *Zweck sein selbst*, fördernd ohne Ziel, nützend wie man es nicht voraussehen konnte.”<sup>207</sup> When contemplated from without, human action itself comes to seem a vital activity insofar as it remains committed to its self-given norm, to realizing at each stage of its unfolding the inner purpose it is unto itself. Both *life* and human *action* thereby bind experience to a normative idea by bringing it to transformative realization, above all in the human act of knowing life:

---

<sup>205</sup> *WA* IV 31, 328. (1819)

<sup>206</sup> From “Bedeutende Fördernis.” Cf. *FA* I 24, 596.

<sup>207</sup> From the “Nachträge zur vergleichenden Anatomie.” Cf. *FA* I 24, 485. Emphasis in original.

Nur im Höchsten und im Gemeinsten trifft Idee und Erscheinung zusammen; auf allen mittlern Stufen des Betrachtens und Erfahrens trennen sie sich. Das Höchste ist das Anschauen des Verschiednen als identisch; das Gemeinste ist die That, das aktive Verbinden des Getrennten zur Identität.<sup>208</sup>

For morphological method, the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* are inextricably intertwined insofar as the observer's own life embeds her in first-personal manner within the order of nature, otherwise contemplated from without. Contemplation and activity alike apprehend unity in its phenomenal self-diversification by theoretically intuiting or practically realizing a phenomenal exemplification of the idea. Despite this commonality, Goethe never lost sight of the distinction between autonomously governed human action and the givenness of natural norms, noting in his portion of "Problem und Erwidern" that "Der Mensch, wo er bedeutend auftritt, verhält sich gesetzgebend, vorerst im Sittlichen durch Anerkennung der Pflicht [...] Handlung und Tat sind nur von Bedeutung, wenn er sie sich selbst und andern vorschreibt; in Künsten ist es dasselbe."<sup>209</sup> Goethe finds such human autonomy problematic when it asserts itself in more contemplative contexts; the scientific tendency to schematize and systematize thus might lead to looking past nature by forcing it into the corset of a humanly imposed framework of understanding. In remarks sent to Goethe, Ernst Meyer assuaged this anxiety about methodological projection by contemplating the activity of morphological contemplation, i.e. re-embedding such human epistemic action within the domain of natural life: "So ist denn auch *natürliches System* ein widersprechender Ausdruck; allein das Bestreben, diesen Widerspruch zu lösen, ist ein Naturtrieb, den selbst die anerkannte Unmöglichkeit ihn zu befriedigen, nicht auslöschen würde."<sup>210</sup> If before life strove for self-transgression within the supple conceptual bounds of the norm, now the very science of life exhibits its own distinct kind of vital exuberance

---

<sup>208</sup> From the "Paralipomena zur Naturlehre," later included in *Maximen und Reflexionen*. Cf. *WA* II 13, 441.

<sup>209</sup> *FA* I 24, 583.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. *FA* I 24, 585.

in the investigator's epistemic "Bestreben" and "Naturtrieb," which press up against the limits that would prevent nature's systematization. Vital exuberance thus expands from natural to practical (i.e., human) life forms, including the human's scientific attempts to systematize nature *as part* of nature, from the inside out, as it were. Goethe's oft invoked notion of truth's 'fecundity' names this vital-practical aspect of his epistemology, leading him to note that "das Falsche an und für sich todt und fruchtlos daliegt, ja sogar wie eine Nekrose anzusehen ist wo der absterbende Theil den lebendigen hindert die Heilung zu vollbringen."<sup>211</sup> Falsehood takes shape here as an epistemic dead end that prevents further cognitive going-on insofar as it disrupts the mereological configuration of an epistemic activity, in need of "Heilung" or of being re-attuned to its inwardly guiding idea.

This may seem to elide the borders between constitutively different ontological districts, courting the threat of naturalizing non-natural domains such as art and human society, even the truth itself. Far from such a crude panvitalism, Goethe was not the first to conceive of 'spiritual' (*geistige*) phenomena on the model of the living. To more fully understand Goethe's claim that "Jedes reine [menschliche] Bemühen ist selbst ein Lebendiges, *Zweck sein selbst*," it will help to look to intellectual precursors in the Idealist tradition that also sought to locate a manifestation of proto-freedom in nature. Unlike Hegel, who saw the idea of life as being logically superseded by the self-consciously self-relating concept of knowing (*Erkennen*), Goethe did not believe that one could access ideas through thought thinking itself thinking.<sup>212</sup> The morphological observer

---

<sup>211</sup> From a short meditation titled "Naturphilosophie" in *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum* VI 1 (1827). Cf. *FA* 397.

<sup>212</sup> Goethe himself explicitly criticized what might be called Hegel's logicization of life. In a letter to T.J. Seebeck, he (mistakenly) notes that he has read a passage from the preface to the *Wissenschaft der Logik* (actually in the *Phänomenologie*) and criticizes the way in which Hegel described vegetal blossom in terms of logical negation and sublation: "Die ewige Realität der Natur durch einen schlechten sophistischen Spaß vernichten zu wollen, scheint mir eines vernünftigen Mannes ganz unwürdig" (*WA* IV 23, 180). Seebeck reassured Goethe that Hegel was quoted out of context, using plant development as a mere metaphor for dialectical sublation. In "Neuste aufmunternde Theilnahme," part of a letter from Hegel to Goethe that Goethe republished in the *Farbenlehre*, Hegel evinces a misunderstanding of the *Urphänomen* insofar as he takes it as "[das] Abstracte:" "Das Urphänomen auszuspiiren, es von den andern,

remains ensconced in “der millionenfachen Hydra der Empirie,” cut off from the “Idee” by normative gaps, only fleetingly catching a contemplative glimpse of it or realizing it in deed.<sup>213</sup> For Goethe, the idea does not stand behind phenomena, but inheres in them, dependent on space and time.<sup>214</sup> As Förster distinguishes both approaches, Hegel takes the idea qua synthetic universal as his point of departure, descending from it so as to provide it with determinate content, while Goethe’s *scientia intuitiva* sees how empirical natural phenomena themselves emerge according to a synthetic universal, an idea that one must *first* discursively work up to, as it were, only to then intuitively descend down from in return to the (now intelligible) particular.<sup>215</sup>

Against the philosophical background cursorily sketched above, we can now see how Goethe avoids a panvitalism that would threaten to naturalize culture and society. When Goethe often speaks of human activity or artworks in organicizing terms – “Jedes reine Bemühen ist ein Lebendiges” –, this is not a strategy for invoking a suspect form of holistic unity, but rather an attempt to understand the radical singularity of the practical or aesthetic phenomenon in question, the way in which it uniquely constitutes itself according to an inner mobile norm so as to take on a life of its own. While observing crabs and snails on the shores of Italy, Goethe hence remarked:

---

ihm selbst zufälligen Umgebungen zu befreien, --- es abstract, wie wir dieß heißen, aufzufassen, dieß halte ich für eine Sache des großen geistigen Natursinns“ (*WA* II 5, 373). Part of the *Urphänomen*’s entire difficulty is to think it not as an abstraction, but as itself still somehow phenomenal precisely *in its generality*.

<sup>213</sup> From a letter to Schiller, Aug. 17, 1797. Cf. *WA* IV 12, 247.

<sup>214</sup> As Simmel notes, “Dass die Idee der Erscheinung innewohnt und in ihr anschaulich ist [...] das ist das zeitlose Prinzipielle der Goetheschen Weltanschauung, ihr ‘Idee’ selbst” (121). Schmitz traces this thought to Goethe’s absolutely central engagement with Plotinus in the aphorisms from *Makariens Archiv* in the *Wanderjahre*. The idea finds itself “bedrängt” in phenomenal appearance. For Schmitz, this brings the Goethean idea in proximity to its Hegelian incarnation as the concrete universal. At the same time, however, Schmitz sees the overall thrust of Goethe’s thought to move against idealism insofar as the latter posits a primacy of pure thought unmoored from the empirical: “Im Sinne der Plotinkritik dagegen tritt die Idee auf dem Felde der unmittelbaren, faktischen, unverkürzten Wirklichkeit hervor und gerät dadurch in eine Krise, bei der sie sich, wie Goethe sagt, vor Bedrängnis kaum zu retten weiß und auf Zeugung, auf Fruchtbarkeit angewiesen ist. Goethe nimmt damit den positive Gehalt der später und z.T. noch heute modernen Kritik an Hegel vorweg” (69). Cf. Georg Simmel. *Goethe*. Cyprus: Verone. 2016 [orig. 1913] Pg. 149-150; Hermann Schmitz. *Goethes Altersdenken im problemgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang*. Berlin: Bouvier. 1959.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Eckart Förster. *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*. Trans. Brady Bowman. Cambridge: HUP. 2012. Pg. 369-370.

“Was ist doch ein Lebendiges für ein köstliches, herrliches Ding! Wie abgemessen zu seinem Zustand, wie wahr, wie seiend!”<sup>216</sup> The exclamation suggests that to be ‘alive’ or ‘living’ (*lebendig*) has less to do with biology and more with being adequate (“abgemessen”) to one’s own inner state according to a measure (*Maß*) or norm, thus being capable of more fully realizing that norm, being true (“wahr”) to it in greater or lesser degrees, thus even *being* in a fuller sense of the term (“wie seiend!”). Remaining true to the norm in human action and art may imply realizing it in a novel, unforeseeable manner, even engaging in the balancing act of transforming the norm *itself* without thereby abandoning it completely. Furthermore, because human norms of practical action and art are self-given, they can fail to be realized in a unique way. However great the normative gap between a specific animal’s life and its form of life, it will never *fail* at exemplifying the norm of its life form, will never *cease* to be itself however manifold its transformations may be. The Ai sloth did not so much abandon its norm as it became constitutively incapable of ever truly realizing it, hence its ‘enslavement.’ Any given human action *can*, on the other hand, fail to exemplify the practice in which it partakes: I may overstay my welcome while participating in the practice of hospitality, may fail to inhabit the role of the guest in appropriate manner in this novel context. The question then becomes how to transform the practice of hospitality so as to do justice to the singularity of the social situation without thereby becoming inhospitable or, for that matter, utterly unintelligible to my hosts.

The vital-practical aspect of the epistemic dimension thus raises the question of how Goethe’s morphological method itself metamorphoses when operative in the domain of human society. Within the domain of nature, the four constitutive moments outlined thus far allow us to rephrase the critical adage that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts as follows: the whole is the immanently emergent or retreating complexity (the mereological) of a structure in

---

<sup>216</sup> Cf. “Italienische Reise.” *HA* 11, 93.



reciprocal temporal interface with its environment (the environmental) as the latter conditions the phenomenal appearance and diversification of its life form qua normative structure of the genesis of empirical structure (the normative) as apprehended by an observer 'tuned in' to its metamorphoses and the practical capacities or 'organs' of observation they disclose in her (the epistemological). These four constitutive moments will be seen in the next chapter to reconstellate so as to allow Goethe to make sense of the Roman and Cologne carnivals as social, specifically ritual practices.

## Chapter 2. Ritual Deformations: Goethe's Morphology of Social Practices in "Das Römische Carneval"

*It is life that is to be applied to the norm and not the norm to life...*<sup>217</sup>  
– Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*

Beyond the domain of natural life forms, Goethe brought his morphological regard to bear on forms of social practice in his pioneering ethnographic account of the Roman carnival. The following chapter will reconstruct this migration of morphological method into the societal domain in three steps, the first addressing the genesis of Goethe's observational practice during his Italian journey. The second step then focuses on a close analysis of Goethe's "Das Römische Carneval" (1789). This primary section elucidates three structural moments synthetically unified by the immanent form of carnival practice: first, collective laughter in the face of that which is constitutively not at our disposal (*das Unverfügbare*) in human life, above all in its 'natural' facticity; second, the reflected ritual deformation of social structure, a cultural matrix of hierarchized positions and their status-incumbents, into *das Gedränge*, a mass throng essentially unsurveyable; third, the festive consecration of the present moment (*Augenblick*) as simultaneous loss and gain, as a moment in which time itself becomes a binding object of collective carnal enjoyment. Goethe apprehends these three moments not simply as empirical characteristics of the carnival among others, but in their "ideal unity" ("Ideale Einheit") as constitutive of the carnival's immanent practical form.<sup>218</sup> A third section finally examines one of the many conceptual afterlives of Goethe's social morphology: Ludwig Wittgenstein's critique of James Frazer's *Golden Bough*. At the intersection of anthropology and the philosophy of language, Wittgenstein's

---

<sup>217</sup> Cf. Giorgio Agamben. *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*. Trans. Adam Kotsko. Stanford: SUP, 2013. Pg. 61.

<sup>218</sup> The term 'constitutive' here and throughout refers to the philosophical distinction between constitutive and regulative rules. While regulative rules (such as those of etiquette) regulate pre-existing behavior and actions that can be performed as those very actions independent of reference to those rules, constitutive rules (such as the rules of chess) bring new behavior and actions into existence that are only intelligible with reference to those ontologically definitive rules. Cf. John Rawls. "Two Concepts of Rules." *The Philosophical Review* 64 (1955): 3-32.

metamorphic inheritance of Goethean method sheds light on a crucial dimension of our historico-philosophical modernity: what it means for the human being to have a history rather than a nature.

### 1. “eine ganz andre Elasticität des Geistes:” The Pleasures of Observational Practice

Goethe noted in his “Schicksal der Handschrift” (published in 1806 as part of his morphological notebooks) that he had learned to ‘see’ three ontological fields (“drei großen Weltgegenden”): nature, art, and society. The first chapter demonstrated that these three ontological zones of reality also come to function as heuristic lenses for apprehending one and the same phenomenon *within* each ontological zone. A kind of ‘re-entry’ of all three distinguishing categories into one category thereby distinguished here takes place. Within the domain of natural life-forms, Goethe was thus found in the first chapter to apply a sociopolitical metaphoric of individual ‘rights’ to explain the supple unity that characterizes the mereological organization of plants, a part of which can become a whole rather than becoming mere matter once severed, as in grafting. Furthermore, Goethe was found to have framed natural phenomena in aesthetic terms when an excess of vital energy overflows the bounds of organic formation to achieve its own independent, non-instrumental shape, as was the case in the example of the prehistoric bull’s horns, compared by Goethe to Hogarth’s serpentine line of beauty. More than merely socializing or aestheticizing metaphors, the language in these case studies points to analogic resemblances between natural forms of self-organization and those inhabiting other ontological domains external to nature. In the cases of society and art, the same tripartite analogic re-entry of ontological categories as heuristic views (*Formansichten*) within one particular category holds.

In a discussion of Boisserée’s plans for the Cologne Dome in the antiquarian journal *Kunst und Alterthum*, Goethe calls attention for a moment to the fact that the Dome’s completion coincides with the post-Napoleonic reinstatement of the Cologne carnival. Rather than framing this

coincidence of human projects in terms of historical circumstances, however, Goethe establishes the comparability of architectural artwork and social practice vis-à-vis the category of nature:

Es ist ein artiger heiterer Zufall, daß in dem Augenblick da wir von dem tüchtigsten großartigsten Werk, das vielleicht je mit folgerechtem Kunstverstand auf Erden gegründet worden, dem *Dom zu Cöln* gesprochen, wir sogleich des leichtesten, flüchtigsten, augenblicklichst vorüberrauschenden Erzeugnisses einer frohen Laune, des *Carnevals von Cöln*, mit einigen Worten zu gedenken veranlaßt sind.

Warum man aber doch von beyden zugleich reden darf, ist daß jedes, sich selbst gleich, sich in seinem Charakter organisch abschließt, ungeheuer und winzig, wenn man will: wie Elephant und Ameise, beyde lebendige Wesen und in diesem Sinne neben einander zu betrachten, als Masse sich in die Luft erhebend, als Beweglichkeit an dem Fuße wimmelnd.<sup>219</sup>

Goethe's simile should not be taken as an ontological claim, as if the Cologne Dome and carnival were both in some metaphysically vitalist sense genuine organisms. Rather than naturalizing the cultural domain, Goethe's justification for investigating 'both simultaneously' lies in the fact that aesthetic and social phenomena both share a similar form of mereological organization. For dome and carnival to each 'achieve, equal unto itself, organic closure according to its own character' can be understood by being broken down into three aspects. First, a certain kind of self-relation ("sich selbst gleich") is in play, one that lifts the sociocultural formation out of the domain of external, empirical, and contingent conditions that would exert a heteronomous influence on them. In other words, a certain autonomy of self-relation characterizes the architectural artwork of the Dome as well as the carnival practice, one that will of course take on a more specific shape were we to examine each case individually and more closely.

Second, this self-relation is understood here not as immediate and unselfconscious, which would be the case for a natural life form such as an actual elephant or ant, but as consciously mediated through the immanent concept of what an artwork or practice *is*. Goethe terms this each formation's 'own character' ("in *seinem* Charakter"). In other words, the dome and carnival relate

---

<sup>219</sup> From "Boisserésche Kunstleistungen," in: *KuA* V/1 (1824). Cf. *FA* I 22 99-100. Emphasis in original.

to themselves through the mediation of their own immanent concept, the form of the unity of their parts into a whole greater than their sum. In this holistic self-organization, they are akin to organisms insofar as their parts reciprocally condition one another and the whole, the whole in turn the parts. Goethe refers to this third aspect by invoking the notion of reaching ‘organic closure’ (“organisch abschließt”) or successfully realizing their immanent concept.

Insofar as cultural phenomena such as artworks and social practices do not *immediately* realize their ‘own character’ or concept, however, there remains an absolutely crucial difference from natural organisms. For an artwork or practice to relate self-consciously to itself through its own concept is what it means for the Dome or carnival to have to *achieve* its being qua artwork or practice. In other words, however bad at living an elephant form of life any particular individual elephant may be, that elephant will never *fail* to exemplify its given life-form, cannot help but be itself in its vital activity. It immediately realizes its own species-concept or ‘character’ unselfconsciously, even if it may do so to a greater or lesser normative degree (e.g. a diseased elephant). A particular artwork or action, on the other hand, *can fail* to realize the concept of the general genre or practice it exemplifies in a categorically different manner. A painting may, for example, fail to account for what it means to inherit the tradition of painting at a given historical juncture. I may give an inappropriate (too expensive or too frugal) gift when participating in the practice of gift-giving, may fail to inhabit the role of the giver in appropriate manner in a novel context. These ‘normative gaps’ are not immediate, unselfconscious failures, but are rather essentially mediated through some faulty or not fully self-aware apprehension of the concept of the artwork or practice in question. The example of the Cologne carnival and cathedral hence shed light on how Goethe built analogic conceptual bridges between his three ontological ‘world-regions.’

The sheer ambition of Goethe's envisioned, yet never comprehensively articulated, morphology of social practices becomes apparent in a remarkable letter to Schiller from March 25, 1801, just a few years after the end of his Italian journey: "Beim Nachdenken über's Beharrende im Menschen, worauf sich die Phänomene der Cultur beziehen ließen, habe ich bis jetzt nur vier Grundzustände gefunden: / des Genießens / des Strebens / der Resignation / der Gewohnheit. [...] eine gewisse Einheit ist ja was man bezwecken will."<sup>220</sup> This proposal for a cultural morphology founded on human 'second nature' ("[das] Beharrende im Menschen") was later reformulated by Goethe as a prize question to be posed to a broad intellectual public, much in the mold of the questions that elicited Kant's essay on enlightenment or Herder's treatise on the origins of language. In the form of an unsent letter, Goethe's proposal further clarifies how the intellectual inquiry required by such a sociocultural morphology might proceed:

Es sollen nämlich die Phänomene menschlicher Ausbildung, so wie die dabey fördernden und hindernden Ursachen, auf allgemeine Ideen zurückgeführt werden. [...] Man verlange eine gedrängte, lichtvolle Darstellung des Bestehenden im Menschen, worauf sich die Hauptphänomene der vorschreitenden, stillstehenden und zurückschreitenden Cultur beziehen lassen. [...] allein man wünscht, um der Gemeinnützlichkeiten willen, sie im Felde der rationellen Empirie behandelt zu sehen, so auch daß der Aufsatz gut geschrieben sey.<sup>221</sup>

The emphasis on 'general ideas' and 'rational empiricism,' a formulation drawn directly from Schiller, emphasize that Goethe's sociocultural morphology shares with his natural scientific investigations the same idealist conceptual foundation. Not only individual human development ("Ausbildung") and the causes that might 'hinder' or 'promote' it, but collective phenomena such as entire progressive, stagnant, or regressive cultures in their historical unfolding belong to this social morphology's subject matter. Human 'nature,' in other words, is not conceived of statically here, but as forming a conceptual reference point for the elucidation of open-ended temporal

---

<sup>220</sup> *WA* IV/15 203

<sup>221</sup> *WA* IV/15 228

processes of individual and historical development. Furthermore, in order to avoid a disorienting encyclopedic comprehensiveness, Goethe recommends rendering all cultural activity intelligible by situating human practices within a conceptual matrix formed by four key orienting coordinates:

Man nehme die beyden Enden menschlicher Thätigkeit *Genuß* und *Streben*, mit den dazwischen liegenden Zuständen *Gewohnheit* und *Resignation*, als empirische Daten für einmal an, man lege diesen Maßstab, oder einen ähnlichen, der sich durch strengere Ableitung mehr empfiehlt, an die Völkergeschichte der verschiedensten Länder und Zeiten, ja an die Lebens und Tagesgeschichte eines einzelnen Menschen: so wird man finden wie manches durch eine solche Operation sich entwickeln, wie manches verschieden scheinende sich unter einerley Rubrik bringen läßt.<sup>222</sup>

Enjoyment and striving form a fundamental polarity of meaningful human activity, with habit and resignation situated in between. While striving leads outside of the self into the world, ultimately to the realization of the self's projects of knowing and doing such that the world is apprehended and transformed, enjoyment, as the polar opposite of striving, is characterized by a kind of self-sufficiency, a quality of resting within itself. These four fundamental modes of human activity are thus said to form a "Maßstab," a normative quadrumvirate the combinations and intersections of which allow one to elucidate sociocultural phenomena. Their innovative intersection in each particular case of cultural activity will be understood by seeing that activity as the conceptual result of a transformatively recombinant "Operation." This operation may even allow the morphologist to develop ("entwickeln") or interpolate novel human activities that may not empirically exist, but could. Furthermore, the sheer diversity of "verschieden scheinende" human endeavors within a society can thereby come to be understood in comparative relation to one another, generating "eine gewisse Einheit" by framing them "unter einerley Rubrik." These four orienting coordinates of human activity – striving, resignation, habit, and enjoyment – frame a

---

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

conceptual matrix within which all sociocultural phenomena could be ‘mapped’ so as to render them intelligible.

Goethe’s remarkable suggestion for a future social morphology was sent to Schiller in 1801, exactly between the experience and the writing of his Italian journey (conducted 1786-1788 and composed 1813-1817). It was in Italy where the genesis of Goethe’s observational practice took place, what he refers to as the onset of “eine ganz andere Elasticität des Geistes.”<sup>223</sup> It is well known, of course, that Goethe’s *Italienische Reise* marks a departure both from the genre of the encyclopedic travelogue exemplified by Johann Jacob Volkmann’s *Historisch-kritische Nachrichten von Italien* (1770/71), which accompanied Goethe as a reference throughout his time in Italy, as well as from the style of travel writing popularized by Lawrence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* (1768).<sup>224</sup> In his *Tag- und Jahreshefte* from 1789, Goethe even notes that in the wake of Sterne’s work “waren Reisebeschreibungen fast durchgängig den Gefühlen und Ansichten des Reisenden gewidmet.”<sup>225</sup> In contrast, Goethe sought to liberate himself from subjectivistic, affectively stylized perception while simultaneously abandoning the form of an objectivizing encyclopedic compendium of local customs: “Ich dagegen hatte die Maxime ergriffen, mich soviel als möglich zu verleugnen und das Objekt so *rein*, als nur zu tun wäre, in mich aufzunehmen. Diesen Grundsatz befolgte ich getreulich, als ich dem römischen Karneval beiwohnte.”<sup>226</sup> On Goethe’s view, his account of the Roman carnival inaugurates an innovatively ethnographic mode of travel writing that may guide “geistreiche Menschen [...] auf ihren Reisen gleichfalls das Eigentümlichste der Völkerschaften und Verhältnisse klar und *rein*

---

<sup>223</sup> Cf. *Reise-Tagebuch für Charlotte von Stein* (1786), *FA I* 15/1 614.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. Reiner Wild. “Italienische Reise.” In: *Goethe-Handbuch. Bd. 3: Prosaschriften*. Ed. Bernd Witte & Peter Schmidt. Stuttgart/Weimer: Metzler 1997. Pg. 331-368.

<sup>225</sup> *HA* 10 434.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.



auszudrücken.”<sup>227</sup> The generic specificity of Goethe’s *Italienische Reise* must be understood, in other words, beyond the confines of autobiography in terms of the genesis of a sociocultural morphology qua observational praxis.

Throughout the *Reise-Tagebuch für Charlotte von Stein* (1786), which follows Goethe through Verona and Venice to end with his arrival in Rome, Goethe continually invokes the semantic nexus of three interdependent concepts: the first sensory impression (*Eindruck*), a ‘purification’ thereof (*rein*), and a contemplative pleasure that arises in response (*Genuß*). Observational practice calls for a kind of eidetic purification of the senses that involves multiples steps. First, background knowledge derived from printed, encyclopedic compendia must be bracketed for the sake of the sensory phenomenon itself:

Doch das ist mein Trost, alles das ist gewiß schon gedruckt. [...] mir ists nur jetzt um die sinnlichen Eindrücke zu thun, die mir kein Buch und kein Bild geben kann, daß ich wieder Interesse an der Welt nehme und daß ich meinen Beobachtungsgeist versuchte, [...] ob und wie mein Auge licht, *rein* und hell ist, was ich in der Geschwindigkeit fassen kann.<sup>228</sup>

What is ultimately at stake here for morphological observation is learning how to sustain an act of receptivity, to keep the eye “licht, rein und hell,” such that it apprehends the phenomenon as it gives itself to be seen on its own terms.

The observation of form caught in the moment of phenomenal emergence and transformation further evokes a distinct sort of noetic pleasure. The passage in which Goethe explains this is worth quoting in full, for it sheds light on an overlooked aspect of his sociocultural morphology, namely that the observation of forms of social practice itself constitutes a practice:

Der Genuß auf einer Reibe ist wenn man ihn *rein* haben will, ein abstrakter Genuß, ich muß die Unbequemlichkeiten, Widerwärtigkeiten, das was mit mir nicht stimmt, was ich

---

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>228</sup> Nov. 1786, Cf. *FA* I/15 625. Emphasis added.

nicht erwartete, alles muß ich bey Seite bringen [...] und es [das Kunstwerk] wieder *rein* in meine Seele bringen [...] Dann hab ich einen *rein* bleibenden Genuß und um dessentwillen bin ich gereißt, nicht um des Augenblicklichen Wohlseyns oder Spases willen. Mit der Betrachtung und dem Genuß der Natur ists eben das. Triffsts dann aber auch einmal zusammen daß alles paßt, dann ists ein großes Geschenk, ich habe solche Augenblicke gehabt.<sup>229</sup>

Here again, subjective first impressions are cleared away to make way for the soul's 'purified' apprehension of the artwork or natural phenomenon, itself in turn sequestered from observational disturbances. At the same time, however, the morphological observer's subjectivity is by no means eliminated, for the entire goal of observation lies in the attainment of "ein[en] abstrackte[n] Genuß," one that remains 'pure' by lifting the object out of the sphere of empirical conditioning, the successive realm of temporal change. Neither a sentimental nor an encyclopedically scientific journey, then, Goethe's travels in Italy ultimately sought an intellectual pleasure of the kind Aristotle associated with the self-sufficient activity of contemplation as the highest form of ethical life. This involved a sacrifice of the fleetingly present pleasures afforded by exotic locales and new sights, which Goethe emphasizes by capitalizing the temporal qualifier in "Augenblicklichen Wohlseyns oder Spases," for the sake of a higher-order pleasure that partakes of an extramundane temporal order: "ich habe solche Augenblicke gehabt." At such moments of fullness, the morphologist delights in the epistemic entanglement of observer and observed as the subject actively receives "ein großes Geschenk," the phenomenon's giving itself to apprehension in the eidetic clarity of its form.

Such lucky, pleasurable moments (*Augenblicke*) of observational success should not, however, be thought to exclude, in their punctuality, further study and scientific elaboration. As Goethe noted in a letter to his friends in Weimar sent from Rome on November 7, 1786: "Das Vergnügen des ersten Eindrucks ist unvollkommen. Nur wenn man nach und nach alles recht

---

<sup>229</sup> Ibid. pp. 669. Emphasis added.

durchgesehn und studirt hat wird der Genuss ganz.”<sup>230</sup> Such pleasure has thus far been characterized as becoming in the course of successful observation ‘whole,’ ‘abstract,’ and capable of perdurance as ‘pure’ (“rein bleibend[.]”), in turn conforming to the object’s clarified form. This kind of holistic intellectual pleasure thus emerges at the interface of subject and object, indeed, captures what it means for the subject to know not just as a floating intellect, as it were, but as this specifically embodied kind of rational-practical life form, i.e. as a human being.

This discussion of morphological observation as a hedonic-perceptual exercise, as a human practice, sheds light on the motivations that led Goethe to write his ethnographic account of the Roman carnival. Goethe’s first impression of it was decidedly negative: despite his aesthetic approach to the social practice, it nonetheless left “einen widerwärtigen, unheimlichen Eindruck.”<sup>231</sup> In his actual account, which eliminates such biographically anchored first impressions to give us the elucidated form of the social practice, Goethe tempers this language through litotes to an elliptical suggestion about *any* foreign observer of the rite: “daß das Römische Carneval einem fremden Zuschauer, der es zum erstenmal sieht und nur *sehen* will und kann, weder einen ganzen noch einen erfreulichen Eindruck geben, weder das Auge sonderlich ergötze, noch das Gemüt befriedige.”<sup>232</sup> The same observational nexus of eye (*Auge*) and mind (*Gemüt*) from the *Reise-Tagebuch* here recurs, now lifted into the status of a preliminary step that must be undergone to clear the way for true apprehension. At the same time, however, Goethe’s account of the Roman carnival, like his observational practice as a whole, aims, in the end, for a sort of noetic pleasure. As Goethe remarks in a letter from April 1789 to Countess Anna Amalia, who was herself on an Italian journey:

---

<sup>230</sup> *WA* IV/8 44-45.

<sup>231</sup> From the *Bericht* of Feb. 1788, a first-personal autobiographical report immediately following the more objective account of the carnival in *Zweiter Römischer Aufenthalt*. Cf. *FA* I/15 557.

<sup>232</sup> *FA* I/15 518. Emphasis in original.

Mit dem Carneval höre ich sind Sie weniger zufrieden gewesen, ich wünsche daß Sie es mehr mit der *Beschreibung des römischen Carnevals* seyn mögen, welche diese Ostermeße herauskommt. Wenn es mir gelingt, wie ich hoffe, durch diesen kleinen Aufsatz, etwas ungenießbares genießbar zu machen, so wird es mich sehr freuen.<sup>233</sup>

The entire purpose of Goethe's ethnographic account, then, is to overcome his first repugnant impression for a purer one that allows him to enjoy the seemingly unenjoyable by rendering it intelligible to the foreign, exclusively optical observer. To what extent the morphologist's ethnographic observation of a social practice will spill over into an actual participation therein will be a question with which our later discussion of Goethe's account will have to grapple. For now, it must simply be noted that Goethe's ethnographic account itself takes enjoyment as its thematic object and not just as its pragmatic end. Goethe qua observer thus tries to understand, and thereby intellectually enjoy, a ritual practice of collective bodily enjoyment. We might even claim, in Wittgensteinian parlance, that Goethe's *Das Römische Carneval* elucidates the very grammar of enjoyment. In this sense, it fleshes out one dimension of the sociocultural morphology envisioned in Goethe's letter to Schiller, elucidating how carnivalesque enjoyment refracts the other three basic coordinates of meaningful human activity: habit (in ritualized action), striving (in the collective's performance of a festivity for itself), and even, as we will see, a peculiar kind of resignation.

## **2. Goethe's Morphology of a Form of Ritual Practice in "Das Römische Carneval"**

When Goethe stated in his morphological notebooks that he had come to understand society during his Italian journey, he explicitly defined it as assimilable neither to nature nor to art. The independent ontological realm of the social instead emerges through a structural interference of conceptual oppositions:

Das dritte, was mich beschäftigte, waren die Sitten der Völker. An ihnen zu lernen, wie aus dem Zusammentreffen von Notwendigkeit und Willkür, von Antrieb und Wollen, von

---

<sup>233</sup> *WA IV/9* 105. Emphasis in original.

Bewegung und Widerstand ein Drittes hervorgeht, was weder Kunst noch Natur, sondern beides zugleich ist, notwendig und zufällig, absichtlich und blind. Ich verstehe die menschliche Gesellschaft.”<sup>234</sup>

Social customs become intelligible once situated within a conceptual matrix that is framed by the interlacing of necessity and contingency. This modal inscrutability of the social means that an observer is incapable of determining whether a sociohistorical phenomenon is necessary and thus lawfully explicable *or* is a mere side-effect of intentional actions and capricious investments. For Goethe, this implies that society can only be understood with conceptual tools creatively readapted by the morphologist from the domains of natural science and aesthetics, for society is “weder Kunst noch Natur, sondern beides zugleich.”

After framing this third ‘world region’ that would form the subject matter of a social morphology, Goethe proceeds to make explicit reference to his description of the Roman carnival. The festivity initially left him with “einen widerwärtigen, unheimlichen Eindruck:” “Das Carneval in Rom muß man gesehen haben, um den Wunsch völlig los zu werden, es je wieder zu sehen. Zu schreiben ist davon gar nichts.” Far from ‘naturalizing’ the social, Goethe’s methodological procedure uses aesthetic tools to frame a social practice *as if* it were natural in order to render visible that practice’s inner form:

es mußte mir bald auffallen, daß dieses Volksfest, wie ein anderes wiederkehrendes Leben und Weben, seinen entschiedenen Verlauf hatte. Dadurch [durch Kunstanschauung] war ich nun mit dem Getümmel versöhnt, ich sah es an als ein anderes bedeutendes Naturerzeugnis und Nationalereignis; ich [...] bemerkte genau den Gang der Torheiten und wie das alles doch in einer gewissen Form und Schicklichkeit ablief.<sup>235</sup>

Once apprehended through an aesthetic lens, the perceptual chaos (“Gewühl”) of the carnival’s abundant absurdities becomes intelligible. The festival now exhibits the self-regulated cyclical processuality that characterizes organic life forms: “wie ein anderes wiederkehrendes Leben.” The

---

<sup>234</sup> *FA I/24 415*

<sup>235</sup> In: *Italienische Reise*. Cf. *FA I/15 557*

term *entschieden* here serves as a *terminus technicus* in Goethe's morphology. Within his morphology, Goethe situates different kinds of wholes, aggregates, and assemblages – forms of mereological organization – on a spectrum the polar ends of which range from the mutual indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) of parts to one another and to the whole, on the one hand, to decisiveness (*Entschiedenheit*), the articulate differentiation and functional specialization of parts and their mutual subordination to one another and to the whole. For the festival process to possess “seinen entschiedenen Verlauf” is thus for it to exhibit more than just a series of sequentially ordered stages, i.e. a structure of empirical genesis; rather, the process-logic on display here consists in the ideal genesis of that very structure. In other words, apprehending the carnival's inner “Form und Schicklichkeit” renders intelligible how each ‘part’ or individual stage, scene, or action fits into the whole formed by “de[r] Gang der Torheiten.” The alliterative drift from nature to culture in the syntagm “Naturerzeugnis und Nationalereignis” thus encapsulates a supple conceptual move: to frame aesthetically a social practice in order to apprehend the processual emergence of the internal self-organization underlying the practice *as if* it were natural so as to better understand that practice on its own, social terms. As Goethe remarked in a letter to Wieland, who published his earliest essays on Roman cultural life: “Ich habe so vielerley, so mancherley, das doch nach meiner Vorstellung und Bemerkens-Art immer zusammenhängt und verbunden ist. Naturgeschichte, Kunst, Sitten pp., alles amalgamiert sich bey mir.”<sup>236</sup>

It is no surprise, then, that Goethe's very first approaches to understanding the carnival took the shape of visual art: he asked his roommate in Rome, the painter Georg Schütz, to make a number of drawings illustrating the carnival's masked actors. These were later etched and colored by Georg Melchior Kraus for the essay's publication as a self-standing book in quarto format in 1789, a sort of *Prachtausgabe*. Only 250 copies of the text were printed; Goethe never attained

---

<sup>236</sup> From Sept. 1788. Cf. *WA* IV/9 14-15.

one and disliked the large-scale format. These illustrations prevented the text from being published in its original publication site, Bertuch's *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, which published a number of more belletristic travel descriptions. Goethe's "Römische Carneval" was eventually republished in the *Journal* in 1790, but without its accompanying illustrations. Goethe correspondingly edited the text, removing footnotes that referred to specific images and the tiny reference numbers still visible on them. As an ethnographic description *avant la lettre*, Goethe's text never found the proper format it deserved, and so he finally integrated it into his *Zweiter Römischer Aufenthalt im Juni 1787 bis April 1788*. The essay's frequent use of the anonymizing "man" rather than the autobiographical "ich" so prevalent throughout the Italian journey sets it off from this new context, however.

Indeed, perhaps the most apt publication context for Goethe's essay would have been Wieland's journal *Teutsche Merkur*, which printed Goethe's first accounts of his time in Italy. A great number of the fourteen essays Goethe published therein are essentially ethnographic in character: "Stundenmass der Italiener," Goethe's reconstruction of Italian time-reckoning and the formative distinction between day and night in the Italian urbanite's lifeworld; "Frauenrollen auf dem römischen Theater durch Männer gespielt," Goethe's analysis of the aesthetic surplus generated by cross-dressing, ultimately a reflection on the theatricality of gender roles; "Neapel. 'Lazzaroni.'," Goethe's critique of Volkmann's account of the impoverished Neopolitan underclass, which Goethe found to be quite industrious despite their poor circumstances; "Lebensgenuß des Volks in und um Neapel," a stunning account of the harmony of colors as they are intensified by the reflective glare of the Mediterranean, this vibrant environment in turn influencing the Italians' rather garish burial practices, which ultimately affirm life; and "Volksgesang," which reconstructs the Venetian practice of gondoliers' singing as their songs

echo one another to vary refrains across watery channels. Goethe's account of the Roman carnival is but of a piece with this earliest writing on Italy, and the textual ensemble testifies to just how deeply – before the turn to autobiography – Goethe was engaged with anthropological concerns. As Goethe remarked to Wieland before the latter agreed to publish the essays: “Ich wollte dich fragen ob du Lust hättest eine Folge solcher kleinen Aufsätze nach und nach in den Merkur aufzunehmen und zwar so daß [ich] einen Aufsatz mit dem andern verbinden, einen durch den andern erläutern kann.”<sup>237</sup> The ideal publication format that Goethe envisioned for his social-ethnographic morphology was a kind of essay-cycle that would round out into a whole of mutually reflecting texts that interpret one another so as to grant the reader intelligible access to the entirety of a foreign form of life.

Given Goethe's optical approach to the carnival as a perceptually recalcitrant social phenomenon, it is unsurprising that the images Georg Schütz devised at his behest isolate select costumed participants and decontextualize them from all surroundings, placing them on a neutral ground against a blank background (Figure 8). To speak with Michael Fried, all figures are depicted in a state of suspended absorption, immersed inside their own individual activity or emphatic gesture. The relief-like flatness of these minimal interactions, here between a lawyer qua costume and a pair of pulcinella, underlines the quasi-scientific and taxonomic style that characterizes all illustrations (Figure 9). One can even make out tiny numbers underneath each figure, cross-referencing textual passages originally enumerated in Goethe's description of the various carnival masks.

Goethe drew on two visual traditions in particular in order to conceive of the function of these images qua visual evidence within his morphological-ethnographic account. After he first viewed the carnival in 1787, Goethe noted on Ash Wednesday, despite his distaste for the

---

<sup>237</sup> From Sept. 1788. Cf. *WA* IV/9 14-15.



occasion: “so sind zur Lust der Kinder Masken des Karnevals und römische eigentümliche Kleidungen gezeichnet, dann mit Farben angestrichen worden da sie denn ein fehlendes Kapitel des *Orbis pictus* den lieben Kleinen ersetzen mögen.”<sup>238</sup> Comenius’s *Orbis pictus* was a seventeenth-century visual encyclopedia that sought to illustrate didactically for children the entire scope of the visible world in its cosmic vastness. Ranging from insects to God, the *Orbis pictus* employed the encyclopedic method of enumerating visual elements on the verso and elucidating their meaning through cross-referencing on the recto. The *Orbis pictus* was wildly popular from its inception well into the nineteenth century. The cosmic perspective the visual encyclopedia took folded its didactic intent – on view in its very first illustration (Figure 10) – into an overarching theological vision. The sequence of first topics lays bare this totalizing view, for the visual text moves from ‘God,’ to ‘World’ (*mundus*), ‘Sky,’ ‘Fire,’ ‘Air,’ ‘Water,’ ‘Clouds,’ ‘Earth,’ until eventually working its way up to ‘Man,’ various bodily organs, the ‘Soul,’ proceeding through agricultural ‘Fieldwork’ to social practices such as ‘The Hunt’ and ‘Viniculture’ as well as more abstract concepts such as ‘Rule’ (*Herrschaft*; Figure 11) until reaching theological themes such as ‘Patience’ and ‘The Last Judgment.’<sup>239</sup>

While Goethe clearly draws from Comenius the didactic technique of numerical cross-referencing, he was even more influenced by Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *Tableau de Paris* (1781-1788).<sup>240</sup> A precursor to Benjamin and Baudelaire’s flâneur and his fragmentary snapshots of everyday life, Mercier took a proto-ethnographic approach to urban Parisian life by recounting salient scenes of sociality and custom in short, individually titled prose vignettes. In his essay

<sup>238</sup> On Feb. 20, in *Italienische Reise*. Cf. *FA* I/15 187.

<sup>239</sup> Cf. Johann Amos Comenius. *Orbis Sensualium Pictus. Hoc est, Omnium fundamentalium in Mundo Rerum & in Vita Actionum Pictura & Nomenclatura. Die sichtbare Welt / Das ist / Aller vornemsten Welt-Dinge und Lebens-Verrichtungen Vorbildung und Benahmung*. Trans. Sigmund von Birken. Nürnberg: Endterus 1658.

<sup>240</sup> For more on Goethe’s relation to the tableau as a visual format of thought, see: Annette Graczyk. *Das literarische Tableau zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft*. München: Wilhelm Fink 2004. Pg. 211-224.

critiquing Volkmann's characterization of the Neapolitan *lazzaroni*, Goethe envisions a text that would go further than this short essay, arguing that "jemand ein ausführliches Tableau von Neapel zu schreiben unternehmen sollte; wozu kein geringes Talent, und manches Jahr Beobachtung erforderlich seyn möchte."<sup>241</sup> Mercier himself described his *Tableau de Paris* as an attempt to present kaleidoscopically diverse perspectives on Parisian urban life 'on the ground,' as it were, his interest drawn above all to social customs: "Je vais parler de Paris, non de des édifices [...] J'ai fait des recherches dans toutes les classes de citoyens, & n'ai pas dédaigné les objets les plus éloignés de l'orgueilleuse opulence, afin de mieux établir par ces oppositions la physionomie morale de cette gigantesque capitale."<sup>242</sup> The 'moral physiognomy' of a city – in a sense, this is what Goethe sought to do for Rome in his essay on the Roman carnival. Above all, Goethe borrowed from Mercier the technique of separating his ethnographic account of a social practice into distinct, separately titled prose vignettes; a total of twenty eight make up the entire text. Mercier's images, however, depicted his urban protagonists as ensconced in the finely textured milieu of Paris, as in these scribes sitting near the Holy Innocents' Cemetery, ready to write love letters and official complaints on behalf of the illiterate (Figure 12).

To what does Goethe's curious amalgamation of Comenius's encyclopaedic mode of visual organization and Mercier's short prose vignette of the mores of everyday urban life amount? If Comenius's *Orbis pictus* gradually moved up the chain of being to end in a cosmic panorama viewed in 'top-down' fashion from a divine vantage point, Mercier's *Tableau* wandered around Paris to provide kaleidoscopically diverse perspectival snapshots of social custom from the 'bottom-up,' with a view to the tumultuous entirety of Paris. Goethe departs from both Comenius's theocosmic totalization as well as from Mercier's occasionalist

---

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Goethe. "Neapel." Volksmanns historisch-kritische Nachrichten von Italien. Dritter Band. *Lazaroni*." In: *FA* I/15 866.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Louis-Sébastien Mercier. *Tableau de Paris*. Vol. 1. Paris: 1782. pp. i-iv.

perspectivalism, instead opting to find the unique microcosm enacted by the ritual of carnival, the world played out by the social practice, if only during its time of exception. Unlike Mercier, who emphatically insisted in his preface that he sought to provide no panoramic views nor a systematic catalogue or inventory, Goethe *does* seek to use his images as a visual-scientific instrument of complexity-reduction given that “kaum unterscheidet man etwas in dem Bezirk des Getümmels, den das Auge fassen kann.”<sup>243</sup> For this reason, Karl Philipp Moritz described Goethe’s carnival description as “das Ganze so täuschend und so wahr wie die Bilder in einem optischen Kasten dem Leser vors Auge bringt.”<sup>244</sup>

A further difference lies in Goethe’s use of his short prose sections to order systematically the diachronic unfolding of the festival process such that it become intelligible, in the end, at a synchronic level. Unlike Mercier’s prose vignettes, however, which are each individually self-sufficient descriptive scenes and which meander about Paris without apparent aim or superstructure, beholden to the unique occasion of each fleeting moment, Goethe’s prose sections coalesce into large-scale structural units, which in turn can be grouped into four analytic categories that unfold one after another (Diagram 1):

---

<sup>243</sup> *FA* I/15.1 518.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Karl Philipp Moritz. *Schriften zur Mythologie und Altertumskunde. Teil 1: Anthusa oder Roms Alterthümer*. In: *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol.4/1. Ed. Yvonne Pauly. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer 2005, pp. 615-16.

## I. SPACE

1 – 3: The physico-symbolic space of the carnival

4 – 7: First temporal stages

[Vorbereitungen, Signal]

## II. ACTORS

8 – 9: Masken, Kutschen

## III. MOVEMENTS

10 – 13: Gedränge, Confetti (Gewalt)

14 – 16: Misc. scenes: Nebenstraßen (Baubo revididus)

## IV. ACTIONS

17 – 20: Fest des Augenblicks: Pferderennen

[Abend]

21 – 24: Misc. scenes (Kunst)

[Nacht]

25 – 27: Die 'letzte Feierlichkeit:' Moccoli

[Morgen, letzter Tag]

[Aschermittwoch]

Arabic numerals designate the individually titled sections that comprise the text, excluding the introduction. These are divided into a total of eight sections or diachronic 'phases' of the carnival's description. Roman numerals group these scene-sets into four analytically distinct dimensions that capture how the text reconstructs the carnival so as to animate its individual parts into a whole within the reader's imagination. The text begins with an account of the physico-symbolic space within which the festivities ensue, elucidating the continuity between the carnival and other Roman customs. It then turns to an account of the practice's principal actors, each described in a visual inventory that allows each individual to attain the status of a general type. The fact of masking in particular enables the arbitrarization of all social roles and symbolic predicates such as 'father,' 'woman,' 'lawyer,' etc. These social roles become, as it were, *mere* masks, and are thus exposed in their arbitrariness as a kind of costume one might put on. In a third step, the text turns to how everyone's tumultuous movements aggregate together so as to form

what Goethe terms “das Gedränge.” Importantly, this aggregate ‘throng’ is formed through the ritual *deformation* of social structure, coming in the fourth and final stage to perform two key actions: the micro-festival of the horse races and the candlelight ceremony of Mocoli. Goethe’s text thus progresses from an empty *space* to populate that blank setting with *actors*, animating their *movements* until finally allowing the collective subject that thereby emerges to engage in two specific ritual *actions*. The illustrations that accompany the text are thus meant to become animated in the reader’s imagination; it is no surprise, then, that Goethe once referred to his “Römisches Carneval” not as a *tableau vivant*, but as a “*tableau mouvant*.”<sup>245</sup>

It is important to note here that Goethe’s description of the “procession of absurdities” (“Gang der Torheiten”) does not slavishly track the carnival’s successive unfolding in linear narrative fashion, but must at key moments depart from such mimesis to engage alternative representational strategies. The carnival’s diachronic phases are thus designated separately on the right-column in brackets, which enclose temporal signifiers Goethe himself used as titles of certain prose sections. Highlighted in blue above are scene-sets that represent the simultaneous as if it were successive.

This structural segmentation of the carnival results in a surprise, for the final temporal stage of the ritual process, “Ash Wednesday” (“Aschermittwoch”), is placed in bold as well as brackets in order to signal its status as a kind of self-standing category. The section constitutes the conclusion both of the diachronic course of festivities and of Goethe’s diachronic description thereof, which was found to reconstruct the carnival’s processual logic by strategically rendering a simultaneity of events successive, as in the visual taxonomy of actors in “Masken.” Goethe now, in “Aschermittwoch,” renders the entire succession of the carnival simultaneous, overlaying the

---

<sup>245</sup> From an orienting guide to Goethe’s works in French translation that Goethe himself composed, “Ouvrages poétiques de Goethe.” Cf. *WA* I/53 209.

four analytically sequestered dimensions of space, actors, movements, and actions so as to afford a synthetic apprehension of the whole of the practice. I wish to highlight that this arrangement has a deep epistemological significance for Goethe. In Goethe's natural-scientific morphology, the disclosure of a synthetically organizing idea within the domain of temporally extended empirical appearances calls for a temporal apprehension of the simultaneity of simultaneity and succession, in Goethe's words: "eine Naturwirkung die wir der Idee gemäß als simultan und sukzessiv zugleich denken sollen."<sup>246</sup> Thus, in "Aschermittwoch," Goethe formulates the intuitive apprehension of the synchronized whole of the diachronic carnival practice in light of its animating idea. Indeed, upon reaching Venice, Goethe remarked: "die Haupt Idee die sich mir wieder hier aufdringt ist wieder *Volck*."<sup>247</sup> In other words, the very idea of the Roman carnival, the synthetic unity of the social practice, comes to articulation in "Aschermittwoch." In Goethe's words: "So ist ein ausschweifendes Fest wie ein Traum, wie ein Märchen vorüber, und es bleibt dem Teilnehmer vielleicht weniger davon in der Seele zurück als unsern Lesern, vor deren Einbildungskraft und Verstand wir das Ganze in seinem Zusammenhange gebracht haben."<sup>248</sup> In contrast to the oneiric ephemerality of the festival's succession, Goethe's reconstruction of the underlying unity of the carnival engages the reader's imagination and understanding, the same two cognitive faculties Kant saw as harmonized in aesthetic judgment. We can understand this work of synthesis by isolating the structural moments that Goethe circumscribes in the "Aschermittwoch" section.

My claim is, then, that the middle three paragraphs of the segment "Aschermittwoch" represent the carnival practice from the standpoint of its Idea and thus disclose the three structural moments (*Strukturmomente*) that in their interrelation constitute the social practice in its unity.

---

<sup>246</sup> From "Bedenken und Ergebung." Cf. *FA* I/24 449.

<sup>247</sup> From the *Reise-Tagebuch für Charlotte von Stein* on Sept. 29, 1786. Cf. *FA* I/15 681. Emphasis in original.

<sup>248</sup> From "Das Römische Carneval." Cf. *FA* I/15.1 551.

This marks a departure from the scholarly consensus on the text's ending, which reads it as an allegorization of the carnival proceedings. The *Goethe-Handbuch* claims that the text's conclusion "als eine allegorische Darstellung von Gesellschaft verstanden werden kann,"<sup>249</sup> while Michael Gamper goes so far as to claim that "Aschermittwoch" "im Rest des Textes keine Bedeutung hat und mit der Tendenz der Beschreibung kaum kompatibel ist," for it is "allegorisch überhöht."<sup>250</sup> Susanne Lüdemann terms the ending "merkwürdig dünn und abstrakt,"<sup>251</sup> while Rolf Jucker's position might be taken to be exemplary of the discussion: "Er [Goethe] mußte eine Struktur in das Ergebnis hineinprojizieren, eine Form suchen, die ihm dieses Treiben erklären konnte, ohne daß er sich selber darauf einlassen mußte. Nur so gelang ihm der Brückenschlag vom unverständlichen Karneval zur Allegorie des Lebens."<sup>252</sup> This view is uncharitable to the text in question, participating in a generally inflated overuse of rhetorical concepts to understand non-rhetorical phenomena. Allegory, after all, depends on a binary structure of meaning that would establish a set of correspondences between, say, the sensuous and the abstract. Abandoning such binary logic, Goethe articulates in the middle three paragraphs of "Aschermittwoch" a threefold structure of significance, the social form of human life that comes to ritual expression in the practice's very enactment. This is not the projection of an external structure onto a phenomenon, but the elucidation of its immanent concept of synthetic unity. What commentators have missed, in other words, is Goethe's achievement of morphological observation within the social domain.

## ***2.a The First Structural Moment: Laughter in the Face of das Unverfügbare***

<sup>249</sup> Cf. "Italienische Reise." In: *Goethe-Handbuch*. Vol. 3: Prosaschriften. Ed. Bernd Witte & Peter Schmidt. Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler 1997, pp. 331-368, here: 365.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. Michael Gamper. *Masse lesen, Masse schreiben. Eine Diskurs- und Imaginationsgeschichte der Menschenmenge 1765-1930*. München: Wilhelm Fink 2007. Pg. 106-124, here: 117.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Susanne Lüdemann. "Vom Römischen Karneval zur ökonomischen Automate. Massendarstellung bei Goethe und E.T.A. Hoffmann." In: *Massenfassungen. Beiträge zur Diskurs- und Mediengeschichte der Menschenmenge*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink 2010. Pg. 107-124, here: 114.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Rolf Jucker. "Das Römische Karneval. Mit Gesetz und Ordnung gegen Gedränge." In: *Goethe-Jahrbuch* Vol. 111. Pg. 35-44.

Let us consider the first structural moment of the carnival:

Wenn uns während des Laufs dieser Torheiten der rohe Pulcinell ungebührlich an die Freuden der Liebe erinnert, denen wir unser Dasein zu danken haben, wenn eine Baubo auf öffentlichem Platze die Geheimnisse der Gebälerin entweiht, wenn so viele nächtlich angezündete Kerzen uns an die letzte Feierlichkeit erinnern, so werden wir mitten unter dem Unsinne auf die wichtigsten Szenen unsers Lebens aufmerksam gemacht.<sup>253</sup>

More than the allegorization of a trio of idiosyncratically selected scenes, Goethe's remark isolates three limit-concepts (*Grenzbegriffe*) of the human being: birth, sexual enjoyment or ecstasy, and death. These three are in play in almost *any* ritual of sufficient cultural significance, of course, but what is unique in Goethe's account is their invocation within the collective context of carnival.<sup>254</sup> Birth, sex, and death are most often associated by anthropologists with rites of passage oriented around an individual and his or her navigation of the key stages on life's path. Victor Turner notes that these are "critical moments of transition which all societies ritualize and publicly mark with suitable observance."<sup>255</sup> The ritualization of such transitions was captured by Arnold van Gennep in the concept of 'rites of passage,' a tripartite structure of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases. Such rites of passage are usually governed by a directionality, for most often they are rituals of status elevation, the initiate undergoing a kind of ritual degradation in which she descends below the entire social hierarchy, as it were, before passing successfully through the liminal phase to move up in symbolic status. Within the domain of everyday life, on the other hand, such rites of passage give us a socially or institutionally sanctioned sense that we are 'going somewhere' in the course of life's way, most especially when

---

<sup>253</sup> *FA I/15.1* 551

<sup>254</sup> Drawing on Vico, Peter Winch, one of the first to read Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer before their publication, calls birth, sex, and death 'limiting notions' that frame the conceptual space of a form of life, for they "give us a clue where to look, if we are puzzled about the point of an alien system of institutions. The specific forms which these concepts take, the particular institutions in which they are expressed, vary considerably from one society to another; but their central position within a society's institutions is and must be a constant factor." How a local form of life deals with death in its ritual practices will have *logical* consequences for how it deals with birth. Cf. Peter Winch. "Understanding a Primitive Society." In: *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 1, No. 4 (Oct. 1964), pg. 302-324.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Oxon/New York: 1969. Pg. 168.



we navigate life's ineluctable biological facticity. Given its directionality, the rite of passage may thus be understood as a kind of narrative template.

If we examine the individual scenes isolated by Goethe, it becomes apparent that they do not evince the linear directionality of traditional rites of passage, no exchange of social statuses, and certainly no status elevation. Instead, they are characterized by constitutive reversibility. Indeed, due to this structural reversibility, the very limit-concepts of birth and death, gain and loss, re-enter as mutually entangled and even substitutable semiotic values within each individual scene. In "Nebenstrassen," a woman thus gives birth to "irgend eine unförmliche Gestalt" precisely at the moment when her two paramours stab one another:

sie gehen friedlich auf und nieder. Auf einmal entzweien sich die Männer, es entsteht ein lebhafter Wortwechsel, die Frauen mischen sich hinein, der Handel wird immer ärger, endlich ziehen die Streitenden große Messer von versilberter Pappe und fallen einander an. [...] Indessen befindet sich die hochschwängere Frau durch den Schrecken übel; es wird ein Stuhl herbei gebracht, die übrigen Weiber stehen ihr bei, sie gebärdet sich jämmerlich, und ehe man sich versieht, bringt sie zu großer Erlustigung der Umstehenden irgend eine unförmliche Gestalt zur Welt. Das Stück ist aus, und die Truppe zieht weiter.

Birth and death here coalesce into indistinguishability. As Goethe notes, this dramatization, hence acknowledgment of the inextricability of mimetic violence and generative eros, is staged for lovers as they steal away to the side-streets. What could be taken as an apotropaic scene of polluted birth finds itself comically bracketed, as it were, insofar as the intended audience of young lovers comes to laugh at the misshapen issue. This audience eventually breaks the fourth wall to take part in the drama, for "die Umstehenden nehmen Teil, als wenn es Ernst wäre," attempting to calm the quarrelling men down. The spectating audience thus morphs into a

participating congregation, enacting a ritualization of the drama, the transformation of one elementary form of cultural performance into another.<sup>256</sup>

Similarly, in “Moccoli,” the third scene selected by Goethe, all participants play a game in which they each hold a lit candle and attempt to extinguish everyone else’s or re-ignite their own through another’s, evoking a kind of symbolic cycle of death and rebirth that remains eminently reversible:

Ohne Unterschied, ob man Bekannte oder Unbekannte vor sich habe, sucht man nur immer das nächste Licht auszublasen, oder das seinige wieder anzuzünden und bei dieser Gelegenheit das Licht des Anzündenden auszulöschen. Und je stärker das Gebrüll sia ammazzato [*Ermodet werde*] von allen Enden wiederhallt, desto mehr verliert das Wort von seinem fürchterlichen Sinn [...] so wird sia ammazzato diesen Abend zum Losungswort, zum Freudengeschrei, zum Refrain aller Scherze, Neckereien und Komplimente.<sup>257</sup>

If the scene of the entanglement of birth and death, the apotropaic and the comic, involved a ritualization of the drama, one here witnesses a ritualization of another elementary form of cultural performance, namely the game.<sup>258</sup> In the Moccoli ceremony as Goethe describes it, we witness the game – the contest of candlelights – morphing into a ritual, for the asymmetry of those with lit and those with extinguished candles remains eminently reversible and status distinctions are thereby effaced. As Goethe recounts:

Alle Stände und Alter toben gegen einander [...] der Knabe löscht dem Vater das Licht aus und hört nicht auf zu schreien: sie ammazzato il Signore Padre! Vergebens, daß ihm

---

<sup>256</sup> On the ritual/drama distinction, see: Roy Rappaport. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: CUP, 1999. Pg. 134-35.

<sup>257</sup> *FA I/15.1* 549-550

<sup>258</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that, while games are disjunctive, rituals are conjunctive. A game begins with a postulated symmetry between two groups or semiotic values only to establish, by the end, a condition of asymmetry and even inequality, most often between winner and losers. A ritual, on the other hand, begins with a postulated asymmetry, say between mortals and gods, or the living and the dead, or children and parents, only to end with the establishment of an equivalence, thus meaningfully conjoining groups or semiotic values that were previously unrelated. While games have an unpredictable outcome, rituals have a preordained one. Ultimately, like so many of Lévi-Strauss’s distinctions, this performative difference takes the form of a chiasmic mirroring, the game being a *structure* of general codified rules that are enacted in order to generate unique *events*, while the ritual constitutes a kind of collectively remembered *event* enacted in order to generate a general social *structure*. Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: UCP 1962. Pg. 32-33.

der Alte diese Unanständigkeit verweis't [sic]; der Knabe behauptet die Freiheit dieses Abends und verwünscht nur seinen Vater desto ärger.<sup>259</sup>

To return to Goethe's synoptic view of these scenes in their synthetic unity, what is immediately striking is that these rituals constitutively prevent passage, dilating the liminal phase by robbing its before and after of their sense of narrative significance. This results in the structural coincidence and even mutual contamination of the limit concepts of birth and death in "Nachtstrassen" and in their reversibility in "Moccoli." The linear directionality governing the tripartite stages in the rite of passage makes possible the ordering of key life events as narrative, but precisely that directional sense is here given up to a play of reversibility that dramatizes the events as limit concepts in inextricable entanglement. What Goethe ultimately intuits in the carnival qua ritual, then, is the non-narrativizability of our natural lives. Within the Roman carnival, in other words, participants come to ritually affirm the sense that the basest facts of our animal existence – that we are born, reproduce, and die – ultimately cannot be conventionalized into a life-story, even if they may appear to be in various institutionalized passage rites. Now, this may seem to be a grimly pessimistic insight, for, contrary to the ritualized status-elevations that normally organize one's life narrative, it amounts to the idea that we are not, in the end, truly 'going anywhere' in life (there is nowhere to 'go'). It is the sense that the sheer contingency of our mortal conditioning, of its inexplicable beginning and its uncontrollable end, rebukes all social orders that would seek symbolically to integrate it.

What is remarkable about Goethe's insight, however, is that he apprehends these three scenes and their correspondently entangled limit-concepts through a mythic lens that sheds light on how the carnival, in its deconstruction of the rite of passage, nonetheless remains a kind of anti-ritualistic ritual, above all a ritual of affirmative laughter. The most blatant allusion is to

---

<sup>259</sup> *FA I/15.1* 550

Baubo, a figure that would later fascinate Nietzsche. Having lost her daughter Persephone to Hades, Demeter finds herself in mourning, the earth in a state of cosmic infertility. One of her handmaidens, Baubo, then exposes herself to Demeter, which elicits the mother's laughter and allows her mourning to cease, returning the earth to its seasonal fecundity.<sup>260</sup> Earlier in his description, Goethe similarly compared the pulcinella in his unseemly gestures to Priapus.<sup>261</sup> According to Ovid's ribald recounting in *Fasti*, Priapus attempted to rape the nymph Lotis (or Vesta) as she slept, yet was interrupted by the bleating of an ass and ran off.<sup>262</sup> Upon being found out, the naked Priapus was subjected to the gods' laughter in a scene of hypertrophic masculine virility exposed in its comic impotence. Taken together, Baubo and Priapus form a kind of polarity that marks the phantasmatic limits of human sexuality in narrative scenarios the contrasts of which mirror one another: in the case of Baubo, an *excess* of fecundity in the midst of irrevocable *loss*; in the case of Priapus, a *lack* of thwarted desire ultimately rendered impotent by its own *excessive* virility. What is most relevant for Goethe, however, is how this mythico-erotic imaginary sheds light on the cultural function of laughter, for in both myths the gods' laughter is elicited by a scene of what the Greeks called *anasyrma*, the public exposure of the genitalia. The mythic lens through which Goethe apprehends the entanglement of the limit-concepts allows him to make sense of the positive surplus of cultural significance generated through the carnival's rites of blocked passage and liminal reversal on display in "Nebenstrassen" and "Moccoli." It is as if, in the Roman carnival, mortals were allowed for a time to partake in the gods' own laughter at the vicissitudes of human sexuality. Viewed mythically, both scenes expose the 'naked' facts of

---

<sup>260</sup> Cf. Georges Devereux. *Baubo. Die mythische Vulva*. Trans. Eva Moldenhauer. Frankfurt a.M.: Syndikat. 1981; Maurice Olender. "Aspects of Baubo: Ancient Texts and Contexts." In: *Before sexuality: The construction of erotic experience in the ancient Greek world*. Princeton: PUP, 1990. Pg. 83-114.

<sup>261</sup> "Hier kommt ein Pulcinelle gelaufen, dem ein großes Horn an bunten Schnüren um die Hüften gaukelt. Durch eine geringe Bewegung, indem er sich mit den Weibern unterhält, weiß er die Gestalt des alten Gottes der Gärten in dem heiligen Rom kecklich nachzuahmen." Cf. *FA I/15.1* 526

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Benjamin Hederich. *Reales Schul-Lexikon*, Sp. 2320-2321 (entry: "Priapus") & *Gründliches mythologisches Lexikon*, Sp. 2078.

human biological life such that their very non-narrativizability becomes an object of affirmative laughter rather than nihilistic despair. The misshapen child, after all, is born “zu großer Erlustigung der Umstehenden.”

How exactly, however, does this mythico-erotically imagined primal scene of laughter constitute an affirmation? If they are not quite rituals of passage, of status-elevation and transformation, then the ritualized drama enacted by the Roman Baubo and the ritualized game of candlelight played out by father and child instead constitute rituals of status-reversal and – indifferenciation. They accomplish this, moreover, by allowing the limit concepts to emerge in their unsettling entanglement from *within* the social order itself, ‘deforming’ its structure of hierarchized sociosymbolic positions from the inside out, as it were. For this ritual ‘deformation’ to elicit a jocular rather than troubled response, a double movement must thus occur: first, a movement outside of an excluding social order so as to constitute a second, excluded realm; second, a becoming visible of that excluded realm within the excluding social order. It is the immanent recrudescence of the constitutively excluded that generates laughter.

The existential relevance of this conceptual design, forcefully brought out in the philosophical anthropology of Joachim Ritter, lies in the fact that precisely those phenomena the social order excludes remain lurking in the weave of ordinary life, unacknowledged and invisible.<sup>263</sup> The limit concepts of birth, sex, and death in particular are occluded from actually being seen in their full reality precisely because they are so omnipresent. This is why Goethe’s sentence cited above turns on the central verbs *erinnern* and “aufmerksam gemacht.” The sense of ‘remembering’ and ‘coming to awareness’ must be understood as a kind of anamnesis, a remembrance of something that was always known yet long forgotten, in other words: as a

---

<sup>263</sup> Cf. Joachim Ritter. “Über das Lachen.” In: *Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze*. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M. 1989 (orig. 1940). Pg. 62-92.

recovery and thus acknowledgment of that which is constitutively excluded by the social order and yet, in its ritualized re-emergence, provokes laughter. To speak with Stanley Cavell, the ‘uncanniness of the ordinary’ here enters the light of day.<sup>264</sup> That we cannot determine when, to whom, or even perhaps why we were born, when and how we will die, even to whom we will be erotically attracted: these facts together circumscribe the domain of that which is excluded yet eminently ordinary, what one might call in German *das Unverfügbare* or that which is constitutively not at our disposal or in our control. Thus, when critics interpret this second paragraph of “Aschermittwoch” as ending the text “[m]it der Depotenzierung des kollektiven Ereignisses zur individuellen Lebenslehre”<sup>265</sup> or as taking the carnival “nur zum Anlass einer lehrhaften Allegorese”<sup>266</sup>, they have missed Goethe’s fundamental point, which is anti-didactic, a warning that socially sanctioned *Bildung* as established by rites of passage remains but a flimsy superstructure. The Roman carnival discloses itself to the morphological observer as ritualizing its ingredient performances, whether dramas or games, such that the non-narrativizability of our natural lives – *das Unverfügbare* – is itself exposed in its nakedness and thus made available to acknowledgment.

### ***2.b The Second Structural Moment: The Ritual Deformation of das Gedränge***

If this represents the first structural moment of the carnival’s inner form of ritual practice – namely laughter in the face of *das Unverfügbare* –, then the third paragraph of “Aschermittwoch” elucidates the carnival’s second structural moment: the ritual deformation of society into the chaotic, proto-social aggregate formation Goethe terms *das Gedränge*. In order to see the importance of this structural moment for Goethe’s work generally, a consideration of other

---

<sup>264</sup> Cf. Stanley Cavell. “The Uncanniness of the Ordinary.” In: *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*. Chicago: UCP 1988. Pg. 153-180.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Michael Gamper. *Masse lesen, Masse schreiben*, pp. 117.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. Ludwig Uhlig. “Goethes ‘Römisches Karneval’ im Wandel seines Kontexts.” *Euphorion*. Vol. 1, Issue 72, 1978. Pg. 84-95 (here: 89).

texts would be necessary. Here we can focus on the single sentence of the carnival treatise that brings out Goethe's essential point. As Goethe phrases it:

Noch mehr erinnert uns die schmale, lange, gedrängtvoll[e] [sic] Straße an die Wege des Weltlebens, wo jeder Zuschauer und Teilnehmer mit freiem Gesicht oder unter der Maske, vom Balkon oder vom Gerüste, nur einen geringen Raum vor und neben sich übersieht, in der Kutsche oder zu Fuße, nur Schritt vor Schritt vorwärts kommt, mehr geschoben wird als geht, mehr aufgehalten wird, als willig stille steht, nur eifriger dahin zu gelangen sucht, wo es besser und froher zugeht, und dann auch da wieder in die Enge kommt, und zuletzt verdrängt wird.<sup>267</sup>

The sentence's prose unfolds in a stately movement of thoroughgoing parallelism: four subject-qualifying conjunctive syntagms level differences between spectators and participants, those unmasked and masked, on balconies or on scaffolds, in carriages or on feet, only for four verb-qualifying contrastive clauses to follow, all emphasizing the phenomenon of thwarted intentional movement. The web of collective intentional actions becomes so complexly entangled in society that one does not so much 'move' through society or stand 'still' in it as one is moved and halted by seemingly nature-like forces of compulsion outside of one's own control.<sup>268</sup> In the carnival, the fact of such unsurveyable social entanglement and the concomitant rendering impotent of the individual will cease to be abstract claims *about* society and become corporeally experienceable. Social entanglement, reduced to physical movements among bodies, not only mirrors the futility of individual endeavor in society, but revels here in a more primary form of embodied togetherness. The Roman carnival thus stages and affirms what may come to seem nature-like in society – its demands and necessities – within society itself.

Goethe begins the sentence by invoking once more his verb for the anamnestic acknowledgment of the ordinary – “erinnert” –, claiming that the crowded Corso recalls “die

---

<sup>267</sup> *FA* I/15.1 552

<sup>268</sup> In *Die natürliche Tochter*, this thought reaches expression in the metaphor of the net: “Ja, mit dem besten Willen leisten wir / So wenig, weil uns tausend Willen kreuzen. / O wäre mir zu meinen reinen Wünschen / Auch volle Kraft auf kurze Zeit gegeben” (V. 1.416-419).

Wege des Weltlebens.” This is, of course, an allusion to the Baroque trope of the *vita mundana*, the worldly as opposed to the holy life, but Goethe’s actual subsequent thought transcends any theological framework that would juxtapose worldly immanence with heavenly transcendence.<sup>269</sup> For Goethe, rather, the structural locus once inhabited by the divine afterlife qua totalizing perspective is rendered meaningless by virtue of the social complexity of the modern world. Unsurveyable complexity renders social observation selective; each act of observation is embedded within that which it observes, namely society. Goethe thus observes via this structural moment the non-observability, the constitutive blind spot, that attends all social observation in which an individual might engage when navigating a complex society, the fact that “jeder Zuschauer und Teilnehmer [...] nur einen geringen Raum vor und neben sich übersieht.” This ultimately blurs the very distinction between spectator and participant, for to inhabit a complex society means to observe the fact that one does not observe it *in toto*, above all that one cannot adequately observe oneself qua social actor and participant (to see oneself through others’ eyes). Though the carnival since Bakhtin has been associated with traditional societies that depend on its state of exception and temporary status-reversals in order ultimately to reinforce a stratificatorily differentiated social structure of hierarchized ‘positions,’ Goethe instead apprehends in the Roman carnival the incipient emergence of modern, ‘mass’ society of the kind Niklas Luhmann would associate with the functional differentiation of multiple social systems.<sup>270</sup>

Goethe’s concept for this mass crowd is *das Gedränge*. No other term repeats as often in all of its morphemic variations within Goethe’s carnival description as this word. One particularly

---

<sup>269</sup> Cf. “Weltleben.” In: *Grimm-Wörterbuch*. Bd. 28, Sp. 1630.

<sup>270</sup> As Luhmann pointed out, we should not think of social complexity as a steadily increasing historical tendency, but rather as dependent on the form of society’s internal self-differentiation. For Luhmann, society becomes modern and complex (in a new historical sense of ‘complex’) when it shifts from stratificatory to functional differentiation, i.e. the move from a class of monk-scribes ‘above’ the laboring feudal vassals yet ‘below’ the bishops to the self-sufficient system of the media in its interdependent ‘horizontal’ relations to the social systems of the church and of the labor market. Cf. Niklas Luhmann. “Gesellschaftliche Struktur und semantische Tradition.” In: *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1980, pp. 9-70.



illuminating example immediately precedes the section titled “Gedränge” and allows Goethe’s metamorphic thought of this societal deformation to become legible at the grammatical level: “jeder drängt sich hin- und herwärts so gut er kann, und von allen Fenstern und Balkonen sieht wieder eine gedrängte Menge auf das Gedränge herunter.”<sup>271</sup> The verb “drängt,” enacted by an anonymous “jeder,” grammatically morphs into an adjective describing a group, “die gedrängte Menge,” until this ‘crowded multitude’ looks down from a balcony at a substantivized “Gedränge” to which it itself belongs, blurring the distinction between spectator and participant. Unlike the self-organization of the people (*Volk*) enabled by the Verona Amphitheater (Figure 13), the people in the Roman carnival are not “zu einem edlen Körper vereinigt, zu einer Einheit bestimmt, in eine Masse verbunden und befestigt, als Eine Gestalt, von Einem Geiste belebt.”<sup>272</sup> Rather than forming a unified and enspirited body politic, the people during the carnival are ritually *deformed* into *das Gedränge*.

In Goethe’s description, the throng occupies the middle core of the Corso, encircled by the circulation of moving wagons, and any pedestrian’s attempt at individuation but serves to heighten the crowd’s primal, mass enjoyment of danger. Goethe was fascinated with this scenario of the frenzied crowd amidst moving carriages, a motif to which he returned in his essay on Mantegna’s “Triumphzug Caesars,” first published in *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum*. Remarkably, Goethe focuses his account of the ninth woodcut print (Figure 14) not so much on Julius Caesar, the principal subject matter of the series depicted in this very print, but on the minor detail of small putti-like children weaving their way in and out of the carriage’s wheels:

Dieses Blatt ist so gedrängt voll, daß man die nackten Kinder mit Siegeszweigen zwischen Pferden und Rädern nur mit Angst ansieht, in der Wirklichkeit müßten sie

---

<sup>271</sup> *FA* I/15.1 530

<sup>272</sup> *FA* I/15.1 44-45

längst zerquetscht sein. Trefflicher war jedoch ein solches Gedränge, das für die Augen immer unfaßlich und für den Sinn verwirrend ist, bildlich nicht darzustellen.<sup>273</sup>

The element of the Roman carnival that was so recalcitrant to morphological observation, to being perceived in its inner form by the mind's eye, to being described in a text or pictured in an image, is this *Gedränge*, which remains “für den Sinn verwirrend.” One only has to compare Goethe's intuitive apprehension of the emergence of modern mass society in the calendrical rite of carnival to Volkmann's account to be struck by the novelty of Goethe's insight. As Volkmann relates, “Man sieht wenigstens einige tausend Masken, die zum Theil sehr sauber und artig gekleidet sind, viele hundert Kutschen fahren in zwey Reihen auf und nieder, ohne daß die geringste Verwirrung vorfällt.”<sup>274</sup>

The *Gedränge* captures the mereological form of social (or rather proto-social) self-organization ritually dramatized in the carnival. Goethe only makes a handful of narratorial interventions during the course of his description, one of which suggests that the *Gedränge* not only resists description, but constitutes the very formal object the genesis of which his description tracks. After describing the throng encircled by circulating carriages in the Corso, individuals here and there jumping in and out between the vehicles, Goethe notes: “Schon gegenwärtig scheint unsere Erzählung außer den Grenzen des Glaubwürdigen zu schreiten [...] Denn was werden unsere Leser sagen, wenn wir ihnen erklären, alles bisher Erzählte sei nur gleichsam der erste Grad des Gedränges, des Getümmels, des Lärmens und der Ausgelassenheit.”<sup>275</sup> This suggests that the *Gedränge* undergoes intensification (*Steigerung*), for the throng crowded into the Corso must then divide and reunite once carriages move through the street's middle:

---

<sup>273</sup> From “Julius Cäsars Triumphzug, gemalt von Mantegna.” Cf. *HA* 12 189.

<sup>274</sup> Cf. Johann Jacob Volkmann. *Historisch-kritische Nachrichten von Italien*. Vol. 2. Leipzig: Caspar Fritsch. 1770, pp. 732.

<sup>275</sup> *FA* I/15.1 533

Sie drängen sich, so gut sie können, zwischen die übrigen Wagen hinein, und auf eine oder die andere Weise bei Seite. Und wie Wasser, wenn ein Schiff durchfährt, sich nur einen Augenblick trennt, und hinter dem Steuerruder gleich wieder zusammenstürzt, so strömt auch die Masse der Masken und der übrigen Fußgänger hinter dem Zuge gleich wieder in Eins zusammen. Nicht lange, so stört eine neue Bewegung die gedrängte Gesellschaft.<sup>276</sup>

More than a mere metaphor, the throng emerges here through the indifferenciation of activity – “Sie drängen sich” – and passivity – “die gedrängte Gesellschaft.” Morphemic variations of *drängen* thus continue to track how this throng is formed through a social deformation, through the first-order interference of individual movements that generates a second-order collective motion beyond the orbit of individual agencies. Though the text’s illustrations by Schütz and Kraus were created according to models afforded by Mercier’s urban tableaux and Comenius’s labeled encyclopedic layouts, the social phenomenon Goethe ultimately sought to understand was perhaps best depicted by a contemporary, the Venetian Francesco Guardi in the latter’s *Studio di folla* (Study of a Crowd, Figure 15). This represents “die gedrängte Gesellschaft:” a throng of anonymized, exchangeable actors, ‘social’ only in the sense of their corporeal proximity, Guardi’s airy, light, flowing outlines allowing each figure to spill over into the next, thwarting individuation at every turn.

To speak with Victor Turner, carnival participants deform into the social proto-form of the throng when inhabiting the collective liminal condition of *communitas*. While the social structure for Turner consists of a cultural matrix of differentiated, hierarchized, webbed symbolic positions inhabited by real-life incumbents, i.e. particular individuals, *communitas* represents a liminal destructuring in which incumbents are stripped of their sociosymbolic predicates, no longer inhabiting their various social positions in the structure but left ‘naked’ to encounter others as singular persons rather than instantiations of a role or representatives of an institution. As Turner

---

<sup>276</sup> FA I/15 534

notes, “[t]he ultimate [social] desideratum [...] is to act in terms of *communitas* values even while playing structural roles, where what one culturally does is conceived of as merely instrumental to the aim of attaining and maintaining *communitas*.”<sup>277</sup> Key for the understanding of carnival, however, is the fact that the “[i]n the process of social life, behavior in accordance with one model [e.g. structure] tends to ‘drift away’ from behavior in terms of the other [e.g. *communitas*].”<sup>278</sup> Seen on a collective scale, then, the carnival does evince a tripartite structure reminiscent of a rite of passage insofar as the social structure undergoes temporary liminal deformation into a state of *communitas*, which, at the carnival’s end, restores symbolic statuses and social positions, reinforcing structure by, in a sense, purging it, recalibrating and thereby correcting the ‘drift’ of structure away from *communitas*. While this account applies to any calendrical rite of status-reversal, what is unique about Goethe’s account of the Roman carnival is that he saw in *das Gedränge* not Turner’s somewhat utopian view of sociosymbolically unmediated togetherness, but the insipient emergence of unsurveyable social complexity in modern mass societies and their collective hysterias, whether revolutionary or fascist.

Like Turner, Bakhtin too falls into the pitfall of ascribing the carnival through a utopian-revolutionary political potential.<sup>279</sup> Furthermore, Bakhtin analyzes Goethe’s carnival description solely at the level of content, failing to ask why Goethe organized his ethnographic account in the segmented, carefully sequenced textual form that he did.<sup>280</sup> This inattention to form combined with the politicization of the content led Bakhtin to overlook Goethe’s insight that the carnival keeps a real political danger at bay: “daß Freiheit und Gleichheit nur in dem Taumel des

---

<sup>277</sup> Cf. Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process*, pp. 177-78.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984 (orig. 1965). Pg. 244-257.

<sup>280</sup> This account on Goethe’s relation to Bakhtin differs from Nährlich-Slatewa’s, who sees both of their conceptions of carnival as largely resonant with one another. Cf. Elena Nährlich-Slatewa. “Das groteske Leben und seine edle Einfassung. ‘Das Römische Karneval’ Goethes und das Karnevals-konzept von Michail M. Bachtin.” *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 106. 1981. Pg. 181-202.

Wahnsinns genossen werden können.”<sup>281</sup> The same social masses that the carnival temporarily allows to vent would later initiate the terror of the French revolution, an event with which Goethe never adequately came to terms.

### ***2.c The Third Structural Moment: The Festival of the Augenblick***

The fourth paragraph in “Aschermittwoch” articulates the third and final structural moment of the carnival’s form of practice. If the first moment relates to the cultural function taken on by laughter in the ritual, the second to the form of mereological self-*dis*organization undergone by the people, then the third relates to the ritual’s temporal structure. As in the previous two paragraphs, here a particular scene from the festival process is selected and lifted out of its continuity with previous and subsequent diachronic stages to be seen by the mind’s eye in its synchronic significance. The scene in question is the horserace at carnival’s end:

Dürfen wir fortfahren, ernsthafter zu sprechen, als es der Gegenstand zu erlauben scheint, so bemerken wir: **daß** die lebhaftesten und höchsten Vergnügen, wie die vorbeifliegenden Pferde, nur einen Augenblick uns erscheinen, uns rühren, und kaum eine Spur in der Seele zurücklassen, **daß** Freiheit und Gleichheit nur in dem Taumel des Wahnsinns genossen werden können, und **daß** die größte Lust nur dann am höchsten reizt, wenn sie sich ganz nahe an die Gefahr drängt, und lüstern ängstlich-süße Empfindungen in ihrer Nähe genießet.<sup>282</sup>

This sentence must be read as the intellectual *result* of a sustained practice of morphological observation, *not* as a moralizing maxim about the fleeting character of earthly delights. Three “daß”-clauses comprise the sentence and articulate Goethe’s phenomenology of a specific kind of collective pleasure. The first “daß”-clause addresses how a successive temporality comes to be folded into one instantaneous moment characterized by a lack of ‘retention,’ for it leaves behind “kaum eine Spur in der Seele.” This temporality comes to coincide with two further dimensions captured in the next two “daß”-clauses: a form of collective togetherness and a specific mode of

---

<sup>281</sup> HA 11 515

<sup>282</sup> FA I/15.1 552

sensuous enjoyment. If the people are disaggregated into the proto-social formation of *das Gedränge* and come to enjoy that condition, then this human ‘throng’ now relates to itself as a collectively spectating subject that shares an experience of enjoyment. This extramundane interval of collective, non-retentional enjoyment reduces temporal experience to the scope of the vanishing now, of “nur einen Augenblick.” With this insight, Goethe is able to specify the precise phenomenological shape taken by the ritual interval of the horserace: the *Gedränge* here enters a sphere of temporal experience in which the self-extinction of a pure now as such becomes sensuously tangible and even enjoyable in a moment of carnal intensity that ends with barely an impression left in the soul of the participants. As a micro-ritual within the carnival, in other words, the horserace is not merely a competitive sporting event, but a festival that consecrates the present moment as a binding object of collective enjoyment.

The presence of the verb *drängen*, which takes as its grammatical subject “die größte Lust,” alerts us to the fact that *das Gedränge* is not just a form of social disorganization, but is also correlated to the temporal structure of a specific form of desire. Besides the cited observation on the horserace, Goethe likewise emphasizes the ephemerality of the throng’s pleasure after “Moccoli,” noting that this micro-ritual ends “mit einer allgemeinen Betäubung.” Goethe’s focus in particular on the example of the boy extinguishing the father’s candle, and vice-versa, calls attention to an intergenerational scale of temporality that exceeds the mortal lifespan of any individual. During “Moccoli,” however, that supra-individual intergenerational scale of time is ‘brought down,’ as it were, to earth, immanentized within the scope of immediately perceived succession. The anthropologist Roy Rappaport has described this in terms of three temporal layers that are reconfigured in ritual: first, the ‘sub-societal,’ experiential time of one’s flow of breath and perception, which Rappaport terms ‘organic’; second, the ‘middle’ layer of mundane social

time: the time of periodized duration, of schedules and timetables; and third, the ‘supra-societal,’ ‘cosmic’ time of intergenerational turnover, nature’s cyclical processes, and creation myths.<sup>283</sup> In ritual, the middle structural layer of mundane social time is evacuated and ‘organic’ and ‘cosmic’ time are coordinated or synchronized. That is, the carnival congregation ritually moves out of the middle range of social time to render a cosmic, intergenerational scale of temporality ritually experienceable for individuals within the *Gedränge*. When inhabiting this extramundane temporal interval, the throng specifically formed in “Moccoli” experiences birth and death, generation and destruction, as they come to coincide in the intense carnal enjoyment of the vanishing now, the limen or ‘edge’ at which the present ceases to be. The carnival’s third structural moment thus consists in an insight not about the temporal character of enjoyment, which would be banal, but about the enjoyment of time itself in its generative self-extinction.<sup>284</sup> The micro-rituals of the horserace and Moccoli carve out an intervallic time within the festival process that allows the *Gedränge* to (de)form and collectively share the experience of the passage of time in a consecration of the now as both intrinsic loss and gain, binding each individual present to the transhistorical people as a whole, short-circuiting mundane social time and thus exposing the arbitrary character of the state itself: “Der Staat,” Goethe notes, “macht wenig Anstalten, wenig Aufwand dazu.”<sup>285</sup>

While the carnival as a whole constitutes such an interval of extramundane temporality and normative exception within the calendrical year, Goethe’s attention is most drawn to how the

---

<sup>283</sup> Cf. Roy Rappaport. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Pg. 224.

<sup>284</sup> In his *Anthusa oder Roms Alterthümer*, Moritz cites Goethe’s “Das Römische Karneval” at length and links it to the ancient Saturnalia held on December 19<sup>th</sup>. In his account of the god Saturn, Moritz notes that he holds a wreath of flowers in his left hand, a scythe in his right: “Es ist die Sense, welche den ungehemmten Schritt der immerfort wirkenden Zerstörung im All der Natur bezeichnet; es ist der Blumenkranz, der auf die immerwährende Verjüngung deutet” (225). Moritz’s reading of the iconography of Saturn confirms Goethe’s own phenomenology of the sensuous pleasure experienced during the carnival. Cf. Karl Philipp Moritz. *Anthusa oder Roms Alterthümer. Ein Buch für die Menschheit. Die heiligen Gebräuche der Römer*. 2. Auflage. Berlin 1797.

<sup>285</sup> *FA* I/15.1 518

individual phenomenological experience of ritual time comes to coincide with two further dimensions captured in his “daß”-clauses: a form of collective togetherness and a specific mode of sensuous enjoyment. The micro-rite of the horse race thus functions in a *pars pro toto* manner to carve an interval within the celandric interval of carnival. During the horse race, each carnival participant not only experiences, but comes to enjoy complete ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ insofar as all partake in the exceptional deformation of social structure into the maddening throng: “daß Freiheit und Gleichheit nur in dem Taumel des Wahnsinns genossen werden können.” If Goethe’s first “daß”-clause articulated the temporality of the collective enjoyment in question here, then this second clause articulates the object of enjoyment as self-referential: the people enjoy their own ‘free’ and ‘equal’ togetherness. As Goethe notes at the very beginning of his description, “Das Römische Carneval ist ein Fest, das dem Volke eigentlich *nicht gegeben wird, sondern das sich das Volk selbst gibt.*”<sup>286</sup> Commentators such as Michael Jaeger, for example, have taken this to mark Goethe’s suspicion of the ritual, but Goethe actually emphasizes the carnival’s *autonomy*, the fact that the people give themselves a ritual expression of their own basal instincts in order to lift them into a public acknowledgment of their own power over and above all now-relativized state authorities.

Another aspect of this third structural moment – Goethe’s phenomenology of a specific mode of temporal enjoyment – is what might be called the mood of Epicurean melancholy that permeates this entire text, above all its conclusion. As Goethe puts this, he does not seek “unsrer Leser traurig zu machen,” but

Vielmehr wünschen wir, daß jeder mit uns, da das Leben im *Ganzen*, wie das Römische Carneval, unübersehlich, ungenießbar, ja bedenklich bleibt, durch diese unbekümmerte Maskengesellschaft an die Wichtigkeit jedes augenblicklichen, oft geringscheinenden Lebensgenusses erinnert werden möge.<sup>287</sup>

---

<sup>286</sup> *FA* I/15.1 518

<sup>287</sup> *FA* I/15.1 552



“unübersehlich, ungenießbar, ja bedenklich” – these qualifiers correspond to the second, third, and first structural moments, respectively: *das Gedränge*, *das Augenblickliche*, and *das Unverfügbare*. The problem of the whole of a human life, of how to render one’s own life, from birth to death, subject as it is to unsurveyable social entanglements and contingencies, a *whole* in the first place – this problem is robbed of its potency (*depotenziert*) in the Roman carnival, such that life may metamorphose into a mode of being in time that unfolds as vital self-enjoyment. In Rome, Goethe had hence intuited in the comic figure of the pulcinella a kind of phenomenological essence: “es war auch ein Theater daselbst [in Rom], wo der von uns so oft im Carneval beklatschte Pulcinell [...] uns mit seinen pantomisch-mimisch-lakonischen Absurditäten auf’s beste zu vergnügen und uns in die so höchst behagliche Nullität des Daseins zu versetzen wußte.”<sup>288</sup> The pulcinella enacts and contagiously elicits the ‘most comfortable nullity of existence,’ the evacuation of mundane social time that makes room for the enjoyment of time’s very self-extinction, a sort of pleasantly ‘null’ state of bare aliveness otherwise inaccessible: “Die Wichtigkeit jedes augenblicklichen, oft geringscheinenden Lebensgenusses.” In the Roman carnival, this pleasurable nullity of existence in its ekstatic temporal enjoyment undergoes a ritual collectivization that reconciles the throng with the non-narrativizability of life itself, exposing the hilariously inflamed natural jointure of an entire cultural form of life.

To summarize: Goethe’s morphological mode of observation enables him to grasp the three constitutive structural moments of the carnival in their synthetic unity: first, collective laughter in the face of that which is constitutively not at our disposal (*das Unverfügbare*) in human life, above all in its non-narrativizable natural facticity; second, the reflected ritual deformation of social structure into *das Gedränge*; and third, the festive consecration of the

---

<sup>288</sup> From “Zweiter Römischer Aufenthalt.” Cf. *WA* I/32 141.

present moment as one in which time itself becomes a binding object of collective carnal enjoyment. These respectively correspond to: the existential-ritual dimension (or *what* comes to reflective awareness in the practice); the social-ontological dimension (or *who* enacts the practice qua collective subject); and the temporal-phenomenological dimension (or *how* the practice is temporally experienced). Goethe apprehends these three moments not simply as empirical characteristics of the carnival, but in their “ideal unity” (“Ideale[n] Einheit”) as constitutive of the practice’s immanent form. They are not three definitive criteria, all of which must be present for a practice to count as a carnival, nor are they simply essential traits of all carnivals; rather, they relate to one another in a simultaneous interconnection of reciprocal conditioning, each one making the other two possible. Using a grammatical analogy that is ultimately misleading because of its propositional linearity, one might say that *das Gedränge* constitutes the carnival’s ‘subject,’ *das Augenblickliche* its ‘verb’ or reshaping ritualization of shared temporality, and *das Unverfügbare* its ‘direct object,’ that which comes to reflective awareness within this collectivized mode of temporal experience. In Goethe’s words, this ideal (or logical rather than empirical) unity means that “diese verschiedenen Teile aus einem idealen Urkörper entsprungen und nach und nach in verschiedenen Stufen ausgebildet gedacht werden.”<sup>289</sup>

To understand fully the conceptual payoff of this ideal (as opposed to empirical or even syntactic) unity requires returning to Goethe's remark that society is neither nature nor art, but both at the same time. In other words, the domain of the social is neither given (i.e., natural), nor self-given (i.e., cultural artifice). Analysis of Goethe’s carnival description allows the social to emerge as a zone of indistinguishability between the given and the made. For the made to come to appear as given is for social constructs to undergo reification, a kind of ‘naturalization; of convention. One present generation, for example, inherits social institutions as given, when these

---

<sup>289</sup> *FA I/24 354*

were in fact made by previous historical actors. In the Roman carnival qua ideal unity, what may seem to be given or ‘naturalized’ in society (e.g., the rites of passage granting a sense of narrative directionality to life) is exposed as having been made.

Far more interesting, however, is how, inversely, the given comes to appear as made. This is a common pattern of meaning-making on display in various religions. In monotheistic traditions, for example, the entire order of creation is seen as a given, but in the mode of a ‘gift’ made by a creator. A ‘conventionalization’ of nature occurs here, as in many religious rituals tied to a public invocation felt to elicit the natural necessities of seasonal change. In the Roman carnival, the natural givenness of the present moment's innate propensity to pass into non-being is ritually contextualized during the horse race, such that the self-extinction of the present morphs into a collective object of enjoyment – one that has been ‘made’ insofar as it has been staged by the people for itself.

The Roman carnival in its ideal unity thus enacts a bidirectional chiasmic movement: it exposes society's naturalization of convention and simultaneously engages in its own conventionalization of nature. The carnival, in other words, ritually dramatizes the incipient moment at which the naturally given and the culturally self-given mutually distort each other in a structural interference that generates the social as such. The inability to distinguish the given from the made within the social domain poses a great threat to its intelligibility, for one cannot tell whether genuinely social phenomena emergent on a historical scale are contingent or necessary, i.e. the byproduct of intentional projects. As Goethe puts this inscrutability of the sociohistorical whole: “hier liegt das Inkalkulable, das Inkommensurable der Weltgeschichte. Gesetz und Zufall greifen ineinander, der betrachtende Mensch aber kommt oft in den Fall, beide miteinander zu

verwechseln.”<sup>290</sup> When the masked people come to laugh at *das Unverfügbare*, the incommensurability that Goethe intuited on a world-historical scale becomes individually experientiable in a shared ritual enactment by *das Gedränge*. The domain of *das Unverfügbare* thus circumscribes not only the individual or ‘micro-scale’ biological facticity of human existence, but, further, the collective or ‘macro-scale’ historical facticity of political-developmental processes that have become inscrutable for local groups of observers (*der Gang des Ganzen*). In a sort of short-circuit, both the most existentially intimate and the most historically anonymous, each on opposite poles of scale, come to coincide in their shared resistance to narrativizing intelligibility. Both inhabit the wormhole-like domain of that which is constitutively not in our control and yet affirmed by being subjected to ritualized laughter. This is one way in which all three structural moments interpenetrate one another in transformative fashion, their synthetic unity disclosing more than could ever be gleaned from their contemplation in isolation.

Intuited as an ideal unity, then, the Roman carnival becomes intelligible as a ritual practice that reflectively ‘deforms’ the entire form of life within which it is embedded so as to lead that local form of life back to the ‘zero degree’ of its *incipient formability*. This is a zone of indistinguishability (or *Indifferenzpunkt*) between the naturally given and the culturally self-given. While social theorists such as Durkheim have seen the category of the social (and, especially, ritual’s role within it) as naturalizing the conventional, Goethe’s social morphology instead attends to the paradoxical moment at which established social structures become visible in their proto-formation, in the very process of structuration.<sup>291</sup> Social structure emerges here both as constituted by individual actors (as ‘made’) and, simultaneously, as the very medium of this

---

<sup>290</sup> From “Maximen und Reflexionen.” Cf. *HA* 12, 395.

<sup>291</sup> This thought is inspired by the work of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu. Cf. Anthony Giddens. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984; Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: CUP, 1977.

constitution (as ‘given’). Goethe was interested neither in sclerotic institutions nor in radical revolutions, but in those ritual practices during which the reciprocity of social macrostructure and individual agency ceases to be readily intelligible and becomes an inscrutable knot. The human life form thus emerges here as one that is naturally in need of a sociocultural form yet lacks such an intrinsic form. The carnival ritually dramatizes the incipient moment at which this constitutive lack is opened up: when the naturally given and the socioculturally instituted reciprocally distort each other in a structural interference that generates the social itself: “weder Kunst noch Natur, sondern beides zugleich.”

### **3. Conceptual Afterlives: Goethe, Moritz, Wittgenstein**

Before turning to one of the conceptual afterlives of Goethe’s carnival description in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s work, it will be helpful to dwell with more historically proximate radiations of influence emitted by Goethe’s social morphological project. These progressively larger circles of contextualization move from the literary, the historical, and ultimately to the philosophical. Remaining within Goethe’s oeuvre, imagined scenarios of *das Gedränge* abound, perhaps most prominently in the jostling crowds of the *Walpurgisnacht* scene of *Faust I* and in the group of displaced refugees depicted in a Hobbesian state of nature as they pollute a river in *Hermann und Dorothea*. While these literary depictions seek to channel in their language the chaotic tumult of the crowd, Goethe’s sociomorphological project in “Das Römische Carneval” called for a more sober and systematic mode of analytic depiction. A generic difference, then, accounts for the apparent paradox of a quite orderly text about the suspension of all order; indeed, one of Goethe’s points is that such festive disorder cannot help but coalesce into a reflected ritual form, that the suspension of norms itself depends on norms.

### ***3.a The Carnival Practice in its Historical Plasticity: From Saturnalia to Political Renewal***

One of the remarkable aspects of Goethe's lifelong engagement with carnival is his liberation of the rite from its theologically significant embedding within the Christian calendar. On the whole, one might say that, for Goethe, carnival was associated more with politics than religion. To get at the broader historical forces at play here and to elucidate how social morphology attends to social practices not only in terms of their immanent form of unity, but in terms of their transhistorical metamorphosis, it will help to cast a glance at Goethe's engagement with the carnival in Germany. In a letter from March 9, 1824, the Bonn-based artist and botanist Nees von Esenbeck notified Goethe of the reinstatement of the Cologne carnival.<sup>292</sup> Goethe replied with a list of questions for Esenbeck to forward to the carnival directors, stating his wish to write a short essay on the festivity, a sort of sequel to his description of the Roman carnival. After the entry of French troops into the Rhein region in 1794, processions and balls were banned. In 1823, a group of bourgeois Cologne shopkeepers, doctors, and bureaucrats assembled a committee to reinstate the rite. In a brief remark from an essay on Sulpiz Boisserée's depictions of the Cologne Dome, Goethe makes careful note of this political interruption of the carnival's historical continuity, tracing the rite back to the *Schönbartlaufen* of the Middle Ages.<sup>293</sup> Goethe proceeds to note

... daß in den jetzigen Tagen ein solcher Humor sich hervorthut, den man geistreich, frey, sinnig und gemäßigt nennen kann [...] alle Hochachtung verdienen die Civil- und Militair-Behörden, welche mit freysinniger Würde die Sache geschehen ließen, Ordnung und Zucht von Ihrer Seite befördernd, so daß dieses ganze excentrische Unternehmen mit ungewöhnlicher Wichtigkeit, Ernsthaftigkeit und Pracht begangen werden konnte.<sup>294</sup>

The finally listed adjective "gemäßigt" stands out here in particular. The very terms Goethe invokes as grounds for praising the administrative and police forces that normatively 'authorize' the temporary suspension of norms and keep it within bounds – "Ordnung und Zucht" – are

---

<sup>292</sup> *FA* I/22, 1030

<sup>293</sup> From "Boisserésche Kunstleistungen," in: *KuA* V/1 (1824). Cf. *FA* I/22 99-100.

exactly identical to those that Goethe used in his *Italienische Reise* to describe the populace as ‘shaped’ into a unitary whole by the Verona amphitheater. Before they are unified into a single *Volk*, a kind of mass ornament, in the amphitheater, the people in their disaggregated state were “sonst nur gewohnt, sich durcheinander laufen zu sehen, sich in einem Gewühle *ohne Ordnung und sonderliche Zucht* zu finden.”<sup>295</sup> The Verona amphitheater ‘formed’ the throng (“das vielköpfige, vielsinnige, schwankende, hin und her irrende Tier”) into “einem edlen Körper” that was “vereinigt, zu einer Einheit bestimmt, [...] als *eine* Gestalt, von *einem* Geiste belebt.” Similarly, the Cologne carnival unifies the territories in the Rhein region formerly occupied by the French by means of an aestheticized self-presentation of the people to itself as one. With a view to the essay on the Cologne carnival that he would never complete, Goethe notes: “Von dem sittlich-ästhetischem Werth eines Symptoms dieser Art mag künftig die Rede seyn.”<sup>296</sup> The use of the term symptom may seem puzzling here, but it refers to the fact of the carnival’s historical resuscitation, the reestablishment of the social practice’s historical continuity in the face of the rupture of political violence. Goethe conceives the historical ‘life’ of the carnival practice as depending on individual social actors as it simultaneously remains beholden to political currents beyond the scope of individual agency. For this reason, he refers to the Cologne carnival’s reinstitution in vital terms as “das Wiederaufleben des in dem Drange und raschen Gange der letzten Jahrzehnte fast untergegangen oder in die Hände der gemeinern Klasse übergegangenen Carnevalsfestes.”<sup>297</sup>

Juxtaposed with Goethe’s initial repugnance at the Roman carnival, his praise for the festivity in Cologne seems perplexing. Indeed, commentators might be inclined to attribute

---

<sup>295</sup> HA 11, 40. Emphasis added.

<sup>296</sup> From “Boisserésche Kunstleistungen.” Cf. FA I/22 99-100.

<sup>297</sup> From Goethe’s scattered notes on the Cologne carnival, assembled in preparation for the essay that went unwritten. Cf. Momme Mommsen & Katharina Mommsen. *Die Entstehung von Goethes Werken in Dokumenten*. Bd. 2: Cecilia bis Dichtung und Wahrheit. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1958. pg. 104.

Goethe's preference to some conservative fetish for orderliness, or to the respectable bourgeois and state authorities (rather than the "gemeiner[e] Klasse") that oversaw the rite's reinstitution, or simply to the fact that the festival was native rather than foreign. However plausible they may be, these hypothetical motivations are rather superficial. A far more interesting lens through which to view Goethe's later engagement with the Cologne carnival is to see it as a morphological ramification of the very same form of ritual practice analyzed in "Das Römische Carneval." The only explicit moment at which Goethe compares the Roman and Cologne carnivals thus frames the difference as an intensification (or *Steigerung*) of the rite's silliness. While in the Roman carnival candles during the Mocoli sub-ritual were ignited at night, in Cologne they are lit during daytime. This is not a deviation from the practice's rules, but their transformation within a novel historico-national context. Goethe thus deems this to be "ganz aber dem Carnevals-Geiste gemäß," for "der Einfall ist höchst glücklich und das Römische Carneval, welches nur am Abend seine Stümpfchen anzündet, sinneverwirrend trefflich überboten."<sup>298</sup> Just as the constitutive rules for a game such as baseball evolve over time, adapting to unforeseeable historical circumstances and novel social contexts, so the carnival's 'game rules' necessarily transform when exemplified (when the ritual is 'played out') in a different historical context.

Though Goethe never saw the Cologne carnival with his own eyes, he did participate from afar. The head of the festival committee for 1825, a certain Heinrich von Wittgenstein, asked Goethe to write a poem commemorating the festival's second post-Napoleonic performance: "durch eines Liedes Freundliche Spende auch dem kölnischen [Karneval] nicht nur einen lichtereren Glanz für die Gegenwart zu verleihen, sondern sein Gedächtnis für immer dem

---

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. pp. 107.



allverschlingenden Strom der Vergessenheit zu entreißen.”<sup>299</sup> At issue was not merely attracting the attention of Goethe’s cultural celebrity, but consecrating the memory of the carnival in light of the practice’s evident historical fragility, its potential to be forgotten and lost amidst the currents of political revolution.

Goethe replied with the poem “Der Cölner Mummenschanz” (1825), which makes telling reference in its fourth strophe to Erasmus’s *Moriae Encomium* (or *In Praise of Folly*, 1511) and Ulrich von Hutten, who together with Erasmus contributed to the anonymously published *Epistolæ Obscurum Virorum* (or *Letters of Obscure Men*, 1515-19). Hutten in particular forms an intellectual historical bridge between Erasmus’s Renaissance humanism and Luther’s Protestant Reformation. Hutten’s *Letters* satirically mock Christian doctrine by pretending to be written by fanatical theology professors who debate such topics as whether to burn all Jewish and pagan books as un-Christian. The poem’s reference to these texts allows us to better contextualize Goethe’s de-Christianization of the carnival, for his engagement with the carnival participates in a larger historical development that came to view it not in terms of preparation for Lent, but in an existential-ethnographic light. Through its intertextual references, Goethe’s poem thus situates itself within a Renaissance space of thought that can be further traced in Germanic visual traditions. As Joseph Koerner has argued, Early Modern woodcuts of battles between carnival and lent depicted allegorized types in the form of two festive processions that represented both opposed theological forces in the Christian calendar. In stark contrast, Bruegel’s *The Battle of between Carnival and Lent* (1559) evinces the painter’s ethnographic gaze. Bruegel observes not allegorized types, but villagers donning masks to play out such types.<sup>300</sup> The painting thus

---

<sup>299</sup> Cf. Hasso von Wedel. *Heinrich von Wittgenstein, 1797 bis 1869: Unternehmer und Politiker in Köln*. Rheinisch-Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv zu Köln 1981. Pg. 32.

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Joseph Leo Koerner. *Bosch & Bruegel: From Enemy Painting to Everyday Life*. Princeton: PUP, 2016. Pg. 309-325.

exposes the performative gap between actor and role, de-allegorizing the carnival to view it as a social ritual. Like Bruegel, Goethe in “Das Römische Carneval” replaces the priest’s sermon in the concluding section “Aschermittwoch” with anthropological reflections of existential purport.

What interested Goethe in the specific case of the Cologne carnival was the fragility of forms of social practice in the wake of inscrutable politico-historical processes, currents of social structuration that elude the individual agencies that otherwise transparently constitute them. The poem Goethe wrote to commemorate the festival’s historical revival in Cologne thus ends its final two strophes with a focus on how different scales of temporality intertwine:

Löblich wird ein tolles Streben  
Wenn es kurz ist und mit Sinn;  
Heiterkeit zum Erleben  
Sei dem flüchtigen Rausch Gewinn.

Häufet nur an diesem *Tage*  
Kluger Torheit Vollgewicht,  
Daß mit uns die Nachwelt sage:  
*Jahre* sind der Lieb’ und Pflicht.<sup>301</sup>

The carnival’s foolish ‘striving’ becomes praiseworthy when it is ‘brief’ (“kurz”) and brought into a meaningful practical form, for then the ‘fleeting ecstasy’ of its pleasure ceases to be merely sensual. Instead, this “flüchtiger Rausch” affords a lasting virtue or existential *habitus* that permeates not only the brief interval of carnival, but the whole of a mortal human life: “Heiterkeit zum Erleben.” A calendrical duration of festive exception is thus coordinated to the span of an individual life, ramifying into the whole of that life so as to transfigure it. At the same time, however, the poem coordinates the current day of carnival (“an diesem *Tage*”) with subsequent years that belong not to the present community, but to the future generations of a “Nachwelt” (“*Jahre* sind...”). An individual lifespan thereby expands to include a transhistorical community of those who came before and those who will follow after. Far from being frivolous, the

---

<sup>301</sup> Cf. “Der Cölner Mummenschanz” (1825). *FA* I/45, 540. Emphasis in original.

reestablished historical continuity of the carnival practice testifies to the perdurance of a transgenerational community of actors whose agency maintains the ritual structure by virtue of transforming it in novel contexts such as the post-Napoleonic one.

Through his literary participation from afar, Goethe contributed to this endeavor, and so was awarded an honorary “Narrendiplom” and two medals by the Dülken-based *Berittene Akademie der Künste und Wissenschaften* in 1825. To receive the degree, Goethe had to answer fifty questions, among them: “Wie schießt man mit einer Kanone um die Ecke herum?” Other honorary members of the Dülken Academy of Fools included Schelling, A.W. Schlegel, and Nees von Esenbeck. Goethe placed the two commemorative medals, shaped as a half-crescent moon and a windmill, in a box labeled “Rheinische Absurditäten” within his study (Figure 16).<sup>302</sup>

Goethe’s “Das Römische Carneval” influenced other texts beyond the orbit of his oeuvre. Karl Philipp Moritz himself witnessed the Roman carnival in February 1787 and again in 1788. Moritz was also Goethe’s guest in Weimar in January 1789, when the latter began writing his description of the rite. It is hence reasonable to assume some degree of collaboration between Moritz and Goethe in matters ethnographic. Moritz’s own *Anthusa oder Roms Alterthümer. Ein Buch für die Menschheit. Die heiligen Gebräuche der Römer* (1791) evinces a number of methodological resonances with Goethe’s project of a sociocultural morphology. If Goethe’s “Römisches Carneval” describes the form of one single ritual practice, then Moritz’s study expands to examine the entire ancient Roman form of life that encompasses myriad interconnected practices. Even as a work contributing to the nascent field of *Altertumswissenschaft*, Moritz’s historiographic method owes more to Goethean morphology than the historicism that would eventually take over the discipline. The antiquarian scholar Friedrich

---

<sup>302</sup> Cf. Exhibition catalogue for “Allerlei Mitgeschicktes. Briefe an Goethe und ihre Beilagen” at the Goethe and Schiller Archive in Weimar; e-mail correspondence with Christian Hain at the Klassik-Stiftung Weimar.

Rambach, for example, would later occupy the Berlin professorship Moritz inhabited. Rambach continued Moritz's *Anthusa* in further volumes that followed a strictly chronological approach, organizing a discussion of ancient Roman life in terms of historical epochs.<sup>303</sup> Moritz, in contrast, adopts a synchronic-analytic approach reminiscent of the form of textual organization employed by Goethe in "Das Römische Carneval." Specifically, Moritz embeds prose tableaux of Roman popular life, customs, and rituals within the temporal patterning of the Roman festive calendar. Moritz's ethnographic descriptions of past rites thus follow an anti-chronological calendrical cycle that effaces the historicity of each specific rite (i.e. the details of its exact historical provenance) in favor of presenting a synchronic image of Roman popular life. By virtue of this calendrical rather than historico-chronological organization, Roman antiquity thereby gains the semblance of an eternal recurrence. Moritz's overarching goal is to understand "die heiligen Gebräuche der Alten, nicht sowohl als eine eigentliche Religion, nach unsern Begriffen, als vielmehr wie eine bloße Weihung des wirklichen Lebens in allen seinen mannigfaltigen Zweigen, und wie eine Art von erhöhten irrdischem Lebensgenuß."<sup>304</sup> Like Goethe in "Das Römische Carneval," Moritz reads ancient Roman religious rites as a sacralization of immanence, in particular of vital enjoyment: "Die Feste, die Spiele der Alten hatten alle Bezug auf den wirklichen Genuß des Lebens, und dieser Genuß war ihnen heilig und geweiht."<sup>305</sup>

Beyond an anti-historistic textual organization and a semantic focus on the sacralization of immanent enjoyment, perhaps the most morphological aspect of Moritz's descriptive reconstructions is his continual emphasis on apprehending ancient rites in terms of their participation in the people's autonomous, collective self-relation. As Moritz puts this, the customs

---

<sup>303</sup> Cf. Claudia Sedlarz. "Gelehrte und Künstler und gelehrte Künstler an der Berliner Kunstakademie." In: *Netzwerke des Wissens. Das intellektuelle Berlin um 1800*. Ed. Anne Baillot. Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2011. Pg. 245-278 (here: 264)

<sup>304</sup> Cf. Moritz. *Anthusa*, pp. 22.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19.

of the ancient Roman people deserve our study “nicht nur wegen seines [des Volkes] Einflusses in den Zusammenhang der menschlichen Dinge, sondern um sein selbst und seines eignen Daseyns willen.”<sup>306</sup> Moritz renders each individual ritual practice intelligible by situating it within the ancient Roman form of life, i.e. against the background of the people in the ideal totality of their cultural enactments. The norm of ethnographic description in play here blocks the instrumentalist explanation of a ritual practice in terms of its purported use-value in favor of its apprehension as an *autonomous* self-expression of the people. Moritz clarifies this through an analogy between the collective and the individual:

Um das Bild, welches die Geschichte von einem durch sich selbst merkwürdigen Volke uns entwirft, gehörig auszumahlen, ist es nöthig, das *Immerbleibende* bey dem Immerabwechselnden kennen zu lernen, und jenes mit diesem, so wie die bleibende, körperliche Gestalt eines Menschen, mit seinen Handlungen, zusammen zu denken.<sup>307</sup>

The passage evinces a morphological attention to the metamorphic interplay between constancy and variation, human ‘nature’ and historical plasticity. Furthermore, the people are said to be “durch sich selbst merkwürdig[,],” meaning that forms of ritual practice must be apprehended as collective actualizations of the people’s freedom, just as an individual’s ‘bodily form’ must be thought together with his free ‘actions’ as medium of their enactment. Goethe’s own carnival description, which may have influenced Moritz’s entire approach in *Anthusa*, similarly grounds the festival in the people’s autonomy on its very first page: “Das Römische Carneval ist ein Fest, das dem Volke eigentlich nicht gegeben wird, sondern das sich das Volk selbst gibt.”<sup>308</sup>

---

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., pp. 3.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> HA 11, 484. Moritz’s anti-instrumentalist emphasis on apprehending ritual practices as expressions of the people’s autonomy has been seen by commentators as risking an aestheticization of the social. Goethe might be seen as open to the same objection when he spoke with reference to the Cologne carnival of the “sittlich-ästhetische[r] Werth eines Symptoms dieser Art.” Seen in light of Goethe’s neglected social morphology, however, the aesthetic lens through which such ritual practices are seen is exposed as a methodological frame meant to elucidate the practice’s inner form and reference to the autonomous cultural form of life against which it becomes intelligible. As Yvonne Pauly argues, Moritz “erschließt die Äußerungen römischer Religiosität als Entsprechungen des Kunstschönen in einer – in ihren besten Momenten – als ‘strukturalistisch’ zu bezeichnenden Manier und damit in einer Art und Weise, die dem

Moritz quotes extensively from Goethe's carnival description when discussing ancient Saturnalia. More than just seeing the carnival as a modern descendant of the ancient festival, Moritz traces the Mocoli ceremony of candelights in particular back to the ritual appeasement of Saturn through human sacrifice. Moritz explains that "man statt der Menschenopfer, die in den rohen Zeiten, dem seine eignen Kinder verschlingenden Saturn dargebracht wurden, ihn durch dieses Anzünden der Kerzen in seinem Tempel zu versöhnen suchte."<sup>309</sup> A kind of sublimation of human sacrifice into the symbolic extinguishing and reigniting of candles took place at the Saturnalia's mythic inception. For Moritz, however, the prevalence of capricious murder lingers in the background of the Saturnalia, focused as it is on the self-destructive familial autophagy represented by the god Saturn. Moritz even misquotes from Goethe's carnival text the scene of mimetic violence enacted by two male paramours who stab one another as their female beloved gives birth to a misshapen child, adding a sentence that never appears in Goethe's account: "So spielt der Römer, dem die Mordgeschichten immer vor der Seele schweben, gern bei jedem Anlaß mit den Ideen vom *Amazziren*."<sup>310</sup> It is as if the child may only be born by virtue of the mimetic violence that would sacrifice its father in a re-enactment of Saturnine murder.

Not Goethe, but a later author decisively influenced by Goethe's "Das Römische Carneval" would later elucidate the murderous, sacrificial undercurrent that courses beneath the carnival's Mocoli ceremony. In E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Prinzessin Brambilla* (1820), which takes place during a Roman carnival and also makes use of tableau-like engravings as illustrations, a humorous debate between Celionati, proponent of carnivalesque Italian humor, and the more serious German painter Franz Reinhold takes place. Reinhold critiques the carnival as lacking insofar as

---

ausgeprägten Formalismus und 'Ritualismus' dieser Religion besonders adäquat ist." Cf. Überblickskommentar to: Moritz. *Anthusa*. Pg. 404.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid. Pg. 154.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. Pg. 163.

its humour is not tempered by that most Teutonic quality of *Gemütlichkeit*:

Das Gemütliche, was unsern Scherz rein erhält, geht unter in dem Prinzip der Obszönität, das eure Pulcinelle und hundert andere Masken der Art in Bewegung setzt, und dann blickt mitten durch alle Fratzen und Possen jene grauenhafte, entsetzliche Furie der Wut, des Hasses, der Verzweiflung hervor, die euch zum Wahnsinn, zum Morde treibt. Wenn an jenem Tage des Karnevals, an dem jeder ein Licht trägt und jeder versucht, dem andern das Licht auszublasen, [...] glaubt nur, Celionati, daß mich dann in demselben Augenblick, da ich, ganz hingerissen von der wahnsinnigen Lust des Volks, ärger als jeder andere um mich her blase und schreie: ‚Ammazzato sia!‘, unheimliche Schauer erfasse, vor denen jene Gemütlichkeit, die nun einmal unserm deutschen Sinn eigen, ja gar nicht aufkommen kann.<sup>311</sup>

As David Wellbery has suggested, this “wahnsinnige[] Lust des Volks” in which even Reinhold cannot help but immerse himself can be thought of with René Girard as a cathartic channelling of collectivized mimetic desire.<sup>312</sup> Girard often terms this the metamorphosis of reciprocal violence between community members into restraining unilateral violence by the community as a whole towards the surrogate victim. For Girard this scapegoat mechanism “structures all cultural values even as it conceals itself behind them.”<sup>313</sup> Ritual for Girard constitutes a kind of formalized mimetic re-enactment, a performative remembrance, of the original, spontaneous murder of the scapegoat in the community, an event memorialized as the ur-myth of generative violence, a violence capable of establishing social order (much as Zeus does when he kills his father Cronus in Hesiod’s *Theogony*). In Reinhold’s criticism of the candlelight ceremony’s lack of *Gemütlichkeit*, he unwittingly plays the role of a Girardian critic of the trace of mimetic violence latent in the carnival, echoing Moritz’s own association of Mocoli with the institution of ancient Saturnalia and its prehistory of ritual sacrifice to Saturn.<sup>314</sup>

---

<sup>311</sup> Cf. E.T.A. Hoffmann. *Prinzessin Brambilla*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971. Pg. 50.

<sup>312</sup> Cf. David Wellbery. “Rites de passage. Zur Struktur des Erzählprozesses in E.T.A. Hoffmanns *Prinzessin Brambilla*.” In: *Seiltänzer des Paradoxalen. Aufsätze zur ästhetischen Wissenschaft*. Hanser 2006. Pg. 118-145 (here: 141).

<sup>313</sup> Cf. René Girard. *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. Pg. 98.

<sup>314</sup> A later extensive description of a popular festival, Goethe’s “Sankt-Rochus-Fest zu Bingen” (1814), contains a scene reminiscent of this Girardean line of thought. Just as the Cologne carnival was reinstated after the departure of

Goethe claimed that the Cologne carnival's playing out of the Mocoli ceremony 'intensified' the Roman carnival's foolishness by nonsensically lighting candles in daylight. This can be understood as further sublimating the sacrificial undercurrent that Moritz traces to the ceremony's ancient past. A line of morphological transformation thus becomes legible from the Saturnalia to the Roman and later Cologne carnivals: first associating Mocoli with the symbolic substitution of a candlelight game for ritual sacrifice, then embedding that game within the Christian rather than pagan calendar as a part of pre-Lenten preparations, and finally uncoupling it from all theological frameworks to see it as a festive rebuke to the Napoleonic political disruption that threatened the practice's historical continuity.

### ***3.b Wittgenstein's Metamorphic Inheritance of Goethean Method***

If Goethe is primarily concerned with elucidating the inner form of unity operative *within* a particular ritual practice, apprehending the carnival's successive stages and scenes as one simultaneous whole, then Wittgenstein's principal concern is to develop a method that will allow him to 'see' the morphological connections *between* different forms of ritual practice. It is not the internal unity of an individual practice that is in question here, but the unity of the local form of life that hosts them, i.e. the whole conceptual space within which multiple diverse practices are interrelated. This Wittgensteinian concern is foreshadowed in Goethe's insistence on beginning his description by showing how the Roman carnival fits into the broader Roman form of life: "Das Carneval ist [...] nichts Neues, nichts Fremdes, nichts Einziges, sondern es schließt sich nur

---

French troops from German territories, so in Bingen was the saint's festival. This exquisite example of Goethe's late prose style includes in its recounting a perplexing coincidence. Just as the bishop reaches the Bingen church on the town's highest hilltop, his procession having reached its end, an innocent animal, a kind of victim, is sacrificed: "Doch gerade in dem Augenblick, als der Bischof mit dem hochehrwürdigen Zug die Höhe erreicht, wird das Rätsel gelöst. Ein flinker, derber Bursche läuft hervor, einen blutenden Dachs behaglich vorzuweisen. Das arme, schuldlose Tier, durch die Bewegung der andringenden frommen Menge aufgeschreckt, abgeschnitten von seinem Bau, wird, am schonungsreichsten Feste, von den immer unbarmherzigen Menschen im segenvollsten Augenblicke getötet" (HA 10, 414). Even the reorientation of the ostensibly Christian ritual around a communal intoxication that revels in political liberation cannot efface the mythic traces of ritual sacrifice and scapegoating.



an die Römische Lebensweise ganz natürlich an.”<sup>315</sup> In his “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*” (1931/36), Wittgenstein critiques Frazer’s method for relating different ritual practices in order to develop his own Goethean method for ‘seeing’ connections between multiple practices within the whole of a form of life.<sup>316</sup> Reconstructing Wittgenstein’s critique of Frazer will clarify how ethnographic thinkers such as Goethe and Moritz not only influenced Wittgenstein in a philological sense (e.g., Wittgenstein quotes Goethe), but, furthermore, how their projects participate in an anthropological matrix of thought that is *already* ‘Wittgensteinian,’ anticipating his conception of ritual practice. Most of the philological work of tracking Wittgenstein’s direct citations of Goethe and their implications has already been done.<sup>317</sup> My claim in what follows below is that Wittgenstein was not only influenced by Goethe, but that, in a conceptual rather than historical sense, Goethe was influenced by Wittgenstein: already in “Das Römische Carneval,” a Wittgensteinian concern with the normativity of social practices and the forms of life that host them is in play.

Frazer’s explanatory strategy might be termed *cognitivist, instrumental, and empirico-historical*. James Frazer began his *Golden Bough* with the puzzle of the priest of Nemi’s barbarous rule of succession in ancient Rome.<sup>318</sup> He adopted a comparative method that looked for the ‘missing links’ that would explain the historical origins of this particular rite by turning to extant primitive cultures still mired in an ‘earlier’ stage of civilizational development. The various

---

<sup>315</sup> HA 11, 486

<sup>316</sup> Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough*. In: *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951*. Ed. James C. Klagge & Alfred Nordmann. Indianapolis 1993. Pg. 115-155.

<sup>317</sup> Cf. Joachim Schulte. “Chor und Gesetz. Zur morphologischen Methode bei Goethe und Wittgenstein.” *Grazer Philosophische Studien*. Jan 1, 1984. Issue 21, pg. 1-32; Ibid. “Ideen mit den Augen sehen: Goethe und Wittgenstein über Morphologie.” In: *Morphologie und Moderne. Goethes ‘anschauliches Denken’ in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften seit 1800*. Berlin/Boston 2014. Pg. 141-156; Mark W. Rowe. “Goethe and Wittgenstein.” *Philosophy*. Vol. 66, No. 257. July 1991, pg. 283-303; Daniel Steuer. “Goethe and Wittgenstein on the Limits of Science: Towards a Critique of Abstraction.” *Publications of the English Goethe Society*. Vol. 71, No. 5, pg. 50-61; Ibid. “Wittgenstein and Goethe: Getting Rid of ‘Sorge’.” In: *Wittgenstein Reading*. Ed. Sascha Bru, Wolfgang Huemer, & Daniel Steuer. Berlin/Boston 2013. Pg. 115-136.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. James George Frazer. *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*. New Abridgement from the Second and Third Editions. Oxford: OUP 1994.

rites, exotic customs, and superstitious practices meticulously compiled by Frazer were grafted onto a historical metanarrative of development from primitive cultures to scientific modernity. From Wittgenstein's perspective, Frazer's basic mistake was to see magic as erroneous science, that is: as the enactment of a pre-existing collective belief (i.e., cognitivism) bearing on a falsely conceived natural-causal efficacy that is thought liable to magical manipulation (i.e., instrumentalism). The second and related error was to frame his object of study in a developmental empirico-historical account.

Anthropological accounts of ritual practice long ago abandoned intellectualizing forms of explanation such as Frazer's, but what is striking in Wittgenstein's remarks is his adamant rejection of giving *any* explanatory account at all. As he puts it, "Nur *beschreiben* kann man hier und sagen: so ist das menschliche Leben."<sup>319</sup> My claim is that Wittgenstein's *descriptive* model of inquiry was forged in his engagement with Goethe's morphological thought. Wittgenstein called this descriptive form a perspicuous presentation (or *übersichtliche Darstellung*) and at this prominent moment in his remarks cites Goethe's poem "Metamorphose der Pflanzen:"

'Und so deutet das Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz' möchte man zu der Frazer'schen Tatsachensammlung sagen. Dieses Gesetz, diese Idee, *kann* ich nun durch eine Entwicklungshypothese darstellen oder auch, analog dem Schema einer Pflanze, durch das Schema einer religiösen Zeremonie, oder aber durch die Gruppierung des Tatsachenmaterials allein, in einer '*übersichtlichen*' Darstellung.<sup>320</sup>

The context of this criticism is Frazer's attempt to give an account of ritual practices in terms of an "Entwicklungshypothese."<sup>321</sup> An example of such an explanatory hypothesis is Frazer's claim

---

<sup>319</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein. *Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough*. Pg. 120. Emphasis in original.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid. Pg. 132. At the margins of this manuscript, Wittgenstein later wrote Schiller's exclamation from "Glückliches Ereignis," "Das ist keine Erfahrung, das ist eine Idee!" Cf. Marco Brusotti. "That they all point, is all there is to it." Wittgenstein, Frazer, eine 'Tatsachensammlung' und ihre 'übersichtliche Darstellung.' In: *Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer. The Text and the Matter*. Ed. Lars Albinus, Josef. G.F. Rothhaupt, & Aidan Seer. Boston/Berlin: de Gruyter 2016. Pg. 311-338; Ibid. *Wittgenstein, Frazer und die 'ethnologische Betrachtungsweise.'* Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2014.

<sup>321</sup> Frazer himself wrote about his developmental-historical theories in a later study: "I hold them all very lightly and have used them chiefly as convenient pegs on which to hang my collections of facts. For I believe that, while theories

that the ritual of the rain dance emerged from a period of drought during which someone's dance for rain happened to coincide with the onset of rain. In contradistinction to such a transparently shaky account of empirical genesis, Wittgenstein advocates an approach that arranges the facts of the ritual into an "übersichtliche Darstellung," such that, as he phrases it, "wir die 'Zusammenhänge sehen.'" This requires both finding and *inventing* hypothetical connecting links (*Zwischenglieder*) between the facts about the ritual on hand and other related cases of ritual practice. Wittgenstein thus concludes:

Ein hypothetisches Zwischenglied aber soll in diesem Falle nichts tun, als die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Ähnlichkeit, den Zusammenhang, der *Tatsachen* lenken. Wie man eine interne Beziehung der Kreisform zur Ellipse dadurch illustrierte, daß man eine Ellipse allmählich in einen Kreis überführt; *aber nicht um zu behaupten, daß eine gewisse Ellipse tatsächlich, historisch, aus einem Kreis entstanden wäre* (Entwicklungshypothese), sondern nur um unser Auge für einen formalen Zusammenhang zu schärfen.<sup>322</sup>

Wittgenstein here distinguishes between morphological (i.e. formal-genetic) and historical (i.e. empirical-causal) comparative models for interrelating practices.

Contra Frazer, then, Wittgenstein wants to claim that the rain dance ritual must be seen in terms of the whole of the tribe's form of life, a totality, of course, that one can never 'see' *in toto*. Through the perspicuous presentation of a district of such a whole, however, one may come to see how the facts of the rain dance hang together, resonate with, are similar to, or inversions of, various other practices of tribal life, and beyond this, to our own social practices. Wittgenstein thus poses a rhetorical question to Frazer about why rain dances are performed in rain season. Surely, if the rain dance were 'explained' by the tribe's false belief in the ritual's causal efficacy, then the tribe would dance away during drought season (it does not). Indeed, for Wittgenstein,

---

are transitory, a record of facts has a permanent value, and that as a chronicle of ancient customs and beliefs my book may retain its utility when my theories are as obsolete as the customs and beliefs themselves deserve to be" (ix). Cf. J. G. Frazer. *Balder the Beautiful: The Fire-Festivals of Europe and the Doctrine of the External Soul*. Vol. 1. London 1913.

<sup>322</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein. *Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough*. Pg. 132. Emphasis in original.

Frazer's very attempt to explain ritual practices is doomed from the start, for it seeks to refer practices back to (ultimately false) beliefs or 'worldviews': "wo jener Gebrauch und diese Anschauung zusammengehen, dort entspringt nicht der Gebrauch der Anschauung, sondern sie sind eben beide da."<sup>323</sup> The 'belief,' like the rule for carrying such a rite out, is implicit *in* the practice itself. In his *Anthusa*, a kind of morphological precursor to Wittgenstein's remarks, Moritz had similarly argued that "die gottesdienstlichen Gebräuche wurden nicht durch die Lehre, sondern die Lehre selbst wurde nur durch die gottesdienstlichen Gebräuche erhalten."<sup>324</sup>

Wittgenstein's question aims to point out how Frazer's cognitivist, historical explanation remains deaf to the grammar of the tribe's form of life. The rain dance, on this view, has less to do with a false belief about what can and cannot be causally effective and more to do with a communal *expression* of gratitude for the rain, a means of ritually transforming that dependence on nature into a self-conscious and collective deed, a way of integrating the seasonal rhythms of nature into a cultural form meaningfully situated between different agrarian and religious practices.

A further insight shared by Wittgenstein and Goethe bears on the *generative* capacity that the morphological ethnographer gains by arranging observed practices in a perspicuously surveyable manner. Wittgenstein's account of this 'know-how' strikingly recalls Goethe's characterization of the *Urpflanze*:

Wie irreführend die Erklärungen Frazers sind, sieht man – glaube ich – daraus, daß man primitive Gebräuche sehr wohl selbst erdichten könnte und es müßte ein Zufall sein, wenn sie nicht irgendwo wirklich gefunden würden. Das heißt, das Prinzip, nach welchem diese Gebräuche geordnet sind, ist ein viel allgemeineres als Frazer es erklärt und in unserer eigenen Seele vorhanden, so daß wir uns alle Möglichkeiten selbst ausdenken könnten.<sup>325</sup>

---

<sup>323</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein. *Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough*. Pg. 118.

<sup>324</sup> Cf. Moritz. *Anthusa*. Pg. 232.

<sup>325</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein. *Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough*. Pg. 126.

This generative capacity for intuiting hypothetical, intermediate forms of practice has the epistemic function of filling in the ‘gap’ between two distinct practices, thus elucidating their morphological interconnection within the conceptual space of a local form of life. For Wittgenstein, we only begin to understand ritual practices when we can see them in relation to our own, for the principle according to which such practices are ordered is “ein viel allgemeineres [...] und in unserer eigenen Seele vorhanden.” Concretely, this means finding hypothetical connecting links between the exotic practice and our own: “Ist ein solches Phänomen einmal mit einem Instinkt, den ich selber besitze, in Verbindung gebracht, so ist eben diese die gewünschte Erklärung.”<sup>326</sup>

What, however, is the principle of explanation proper to ritual practices if, as Wittgenstein elsewhere insists, one should not seek to explain them at all but merely describe? What is their general principle (“das Prinzip”)? Most accounts of Wittgenstein’s remarks on Frazer take the philosopher to espouse some form of ‘expressivism’ over against Frazer’s intellectualizing ‘instrumentalism,’ but this seems to oversimplify the matter, for even socially codified actions that grant communal expression to emotions or instincts have a kind of intentional end.<sup>327</sup> With regards to angrily bludgeoning the sidewalk after stubbing my toe, Wittgenstein makes the uncharacteristically general claim: “‘Ich lasse meinen Zorn aus.’ Und dieser Art sind alle Riten. Solche Handlungen sind Instinkt-Handlungen.”<sup>328</sup> This does not mean, of course, that rituals are *mindlessly* instinctive actions; rather, they are socially codified collective expressions of an instinctive response to shared human life that lift that instinct to reflective awareness. One of Wittgenstein’s most famous examples can help elucidate the complex notion of expression at

---

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Brian Clack presents the most nuanced interpretation. Cf. Brian R. Clack. “Wittgenstein and Anthropology.” In: *A Companion to Wittgenstein*. Ed. Hans-Johann Glock & John Hyman. West Sussex 2017. Pg. 627 – 638; Ibid. *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*. New York 1999.

<sup>328</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein. *Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough*. Pg. 138.

work here:

In effigy verbrennen. Das Bild des Geliebten küssen. Das basiert *natürlich nicht* auf einem Glauben an eine bestimmte Wirkung auf den Gegenstand, den das Bild darstellt. Es bezweckt eine Befriedigung und erreicht sie auch. Oder vielmehr: es *bezweckt* gar nichts; wir handeln eben so und fühlen uns dann befriedigt.<sup>329</sup>

The action in question is not at all ‘superstitious,’ nor does it depend on the faulty belief that my kissing the photograph will magically be felt across, say, the Atlantic by my beloved. The action is also not oriented toward an instrumental end, as if I were simply trying to find a fetishistic substitute to satisfy my desire for the absent beloved. At the same time, however, there *is* a connection between depiction and depicted, only not a ‘magical’ one in the spooky sense of the term. As Wittgenstein puts it, what comes to expression here is a wish-fulfillment: “Die Darstellung eines Wunsches ist, eo ipso, die Darstellung seiner Erfüllung. Die Magie aber bringt einen Wunsch zur Darstellung; sie äußert einen Wunsch.”<sup>330</sup>

Wittgenstein’s thought here bears a striking resemblance to Freud’s account of Frazer’s imitative and contiguous magic as based on an acting-out of a wish-fulfillment phantasy analogous to children’s play. As Freud puts this in *Totem und Tabu*,

Für den erwachsenen Primitiven ergibt sich ein anderer Weg. An seinem Wunsch hängt ein motorischer Impuls, der Wille, und dieser – der später im Dienst der Wunschbefriedigung das Antlitz der Erde verändern wird – wird jetzt dazu verwendet, die Befriedigung darzustellen, so daß man sie gleichsam durch motorische Halluzinationen erleben kann. Eine solche *Darstellung* des befriedigten Wunsches ist dem *Spielen* der Kinder völlig vergleichbar, welches bei diesen die rein sensorische Technik der Befriedigung ablöst.<sup>331</sup>

A ‘magical’ action, one might say, is one that grants expression to a human desire such that that desire finds external actualization in a kind of representation that also, by virtue of the actor’s newfound distance from *and* relation to the so objectified desire, ‘satisfies’ or virtually fulfills it.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid. Pg. 123. Emphasis in original.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid. Pg. 124.

<sup>331</sup> Cf. Sigmund Freud. *Totem und Tabu*. Ed. Herman Westerink. Vienna 2013. Pg. 130.

This is not far from Winnicott's notion of the transitional object, e.g. the child's toy qua substitute for the mother in the *fort/da* game that allows it to work through being distanced from the mother while also simulating the fulfillment by functioning as her proxy. The transitional object strengthens the infant's sense of self by allowing it to separate from the mother without psychic trauma.<sup>332</sup> In short, the notion of transitional *objects* helps us here to get a grip on the psychological mode of intentional attending and participating at work in ritual action, a sort of collective attitude toward *objective reality* as itself in a 'transitional' state, reconfigured *in toto* by being saturated with human expression according to the scripts of the practice (acting 'as if' the blanket is the mother, taking the goat 'as' the god). Returning to a psychoanalytic vocabulary closer to Wittgenstein's own, if the child works through separation from the mother, then a society engaged in ritual might be said to be working through the limit experiences unique to the human form of life: birth, sex, and death, which are enacted during the ritual as transitional realities.

One might even think of the candlelight ceremony of Mocoli in "Das Römische Carneval" as a kind of collectivization of the child's *fort/da* game. That game is also characterized by constitutive reversibility as the child throws the reel under the bed and across the hanging bed sheet, eliciting a sense of controlled absence, only to pull back the reel with its spool, eliciting its newfound presence. This simulates the interplay of the mother's absence and presence. The child, of course, inhabits a pre-egoic state: it does not register the mother's absence as that of a separate person, but as a kind of unnamable disturbance, a tear in the fabric of its life. In other words, the mother's absence belongs to the realm of that which remains *unverfügbar*. What the *fort/da* game does is to render the mother's absence for the child 'nameable,' to allow the loss *as loss* to be

---

<sup>332</sup> Cf. D. W. Winnicott. "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena." In: *Playing and Reality*. New York 2005. 1-34.

symbolically worked with within a cultural space of reasons.<sup>333</sup> On a collective psychological level, this is what the micro-ritual of Mocoli accomplishes during the Roman carnival for what we name ‘death’ and ‘birth,’ allowing that which constitutively eludes our sociosymbolic grasp to recrudescence comically within the social structure itself.

Rather than expanding his sense of those *shared* instincts and desires that reach expression in the magical practices of primitives, Frazer assimilated their practices to a pre-established scientific view of our life form. For this reason, Wittgenstein claims that “Frazer ist viel mehr savage, als die meisten seiner savages, denn diese werden nicht so weit vom Verständnis einer geistigen Angelegenheit entfernt sein, wie ein Engländer des 20sten Jahrhunderts. *Seine* Erklärungen der primitiven Gebräuche sind viel roher, als der Sinn dieser Gebräuche selbst.”<sup>334</sup> As tribesmen might attain a kind of virtual satisfaction by burning an effigy of an enemy (“wir handeln eben so und fühlen uns dann befriedigt”), so Frazer aims for a kind of cognitive satisfaction through his intellectualizing interpretations of ritual practices: “die Befriedigung, die durch die Erklärung angestrebt wird.”<sup>335</sup> Wittgenstein’s remarks on Frazer themselves constitute an ethnography of armchair ethnographers. The morphological ethnographer, in contrast, will not be able to neglect reflection on her own local form of life. Genuine anthropological understanding vis-à-vis a perspicuous presentation hence involves a gradual erosion of the observer/participant role-distinction: one comes to ‘see’ connections to one’s own practices and thereby expands the conceptual space of a global human form of life.

Wittgenstein finds the *tertium comparationis* for relating not just two practices, but entire local forms of life to one another in the exact three ‘limit-concepts’ of the human being that Goethe intuited in their entanglement in the carnival’s first structural moment of *das*

---

<sup>333</sup> Cf. Jonathan Lear. *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life*. Cambridge: HUP, 2000. Pg. 88-99.

<sup>334</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein. *Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough*. Pg. 130.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 123, 120.



*Unverfügbare*. As Wittgenstein puts it, that “die Erscheinungen des Todes, der Geburt und des Geschlechtslebens, kurz alles, was der Mensch jahraus jahrein um sich wahrnimmt, in mannigfaltiger Weise miteinander verknüpft, in [...] seinen Gebräuchen eine Rolle spielen wird, ist selbstverständlich, oder ist eben das, was wir wirklich wissen und interessant ist.” These limit concepts are central orienting coordinates that frame the conceptual space of *any* culturally local form of life, for they give us a clue where to look if we are puzzled about the point of an alien system of customs. Though differently ritualized in any given form of life, how a given group ritualizes one of the limit concepts will have logical consequences for how it ritualizes the others.

We might pose the Wittgensteinian question of where in Goethe’s description of the Roman carnival the observer/participant distinction comes to blur, not as a manifestation of bad ethnographic method, but of the understanding of one’s commonality with a foreign form of life. During *Moccoli*, a certain Signore Filippo makes an appearance: “So hören *wir* [...] einen vorbeigehenden guten Freund anrufen: Sia ammazzato il Signore Filippo.” Though this remark is couched in the royal “*wir*,” it also contains an esoteric reference to Goethe himself, for the pseudonym that protected his incognito life in Rome was “Filippo Möller.” While all of the illustrations evince a relief-like planarity, there is one in which a costumed figure seems to break out of his analytic isolation to look directly at us, the viewing readers (Figure 17). He stands wearing the caricatured garb of a Northerner beside a pair of *tabarros*. One of them glances at the Northerner, but he seems incapable of response, his hands nonchalantly kept in his pockets, his gaze instead trained directly on us. In a passage that anticipates this trio of illustrated figures, Goethe recounts: “Es war mir die Lust angekommen mir einen *Tabarro* mit den *Apartinentien* anzuschaffen, denn man läuft schön in der Maske. Hernach dauerte mich aber das Geld und bin ich ihnen nicht schon Maske genug?” In this figure of the masked Northerner, it is as if Goethe

himself breaks out of his observational position to address us directly as another carnival participant, unmasking himself by exposing his own masked enjoyment.

### Chapter 3. Goethe's Generic Experiments in Narrative Prose

*Was wir Form nennen, ist immer eine Überwindung.*<sup>336</sup>  
– André Jolles

Beyond the domains of nature and society, the third ontological domain Goethe learned to apprehend in Italy was art. Rather than examining Goethe's aesthetic writings, the following discussion will turn to Goethe's morphology of literary forms, in particular to his experiments in narrative prose: *Novelle* (1828) and *Märchen* (1795). As their titles suggest, these texts aspire in some sense to exemplify paradigmatically their genre. At the same time, they may themselves be understood as exercises in genre theory that reflect on what it means to exemplify a genre in the first place. For Goethe's literary morphology, it will turn out to be the case that successfully to exemplify a genre is to transform it. Furthermore, both texts engage the faculty of the imagination in its free productive activity, working through how that imagination finds a literary form adequate to its inventions.

Goethe's most explicit remarks on the issue of genre stem from his discussion of "Naturformen der Dichtung" in the *Noten und Abhandlungen* of the *Divan*. For Goethe, the primordial modes of verbal presentation ("Dichtungsweisen") are drama, epic, and lyric, which he suggests could be ordered in a circular morphological series: "daß man die drey Hauptelemente in einem Kreis gegen einander überstellt und sich Musterstücke sucht, wo jedes Element einzeln obwaltet."<sup>337</sup> One may then search for examples of intermediate forms until the series 'rounds out' via "Beyspiele die sich nach der einen oder nach der andern Seite hinneigen [bis] der ganze Kreis in sich geschlossen ist."<sup>338</sup> As this last remark suggests, Goethe's interest is not only drawn to pure exemplars of one literary mode of presentation, but to how intermediate literary forms come

---

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Giovanni di Boccaccio. *Das Dekameron*. Trans. Albert Wesselski. Vorwort von André Jolles. Frankfurt a.M. 1967 [orig. 1921]. Pg. 7

<sup>337</sup> *FA* 38/1 207.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

to ‘incline’ toward one another and intermingle. Rather than exemplifying their narrative (or ‘epic’) genres in a ‘pure’ exemplar, both *Novelle* and *Märchen* dramatize multiple intergeneric metamorphoses, cycling through entire segments of the circular schema of literary forms before ‘settling’ in their final titular genre. Goethe even proceeds to align this literary taxonomic endeavor with his natural scientific studies: “Der Versuch jedoch wird immer so schwierig seyn als in der Naturkunde das Bestreben den Bezug auszufinden der äusseren Kennzeichen von Mineralien und Pflanzen zu ihren inneren Bestandtheilen, um eine naturgemäße Ordnung dem Geiste darzustellen.”<sup>339</sup> As was the case with natural life forms governed by a normative type, literary forms are ultimately brought into an ideal normative order not beholden to historical empiricity. This order is not natural, of course, but, like the natural order, its formal regularities are rendered perspicuous to “dem Geiste.” At the same time, one will not be able to delineate genres through recourse to “äusseren Kennzeichen” or empirico-historical criteria, but only through an investigation of a genre’s inner formal connection to its literary neighbors. As will become apparent, both *Novelle* and *Märchen* conduct such an intergeneric exploration in order to achieve their own titular generic status.

### **1. Pathologies of the Imagination: The Intertwining of Narrative and Lyric Forms in *Novelle***

The conclusion of Goethe’s *Novelle* has never ceased to riddle critics, above all because of the apparent discontinuity between realistic narrative exposition and idealized poetic end. Earlier readers such as Emil Staiger have argued that the conclusion functions to harmonize the semantic oppositions earlier set up in the narrative, such as those between nature and art, the destructive force of the elemental, envisioned as a violent fire symbolic of revolutionary fervor, and the pacifying power of a child’s poetic song. As Staiger puts this, the end demonstrates “wie die

---

<sup>339</sup> Ibid. Pg. 207-8.

Kunst als Blüte aufsteigt aus den Blättern der Natur und eine leichtgeschwungene Brücke von den Morgenländern zu der hochgebildeten Gesellschaft später Zeit hinüberführt.”<sup>340</sup> Later critics have qualified this harmonizing interpretation with an emphasis on the theatricality of the scene. Jane Brown, for example, reads the end as an anti-hierarchical integration of the arts that doubles as a societal integration, noting that “the various allusions in this scene are all spectacles which take place in theaters or arenas.”<sup>341</sup> Waltraud Wiethölter in the Frankfurt edition of Goethe’s works further claims that the ‘artificiality’ of the conclusion in its thick overlay of cultural allusions marks the harmonic resolution as a transitory, precarious moment that the text itself ironically puts into question: “Was hier als Versöhnung von Natur und Kunst erscheint, ist jener Kunst und jenem Handwerk zu verdanken, mit dem alle Figuren des Textes beschäftigt sind: ihre Welt aus Repräsentationen [...] herzustellen.”<sup>342</sup> Whether one emphasizes the harmonic, integrative character of the end or its theatrical, citational status as artifice, there lingers the residual question of why the Princess and courtly society in general remain conspicuously absent from the scene of the lion’s taming. Gerhard Neumann has called this counterintuitive disappearance of aristocratic protagonists at the *Novelle*’s conclusion its ultimate ‘mystery,’ arguing that the final scene represents a “Heterotop unter Ausschluß des Fürstenpaars, und [es] wird einer Familie fahrenden Volkes anvertraut. Dieser Schluß bleibt wohl das Rätsel dieses unvergleichlichen Textes.”<sup>343</sup> Even Eckermann, *Novelle*’s first reader, registered a certain dissatisfaction with the moment of narrative closure:

Nicht ohne Rührung hatte ich die Handlung des Schlusses lesen können. Doch wußte ich nicht, was ich sagen sollte, ich war überrascht, aber nicht befriedigt. Es war mir, als wäre

---

<sup>340</sup> Cf. Emil Staiger. *Meisterwerke deutscher Sprache aus dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert*. Atlantis Verlag. Zürich: Atlantis Verlag. 1957. Pg. 135-162 (here: pg. 162).

<sup>341</sup> Cf. Jane K. Brown. “The Tyranny of the Ideal: The Dialectics of Art in Goethe’s ‘Novelle.’” *Studies in Romanticism*. Vol. 19, No. 2. (1980). Pg. 217-231 (here: pg. 225-6).

<sup>342</sup> Cf. *FA* 11, pg. 1076.

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Gerhard Neumann. “Fernrohr und Flöte. Erzählte Räume in Goethes Novelle.” In: *Goethe und die Musik*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann. 2012. Pg. 125-144 (here: pg. 140).

der Ausgang zu einsam, zu ideal, zu lyrisch, und als hätten wenigstens einige der übrigen Figuren wieder hervortreten und, das Ganze abschließend, dem Ende mehr Breite geben sollen.<sup>344</sup>

Goethe's oft-cited response to Eckermann – his own interpretation of the end – has established an authoritative framework from which only few critics depart. To explain the conclusion, Goethe calls on an organic metaphor in order to establish a continuity between the overly idealized, even isolated lyrical end and the realistic narrative exposition that precedes it: “‘Um für den Gang dieser Novelle ein Gleichniß zu haben,’ fuhr Goethe fort, ‘so denken Sie sich aus der Wurzel hervorschießend ein grünes Gewächs, das [...] zuletzt mit einer Blume endet. Die Blume war unerwartet, überraschend, aber sie mußte kommen; [...] das grüne Blätterwerk der durchaus realen Exposition ist nur dieserwegen da und nur dieserwegen etwas werth.’”<sup>345</sup> Such a metaphor figures textual holism on the model of vegetal organism and lends credence to harmonizing interpretations such as Staiger's.

Goethe's remark, however, is by no means hermeneutically transparent. The very fact that Goethe may re-describe the narrative plot (“Gang”) in terms of a poetic metaphor (“ein Gleichniß”) points to the systematic intertwining of narrative and lyric forms at the text's dénouement. Indeed, Goethe's *Novelle* might be described as a narrative that ends not in but *as* lyric, the “Gang” of an event-sequence not only figurable as, but itself metamorphosing into a “Gleichniß.” Goethe more clearly describes the inner necessity that guides the narrative's non-narrative, poetic closure in other remarks to Eckermann. He here continually returns to the threat of ‘becoming prosaic’ had the conclusion been written otherwise:

‘Hätte ich,’ sagte er [Goethe], ‘einige der übrigen Figuren am Ende wieder hervortreten lassen, so wäre der Schluß prosaisch geworden. [...] Aber ein ideeller, ja lyrischer Schluß war nöthig und mußte folgen; denn nach der pathetischen Rede des Mannes, die schon

---

<sup>344</sup> Cf. Gespräch mit Eckermann, 18. Jan. 1827. *WA* 5/6, Pg. 21-25 (here: pg. 21-22).

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 22-23.

poetische Prosa ist, mußte eine Steigerung kommen, ich mußte zur lyrischen Poesie, ja zum Liede selbst übergehen.<sup>346</sup>

Goethe's invocation of *Steigerung*, coupled with his emphasis on the necessity of the transition ("übergehen") to poetry, allow the *Novelle* to be read as a linguistic metamorphosis of prose into verse, as narrative's self-transcendence into the state of lyric. The natural scientific diction in Goethe's justification to Eckermann is key. Eckhart Förster has explicated Goethe's morphological thought as a method of the intuitive understanding that attends above all to moments of transition (*das Übergängliche*).<sup>347</sup> The empirical stages of a plant's growth, for example, may be brought into a series by the morphological investigator such that the transitions *between* discrete stages become apparent to the mind's eye. By apprehending the regularity governing such moments of transition (seen empirically, mere gaps), one may then cognitively intuit the lawfulness or source of unity undergirding the plant's self-differentiation in time. The process of vegetal growth thereby becomes legible as a unitary activity, the self-elaboration of one and the same organ, i.e. the 'transcendental leaf' in its continual contraction and expansion. As Goethe put this, "Erst bin ich geneigt mir gewisse Stufen zu denken; weil aber die Natur keinen Sprung macht, bin ich zuletzt genöthigt mir die Folge einer ununterbrochenen Thätigkeit als ein Ganzes anzuschauen, indem ich das Einzelne aufhebe, ohne den Eindruck zu zerstören."<sup>348</sup> Attentive to such transitions, the morphological gaze renders even radical, seemingly discontinuous transformations, such as that from caterpillar to butterfly (or prose to verse), newly intelligible as open-ended processes in search of stability.

---

<sup>346</sup> Ibid. Pg. 22

<sup>347</sup> Cf. Eckhart Förster. *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy. A Systematic Reconstruction*. Trans. Brady Bowman. Cambridge: Harvard . 2012. Pg. 250-276

<sup>348</sup> As Goethe notes, "das Einzelne" or serialized empirical phenomena are sublated (mentally synchronized into "ein Ganzes") *without* thereby 'destroying' the temporal-phenomenal "Eindruck." The morphological investigator must hence mediate between two levels of description: the level of formal description that sees "das Einzelne" in light of its animating idea, the 'ideal whole' or structure made present in the mind and thereby eliminating the slough of contingent circumstance, and the level of thick phenomenal description beholden to time and so preservative of the singular "Eindruck." Cf. *Vorarbeiten zu einer Physiologie der Pflanzen*. In: *WA* 2/6, pg. 303-4.

Seen from the vantage point of Goethe's morphology, then, a very different picture of the organic metaphor emerges. Precisely by virtue of 'exceeding' itself, transgressing the apparent boundaries of its genre (such as prose), the *Novelle* achieves its genre-internal aims, among them the representation of "eine sich ereignete, unerhörte Begebenheit."<sup>349</sup> Rather than looking for the central, unheard-of event at the level of story (*fabula*), the following reading finds it situated at the level of discourse (*syuhzet*), specifically in the transition through which narrative metamorphoses into lyric. The shift from prose to verse hence marks a morphological transition, a *self*-transformation, immanent to the generic form.<sup>350</sup> The *Novelle* can thereby be reread as narratively setting up the pragmatic context appropriate for lyric poetry as such. In constructing a narrative situation that *necessitates* poetic language, however, Goethe envisions a social world on the brink of crisis, in need of poetic form in order to salvage a form of courtly life on the verge of dying out.

Before turning to the work itself, however, it will be helpful to dwell with the process of its textual genesis, for the *Novelle*, as a finished product, itself depicts a process, the transformation of narrative into lyric. Re-situated in its textual genetic background, Goethe's *Novelle* becomes legible as an exploration of generic structures and the boundaries (as well as transitions) between them. The *Novelle* began life in 1797 as the plan for a hexameter epic titled *Die Jagd*, but because the plot contained no moment of retardation, Schiller and Humboldt

<sup>349</sup> Gespräch mit Eckermann, 29. Jan. 1827. Cf. *WA* 5/6, pg. 40.

<sup>350</sup> Two earlier readings, which begin from a resonant starting point but end at different interpretive conclusions, can be found in Himmel (1965) and Wells (1980). Himmel situates the *Novelle* in the context of other works by Goethe, associating the flute-playing child with *der Knabe Lenker* or Euphorion in *Faust II* as a personification of poetry. Wells reads the text as staging various polarities that are then harmonically 'intensified' (*gesteigert*), taking Goethe's organic metaphor at face value and even ascribing the text a "Spiraltendenz." This takes Goethe's organic metaphor too literally, however, by looking for correspondences between Goethe's plant morphology and themes in the text rather than elucidating the metamorphosis internal to the text's narrative structure qua process. In my own reading, I am hence concerned with the very specific structural jointures or metamorphic transitions that allow a narrative to transform into lyric. Himmel's approach is closer to my own, but his analysis addresses the poetic as theme in the story rather than as one of its discursive modes. Cf. Hellmuth Himmel. "Metamorphose der Sprache. Das Bild der Poesie in Goethe's 'Novelle.'" *Jahrbuch des Wiener Goethe-Vereins*. Vol. 65. 1961. Pg. 86-100; Larry D. Wells. "Organic Structure in Goethe's 'Novelle'." *The German Quarterly*. Vol. 53, No. 4. Nov., 1980. Pg. 418-431.



discouraged Goethe from the epic form. Goethe himself notes of the plot that “die Entwicklung auf eine Weise geschieht, die den Anstalten [der Jagd] ganz entgegen ist, und auf einem ganz *unerwarteten* jedoch natürlichen Wege.”<sup>351</sup> Thirty years later, in 1827, Goethe recalls exactly this ‘unexpected’ character of the plot’s dénouement when he figures the lyrical conclusion as a kind of ‘blossom:’ “Die Blume war *unerwartet*, überraschend.”<sup>352</sup> In 1797, however, Schiller had argued that Goethe’s planned poem was more “ein komisch-episches [Gedicht],” for it inclined toward comedy given the unexpectedly harmonic resolution of its plot.<sup>353</sup> The epic, now a comic-epic, then metamorphosed in Goethe’s plans into a rhymed poem as he concurrently returned to work on *Faust I*. Noting the ‘romantic’ character of the subject matter (the heroic deed of a hunter from a knightly milieu overcoming a tiger), Schiller recommended the Italianate rhyme scheme of *Stanzen*.<sup>354</sup> What began life as an epic then morphed once more into a ballad: “Es scheint mir [Goethe] jetzt auch ausgemacht, daß meine Tiger und Löwen in diese Form [des Reims] gehören; ich fürchte nur fast, daß das eigentlich Interessante des Sujets sich zuletzt gar in eine Ballade auflösen möchte.”<sup>355</sup> Goethe’s struggle to find an appropriate poetic form for his subject matter, which threatened to ‘dissolve’ under improper formal constraints, can be read as a symptom of his classicist concern in the 1790s with the sequestration of genres. It has also been interpreted as indicative of the form-precedent centrality of the ‘ideal flower’ that is the child’s taming of the

<sup>351</sup> An Schiller. 22. April 1779. *WA* IV/12, pg. 93. Emphasis added.

<sup>352</sup> Gespräch mit Eckermann, 18. Jan. 1827. *WA* 5/6, Pg. 22. Emphasis added.

<sup>353</sup> Schiller had earlier claimed that *Hermann und Dorothea* was characterized by an analogous dramatic inclination, this time towards tragedy rather than comedy (“eine gewisse Hinneigung zur Tragödie”), given its quasi-dramatic unities of space and time, the limited setting of a town east of the Rhein, and the temporal duration of one day. The *Novelle* also lasts precisely one day. Cf. An Goethe. 25. April 1797. Cf. *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*. Bd. 2. 1797-1798. Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek. Pg. 38

<sup>354</sup> An Goethe. 26. Juni 1797. *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*. Bd. 2. 1797-1798. Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek. Pg. 61-2.

<sup>355</sup> An Schiller. 27. Juni 1797. Cf. *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*. Bd. 2. 1797-1798. Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek. Pg. 63-64.

lion through song – indicative, that is, of a content ultimately indifferent to poetic form.<sup>356</sup> The textual genesis of Goethe’s *Novelle* must be seen, however, as central rather than incidental to the finished work, for the text itself stages the genesis of verse out of prose. Goethe emphasized to Eckermann the inevitability of his selection of prose as the fitting ‘form’ for this subject matter:

Sie sehen aber wohl, daß ich mit der Prosa zuletzt am besten gefahren bin. [...] Und dann ließ sich auch der anfänglich ganz reale und am Schluß ganz ideelle Character der *Novelle* in Prosa am besten geben, sowie sich auch die Liederchen jetzt gar hübsch ausnehmen, welches doch so wenig in Hexametern als in den achtzeiligen Reimen [der Stanze] möglich gewesen wäre.<sup>357</sup>

Unable to find the proper poetic form – epic, comic-epic, ottava rima, ballad – Goethe settled on prose.

Prose, of course, is not a proper poetic ‘form.’ As Friedrich Schlegel claimed, the prose novel is capable of integrating within itself all other poetic forms: a sung lyric, dramatic dialogue, even excerpts from other prose genres, such as academic treatises and newspapers. The potentially encyclopedic range of ‘forms’ that prose may absorb allows it to function as a general medium for reflection on those very forms. According to a common-sense view, poetic forms only craft language into the meaningful shape of verse by ‘working’ on precedent, prosaic sentences. Prose may thus serve as the *precedent* ‘material’ upon which poetic forms exert their fashioning powers as well as the *subsequent* medium within which such forms are brought into self-conscious reflection. As Ralf Simons articulates this dialectic, “Vor der Form und nach der Form liegt eine genuine Verdichtung, einerseits als gebende Matrix für die Formen, andererseits als Reflexionsmedium der Formen und als ihr eigentlicher Erfüllungsgegenstand (Telos). Ich

---

<sup>356</sup> Beutler discusses the work’s genesis at length, ultimately finding the ‘origin’ of this ‘Motivkeim’ (the child’s taming of the lion) in Goethe’s early experiences of Christianity, in particular Friedrich Karl Ludwig von Moser’s prose epic *Daniel in der Löwengrube* (1763). Cf. Ernst Beutler. “Ursprung und Gehalt von Goethes ‘Novelle.’” In: *DVjs.* 16, 1938. Pg. 324-352.

<sup>357</sup> Gespräch mit Eckermann, 18. Jan. 1827. Cf. *WA* 5/6, S. 24-25.

nenne dies: Prosa.”<sup>358</sup> Simons’s construal of prose remains dependent, however, on the common-sense view that poetic forms are akin to containers that merely ‘shape’ preexisting prosaic language. Such forms, however, more accurately first produce poetic language through the *generative* constraints they impose on language.<sup>359</sup> Another way of putting this would be to think of poetic form not as the wine glass or poetic-formal container that holds the wine or ‘prosaic’ content, but as the winepress through which the wine/content is first generated. Goethe’s selection of prose is hence key, for the medium of complete sentences allows him to restage the textual genetic problem of finding the proper poetic form *within* the very story that begins as prose and ends as verse. Goethe solves the problem of appropriate poetic form, then, by strategically displacing it, folding the textual genetic problem into the very texture of the finished work. As will become apparent, to resolve prose into poetic form also implies – within the storyworld of Goethe’s *Novelle* – finding an adequate aesthetic solution to political problems prevalent in an aristocratic form of life on the verge of becoming an historical anachronism.

More than simply ‘unformed’ content, prose here is, furthermore, not simply synonymous with narrative. As Roland Barthes claimed, the freedom unique to narrative lies below the level of overarching plot structures yet above the level of standard linguistic unit-hierarchies (e.g., phonemes bundled into morphemes bundled into lexemes, etc.):

There is, of course, a freedom of narrative [...], but this freedom is limited, literally *hemmed in*: between the powerful code of language [*langue*] and the powerful code of narrative a hollow is set up – the sentence. If one attempts to embrace the whole of a written narrative, one finds that it starts from the most highly coded (the phonematic, or even the merismatic, level), gradually relaxes until it reaches the sentence, the farthest

---

<sup>358</sup> Simon draws on Agamben and Benjamin in his delimitation of a concept of prose. Cf. Ralf Simon. “Vorüberlegungen zu einer Theorie der Prosa.“ In: *Poetik*. Hsg. Armen Avanesian u. Jan Niklas Howe. Berlin: Kadmos. Pg. 124-144 (here: pg. 126); Giorgio Agamben. *Idea of Prose*. Trans. Michael Sullivan & Sam Whitsitt. State U of NY Press 1995. Pg. 39-41; Günter Oesterle. „Die Idee der Poesie ist die Prosa.’ Walter Benjamin entdeckt ‚einen völlig neuen Grund’ romantischer ‚Kunstphilosophie.’“ In: *Walter Benjamin und die romantische Moderne*. Hsg. Heinz Brüggemann u. Günter Oesterle. Königshausen & Neumann. Pg. 161-173.

<sup>359</sup> Along these lines, Simon Jarvis terms verse forms “compositional generators.” Cf. Simon Jarvis. “The melodics of long poems.” *Textual Practice*. Vol. 24, No. 4. 2010. Pg. 607-621 (here: 610).

point of combinatorial freedom, and then begins to tighten up again, moving progressively from small groups of sentences (micro-sequences), which are still very free, until it comes to the main actions, which form a strong and restricted code.<sup>360</sup>

The late style of Goethe's prose in *Novelle* presents a test case at the limits of Barthes's claims here, for Goethe's sentences themselves mirror the greater, overarching codes according to which the narrative they make up is built. At the same time, those narrative codes – above all, as will be demonstrated, that of the anachronic event-sequence – do not *determine* the course of the sentences and the organization of their syntax; rather, the sentences themselves carry the greater narrative structure and drive its self-transformations in time, such that the narrative code does not remain static. In this regard, Goethe's sentences in *Novelle* are so radically free that they are syntactically constructed so as to elude actively and ultimately any greater supra-sentential narrative code they might inaugurate.

The poetic prose of *Novelle*'s very first sentence, for example, provides indispensable clues as to how its narrative is built. The scene opens onto a view-obstructing fog: “Ein dichter Herbstnebel verhüllte noch in der Frühe die weiten Räume des fürstlichen Schlosshofes, als man schon mehr oder weniger durch den sich lichtenden Schleier die ganze Jägerei zu Pferde und zu Fuß durcheinander bewegt sah” (491). Every sentence in the first paragraph contains a comma separating one main clause from one subordinate clause. In the very first sentence, the comma takes on the function of a kind of axis across which the sentence turns to emphasize different semantic values. In the first case, those semantic values relate to the conditions of visibility: in the main clause opacity (“Ein dichter Herbstnebel”) and in the subordinate clause transparency (“durch den sich lichtenden Schleier”). Accordingly, the verbs in each clause juxtapose semantic opposites: the obstruction of sight (“verhüllte”) and the act of sight (“sah”). This latter act is

---

<sup>360</sup> Cf. Roland Barthes. “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives.” In: *Image – Music – Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill & Wang. 1977. Pg. 79-124 (here: 123, emphasis in original).

attributed to an impersonal “man” that distances the narrator from the narrated storyworld and will recur throughout the narrative at the level of discourse. The sentence’s careful syntactic parallelism, hinged on the comma, also brings two adverbial temporal modifiers into relief: “noch” in the main clause and “schon” in the subordinate one. The autumn fog *still* clouds the courtly spaces even as one *already* partially sees the hunting party assemble. This juxtaposition establishes a simultaneity between the lingering of the past into the present (“noch”) and the anticipation of the future in the present (“schon”), staging a Janus-faced event in the present that *eludes* the present in order to take place as a transition between night and day in early morning, between summer and winter in the blur of an autumnal fog. Such syntactic parallelism hence generates semantic associations, here establishing a transition that hovers in stylistic equilibrium between past and future, opacity and transparency, the foreclosure of vision and the act of sight.

At the same time, the temporal imbrication of “noch” and “schon” provides us with a general structural figure that captures the political situation of this post-revolutionary social order: the prince’s father and thus the state has *already* incorporated the lessons of a former revolutionary tumult, perhaps what led to the first fire in town, while the aristocratic nobility nevertheless *still* lingers on in new guise, even in a new castle. A later sentence strikingly recapitulates the structure of syntactic parallelism hinged on a comma, but this time brings to the fore the paradoxical simultaneity of bourgeois and feudal political orders by juxtaposing the “Finanzminister” and “Landjägermeister:”

**Wenn** sich nun der Fürst fast ausschließlich in diesen Tagen mit den Seinigen über diese zudringenden Gegenstände unterhielt, auch besonders mit dem *Finanzminister* anhaltend arbeitete, **so** behielt auch der *Landjägermeister* sein Recht, auf dessen Vorstellung es unmöglich war, der Versuchung zu widerstehen, an diesen günstigen Herbsttagen *eine schon verschobene Jagd* zu unternehmen, sich selbst und den vielen angekommenen Fremden ein eignes und *seltnes* Fest zu eröffnen. (491-2, emphasis added).

The economic self-regulation of the state, perhaps to be fully rationalized in the future, and the courtly ritual of the hunt, an adage from the feudal past, thus coincide. The sentence's phrasing, however, suggests that the courtly dimension of this form of life remains especially precarious: the head of the hunt retains his "Recht," as if he might otherwise have lost it to the finance ministers. The hunt itself has also already been deferred ("eine schon verschobene Jagd") and been demoted to a rarity, a "seltnes Fest," as if the entire courtly form of life were in the process of fading away. The sentence's syntax thus performs a balancing act not just between its clauses ("Wenn..., so..."), but between two historical forms of sociopolitical organization, forming a grammatical emblem of the post-revolutionary lesson learned a generation earlier by the prince's father, "daß alle Staatsglieder in gleicher Betriebsamkeit ihre Tage zubringen, in gleichem Wirken und Schaffen jeder nach seiner Art *erst gewinnen und dann genießen* sollten" (491, emphasis added). The parallel arrangement (*Gliederung*) of the sentence, moving from the prince's activity in economic "zudringende Gegenstände" to a "seltnes Fest," thus mirrors the civic arrangement among "Staatsglieder," which proceed from profitable production to enjoyable consumption, from *Gewinn* to *Genuß*. As Borchmeyer puts this, "Der Fürst und sein Hof führen eine durch überlieferte höfische Gepflogenheiten, Rituale und Förmlichkeiten nur dürftig verdeckte bürgerlich-prosaische Existenz, ihr Leben ist wie das aller anderen Staatsglieder von Arbeit angefüllt." <sup>361</sup> Borchmeyer interestingly reads the hunt in *Novelle* as a politically impotent residuum of Goethe's original plans for an epic, quoting Wilhelm von Humboldt relating the subject matter to his wife: "Nur bei der Jagd, meinte er [Goethe] zeige sich noch etwas dem Heldenalter gleichsam Ähnliches, weil doch da jeder selbst tätig sein, selbst Hand anlegen

---

<sup>361</sup> Cf. Dieter Borchmeyer. *Höfische Gesellschaft und französische Revolution bei Goethe*. Athenäum. 1977. Pg. 333-350.

muß.”<sup>362</sup> Hegel similarly argued that fundamental historical changes in the nature of society forced Goethe’s epic *Hermann und Dorothea* to take shape as an idyll, for only within the restricted circle of a bourgeois town may individual activity influence the societal whole. Modern social organization, in contrast, is characterized by the fact that influence on the societal whole may only be exerted by supra-individual, mediating institutions. In “Über epische und dramatische Dichtung,” Schiller and Goethe anticipate this Hegelian argument about the epic’s necessary transformation into a bourgeois idyll in modernity by claiming that epic protagonists “am besten auf einem gewissen Grade der Kultur stehen, wo die Selbsttätigkeit noch auf sich allein angewiesen ist, wo man nicht moralisch, politisch, mechanisch, sondern persönlich wirkt.”<sup>363</sup> To allow the premise of the epic hunt to fade into a mere subplot within the *Novelle*’s narrative trajectory toward the lyric, then, amounts to dramatizing the inherent impossibility of courtly society under the historical conditions of modernity. Such a form of life is exposed as a kind of historical remnant or lingering specter, as unlivable in 1827 after the French Revolution as Goethe’s original epic *Die Jagd* was unwritable.

The precarity of this social form of life even reaches subdued articulation as early as the third sentence of the *Novelle*’s first paragraph, again built around a syntactic parallelism: “Auch hie und da gebärdete ein Pferd sich mutiger, von feuriger Natur getrieben oder von dem Sporn des Reiters angeregt, **der** selbst hier in der Halbhelle eine gewisse Eitelkeit, sich zu zeigen, nicht verleugnen konnte” (491, emphasis added). The second comma here functions as the crucial semantic axis, juxtaposing the horse with its rider, animal and human alike each attributed a reflexive verb (*sich gebärden*, *sich zeigen*). Whether the horse misbehaves due to its own ‘fiery nature’ or the rider’s spur, however, remains essentially ambiguous. This first subordinate

---

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> *FA* I/18, pg. 445.

clause's "oder" anticipates more global symbolic ambiguities about the status of the fire that breaks into town (is it simply a natural occurrence or one perpetrated by "die Menge"?) and the animals thereby set loose (are they already tame, given that they are circus animals, or driven by their own destructive "feuriger Natur"?). At the same time, the rider cannot help but indulge in the "Eitelkeit, sich zu zeigen," articulating one of the main social-representative functions of the hunt, which qua ritual allows for the self-presentation of public persons or nobles in the worldly space of court, even when transposed into a forest.<sup>364</sup> The rider nonetheless remains shrouded "hier in der Halbhelle," and so the visibility of courtly self-presentation – its societal recognizability – remains questionable, indeed, may even be the cause leading the rider to kick the spur and thus unleash a potentially revolutionary "feuriger Natur."

To return to the poetic prose of Goethe's first sentence, its definition of the present event as a coincidence of "noch" and "schon," retrospection and anticipation, also emblematically furnishes a structural principle for the interpretation of narrative events in general in the *Novelle*. The 'event' in this sentence is a temporally fraught *transition* from occlusion to visibility, and the story, especially in its first half, will place great emphasis on the princess's acts of visual perception, as if an *Ereignis* in this storyworld were always also an *Eräugnis*. In addition to this elevation of the act of sight to the status of a potential narrative event, the coincidence of retrospection and anticipation in the present moment can be termed the paradoxical temporality of

---

<sup>364</sup> Habermas interestingly relates this social-representative function of showing oneself in the world, part of the courtly form of life, to Wilhelm Meister's penchant for theater in the *Lehrjahren*: "Wilhelm gesteht dem Schwager das Bedürfnis, 'eine öffentliche Person zu sein und in einem weiten Kreis zu gefallen und zu wirken.' Da er jedoch kein Edelmann ist und auch als Bürger nicht vergeblich sich bemühen will, es bloß zu scheinen, sucht er, sozusagen als Öffentlichkeitsersatz – die Bühne [...] Das [theatralische] Publikum ist jedoch bereits Träger einer anderen Öffentlichkeit, die mit der repräsentativen nichts mehr gemein hat" (27-8). If *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* depicts in the figure of Wilhelm a bourgeois with an anachronistic desire to become a member of a fading nobility despite fundamental structural changes that render the aristocratic class economically defunct in the long-term (destined to be replaced by the managerial class of bureaucrats), then *Novelle* depicts this societal transition from the perspective of the nobility rather than the bourgeoisie. Cf. Jürgen Habermas. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Neuwied-Berlin. 1971; Norbert Elias. *Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie*. Luchterhand 1981.



an ‘anachronic’ event.<sup>365</sup> When located at the level of discourse rather than story, anachronic events take place at a site of coincidence between analepsis and prolepsis (flashback and flashforward). All narrative events, of course, refer backwards and forwards in time, for they are embedded in a given causal sequence, i.e., a plot. Anachronic events, however, point towards past and future in indirect fashion, not according to the chronologic of plot but according to a synchronic, paradigmatic resemblance. The operation of iteration, e.g. the princess seeing the ruins or a tiger multiple times, first through different media and images, then in real encounter, is constitutive of these anachronic narrative events. This is the case because, given the coincidence of retrospection and anticipation at the level of story, ana- and prolepsis at the level of discourse, it remains unclear whether a ‘new’ event is genuinely new; it will instead take on the appearance of a repetition. The princess’s initial acts of sight (or *Eräugnisse*) in the first half of the story thus anticipatorily ‘prime’ her with anxiety-ridden images or “Schreckbilder” (500) that function as phobic imprints, impressing themselves upon her imagination in order to pre-contextualize a future event in terms of the past.

The act of visual perception for Goethe is intermingled, of course, with that of mental apperception. In his discussion of Purkinje’s *Das Sehen in subjektiver Hinsicht* (1819), Goethe hence notes “daß Gedächtnis und Einbildungskraft in den Sinnesorganen selbst thätig sind, und daß jeder Sinn sein ihm eigenthümlich zukommendes Gedächtniß und Einbildungskraft besitze,

---

<sup>365</sup> The term is adapted from Genette, who defines anachronies as “the various types of discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative” (36). I here use the term in an expanded sense, referring both to discordances between story and discourse (what Genette calls ‘narrative’) as well as to story-internal discordances between events that, though unrelated in a causal-empirical sense, remain concordant, resemblant with one another, at the level of character psychology and the prose sentence. When referring to the level of the story, which includes character psychology, the reference to the past will be termed retrospection, that to the future anticipation; when referring to the level of discourse, I will use Genette’s respective terms: analepsis and prolepsis. Both levels of story and discourse are intertwined at key moments in the *Novelle*, above all when the fire and animals are unleashed.

die, als einzelne begrenzte Kräfte, der allgemeinen Seelenkraft unterworfen sind.”<sup>366</sup> The princess’s acts of sight are thus also acts of the imagination, and the central problematic dramatized by *Novelle* at the level of story consists in the princess working through a pathology of the imagination, the latter’s susceptibility to fearful enthrallment before *idées fixes*. These fixed ideas or phobic imprints give rise to anachronic narrative events by precontextualizing the present occurrence in terms of a past event and priming the princess for a future event in terms of the present. Liberation from this pathology of the imagination will ultimately come with the emergence of poetry at the text’s conclusion. The child’s lyric poetry speaks his present situation into aesthetically accessible presence and thereby enables a shift from the past’s pre-contextualization of the present to the present’s re-contextualization of the past, thus breaking the pathological imagination’s repetitive cycle of anxious priming and sudden returns of the phobically impressed.

The first sentence hence contains the narrative structure of the entire text *in nuce*. With these reflections drawn from that sentence in mind, *Novelle* can be segmented into eight key events, which in turn can be nested under the rubric of four main action-sequences. The eight key events can be described as follows:

a → b → c → A → B → C → d → D

- a: The princess sees the ruins of the old castle through two visual mediations (first through the telescope, then in drawings)
- b: Her uncle tells the story of the first fire and the princess reacts anxiously (case of verbal mediation, external analepsis, first told by character at level of story, then by narrator at level of discourse after princess interrupts uncle)
- c: The princess encounters tiger and lion via fearful images advertising the circus in town (another visual mediation; description of images by narrator at level of discourse, critical interpretation by uncle at level of story)
- A: Princess and company cross over into the mountainous terrain of the ruins above

---

<sup>366</sup> Eckhart Förster more generally discusses the role of the eye’s inner activity when perceiving colors in relation to Fichtean concepts of activity. Cf. *WA* II/11, Pg. 282; Eckhart Förster. *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*. Pg. 250-276.

- B: A fire actually breaks out, calling up fearful images in the princess's imagination despite Honorio's calm reasoning that all will be safe
- C: Animals escape and the princess actually encounters the tiger, calling up the fearful image she saw in town; Honorio likewise operates as if he were in a knightly martial performance (an animal is killed)
- d: The child performs three poetic songs before the prince with his family as musical accompaniment, thereby 'taming' the aristocratic hunting company & relieving the princess of her anxieties
- D: The child performs three poetic songs before the lion with mother and guard as 'audience' (an animal is spared)

The principle of selection used to choose events is already interpretive in nature: all center on the princess or, at conclusion, on the Orientalized family that suddenly appears on the scene. Lower-case 'events' constitute acts of perception carried out through a 'mediation:' the Princess seeing images (a & c), or seeing with the aide of the optical medium of the telescope (a), and her act of listening to her uncle's frightening story, an oral medium (b). Upper-case events are all cases of 'actual' encounter: the princess enters into the real-life mountainous terrain she before only saw from afar with the telescope or in image (A); she sees an actual fire break out in the town below with "den guten, unbewaffneten Augen" (500) (B); she also encounters the tiger she formerly saw fearsomely depicted in town (C). What changes between the first three events and the subsequent trio can thus be termed a shift from mediation to actual encounter, one that happens to coincide with the princess's spatial journey out of the new castle, through the town, and into the mountainous terrain. Once in the mountainside forest, she sees face-to-face what before was only imagined or seen in images. This shift from mediation to actual encounter constitutes one higher-order nesting of events, a transition between two action-sequences:  $\{a \rightarrow b \rightarrow c\} \rightarrow \{A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C\}$ . As the princess remarks before setting forth to visit the ruins of the old castle: "lassen Sie [Friedrich] mich in der Wirklichkeit sehen, was Sie mir hier im Bilde zeigten. [...] mit Augen zu sehen, was mir in der Erzählung unmöglich schien" (8). One can also, however, group both lower- and upper-case instances of the same letter as members of an alternative, non-sequential or

paradigmatic set, which will in some cases constitute an anachronic event. The four ensuing sets are: the princess and company crossing from the new castle into the mountainous terrain of the old one or  $\{a \rightarrow A\}$ ; the outbreak of fire or  $\{b \rightarrow B\}$ ; the outbreak of the animals or  $\{c \rightarrow C\}$ , and the taming of potential violence through music or  $\{d \rightarrow D\}$ . Rather than referring to the level of story or *fabula*, these segments refer both to the actual narrative event in question (upper-case) as well as the way in which it has been ‘primed’ in the Princess’s memory and imagination beforehand (lower-case). One might describe this narrative unit unique to Goethe’s *Novelle* as an event formed by the temporally complex superimposition of past perception and present event, or:  $\{Eräugnis \rightarrow Ereignis\}$ . The four paradigmatic sets thus also refer to a level of character psychology internal to the storyworld as well as to the level of discourse. In order to make sense of the narrative’s poetic conclusion or  $\{d \rightarrow D\}$ , thus far left largely unremarked, the two key action-sequences – the outbreak of fire  $\{b \rightarrow B\}$  and tiger  $\{c \rightarrow C\}$  – will be interpreted, for these constitute the most central anachronic events in the narrative.

### ***1.a The outbreak of fire: The anachronic event as phantasmatic afterimage***

It may seem to be the case that the narrative’s focus on moments of optical mediation, such as Friedrich’s (description of) drawings of the old castle ruins embedded in a natural landscape, aims at conveying the message that an ‘unmediated’ view of nature, say, is impossible. Though there is certainly an element of truth to the claim, it remains rather banal by virtue of its sheer generality. Goethe’s focus, rather, is more specifically drawn to how the princess’s imagination in such moments is all too quickly gripped and controlled by fearfully fixed impressions drawn from images and stories. Insofar as these phobic imprints prime the princess’s character psychology and the narrator’s description of her reaction to subsequent events, the pathology of the imagination she exemplifies closely hangs together with the text’s construction

of anachronic narrative events. This becomes most explicit in the case of the fire, for here visual mediations give way to a verbal mediation, her uncle Friedrich's story of the first fire in the town's prehistory, which constitutes a kind of framed story within a quasi-frame narrative:

“ich [Friedrich] reite niemals gern durch Markt und Messe; bei jedem Schritt ist man gehindert und aufgehalten, *und dann flammt mir das ungeheure Unglück wieder in die Einbildungskraft, das sich mir gleichsam in die Augen eingebrannt*, als ich eine solche Güter und Warenbreite in Feuer aufgehen sah. Ich hatte mich kaum – “

“Lassen Sie uns die schönen Stunden nicht versäumen!” fiel ihm die Fürstin ein, da der würdige Mann *sie schon einigemal mit ausführlicher Beschreibung jenes Unheils geängstigt hatte*, wie er sich nämlich, auf einer großen Reise begriffen, abends im besten Wirtshause auf dem Markte, der eben von einer Hauptmesse wimmelte, höchst ermüdet zu Bette gelegt und nachts durch Geschrei und Flammen, die sich gegen seine Wohnung wälzten, gräßlich aufgeweckt worden. (496, emphasis added)

Not just the princess, but the uncle as well remains captive to a pathology of the imagination: the trauma of the first fire, “das ungeheure Unglück,” continues to ‘blaze’ in his “Einbildungskraft.” Despite his posttraumatic avoidance of riding through the town center, especially when a large social collective gathers there, the uncle nonetheless curiously repeats a story already told to the princess countless times, as if his storytelling were symptomatic of a repetition compulsion. Friedrich's imaginative fixation on the fire has also contaminated the princess, for she remains “geängstigt” by the story. The “Schreckbilder” implanted in her memory blind her and other aristocratic protagonists to the reality before them in an anxiety-induced imaginative projection that ‘infects’ the act of visual perception.

The symbolic potential of the fire in *Novelle* is usually read as an allusion to the French Revolution (it functions so, for example, in Schiller's “Lied von der Glocke,” which also invokes an escaped tiger), but the fire may also symbolically stand for the ‘flammability’ of the imagination, as it were, and the sense organs it distorts from within, which may then light the world on fire, cast it into the red glow of an all-encompassing, projective anxiety. Goethe expressed exactly this in a paralipomenon to *Novelle*: “sie [die Fürstin] glaubte wirklich

dergleichen [Bilder] zu sehen und es ist keine Frage daß ein feuriges Auge sich die Gegenstände zum Schein entzünden, und als flammend vor sich schauen könne.”<sup>367</sup> As Goethe’s Plotinian poem from his introduction to the *Farbenlehre* makes clear, the organ of the eye is productive as well as receptive: “Wär’ nicht das Auge sonnenhaft, / Wie könnten wir das Licht erblicken?”<sup>368</sup> Each organ, such as the eye, possesses its own kind of imagination and memory, its own mode of productively contributing to the apprehended phenomenon in its very receptivity to it. Perceiving organ and ‘element’ (medium of perception) are complementary: as Goethe said of the fish, “Der Fisch ist für das Wasser da, scheint mir viel weniger zu sagen als: der Fisch ist in dem Wasser und durch das Wasser da.”<sup>369</sup> The same holds for the eye and its medium of light. Goethe avoids the teleological preposition “für” in favor of a model of reciprocal co-determination between organism and environment, organ and medium. For “ein feuriges Auge” to blaze forth is hence for the organ of sight to supersede transgressively the solar element of light within which it perceives. The eye, “zum Schein entzünde[t],” overtakes the sun and only sees its own imaginings “als flammend vor sich,” thereby becoming inadequate to its medium of visibility by instead projecting its own distortive light.

This recalls Goethe’s discussion of “Blendungsbilder” in his review of the physiologist Johann Purkinje’s *Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Sehens in subjectiver Hinsicht* (1819). Following Purkinje, Goethe distinguishes between the “Nachbild” and “Blendungsbild,” roughly correspondent to the distinction between mental afterimages (e.g., in memory) and retinal

---

<sup>367</sup> Cf. *WA* I/18, pg. 468.

<sup>368</sup> Cf. *Entwurf einer Farbenlehre. Einleitung*. In: Goethe. *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Reclam: Stuttgart. Pg. 177.

<sup>369</sup> As Goethe continues to note: “Dieses wäre also die erste und allgemeinste Betrachtung von innen nach außen und von außen nach innen, die entschiedene Gestalt ist gleichsam der innere Kern, welcher durch die Determination des äußeren Elementes sich verschieden bildet.” Cf. *FA* 24, pg. 212-3.

afterimages.<sup>370</sup> The former may be called up willfully “durch freie Thätigkeit” and disappear as soon as one wills their evanescence before the mind’s eye, but “das Blendungsbild schwebt *unwillkürlich* dem Sinne vor, verschwindet und erscheint wieder aus *objectiven* Gründen.”<sup>371</sup> The uncontrollable, objectively triggered “Schreckbilder” (500) that phobically imprint themselves on the uncle and princess’s imaginations operate just as these *Blendungsbilder* do. Relevant for the interpretation of *Novelle* is Goethe’s psychological characterization of how both images are apprehended: “Besonders lebhaft ist das Nachbild bei erhöhter Seelenthätigkeit, das Blendungsbild hingegen pflegt *bei nervöser Stimmung* in asthenischem Zustande länger nachzuhalten.”<sup>372</sup> The “Schreckbilder” implanted in the princess’s imagination blind her and other aristocratic protagonists to the reality before them, as if a mental afterimage had become akin to the “Blendungsbild,” i.e. uncontrollable and incapable of being dissipated at will.

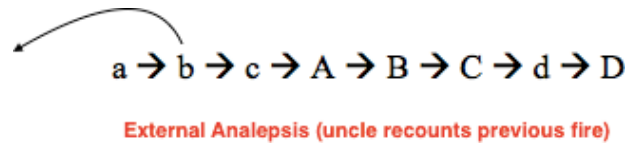
Beyond the pathology of the imagination and eye, most striking in *Novelle*’s account of the fire is the transition between the levels of story and discourse. When recounting his memory to the princess, Friedrich begins what Genette would term an external analepsis in a ‘framed’ story, an intradiegetic citation of an extradiegetic prehistory. After the princess interrupts Friedrich, the narrator proceeds to take up the uncle’s story and finish telling it outside of rather than within the citational frame. This can be visually schematized in relation to the chain of events composing the story (Diagram 2):

---

<sup>370</sup> Cf. Frederick Burwick. *The Damnation of Newton: Goethe’s Color Theory and Romantic Perception*. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter. 1986; *WA* II/11, pg. 281.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.



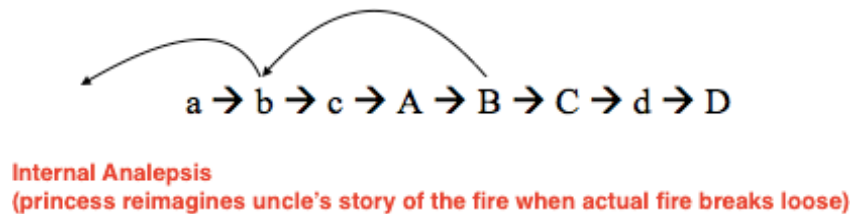
The lower-case **b** here stands for the uncle’s act of storytelling. Such schemas will help us track the narrative discourse’s construction of an anachronic event. After the princess traverses the semiotic border from town into the arboreal mountainside, she witnesses an actual fire, the second in the town’s history, and now in the narrative present, without verbal or visual mediation: “auch wurde das Unheil den guten, unbewaffneten Augen der Fürstin bemerklich” (500). The uncle interprets this novel narrative event as a repetition of the former one he narrated: “Ich fürchtete immer, das Unglück zum zweiten Male zu erleben” (500). Unlike the princess and uncle, Honorio remains calm, interpreting the narrative event without reference to the first fire: “In der Stadt wie auf dem Schloß sind die Feueranstalten in bester Ordnung, man wird sich durch einen so unerwartet außerordentlichen Fall nicht irre machen lassen. [...] ohnehin, bis wir hineinkommen, wird das Feuer schon nieder sein” (500). Despite such calm reasoning, the princess sees not the fire before her, but her uncle’s story:

Die Fürstin glaubte nicht daran; sie sah den Rauch sich verbreiten, sie glaubte einen aufflammenden Blitz gesehen, einen Schlag gehört zu haben, und *nun bewegten sich in ihrer Einbildungskraft alle die Schreckbilder, welche des trefflichen Oheims wiederholte Erzählung* von dem erlebten Jahrmarktsbrande leider nur *zu tief eingesenkt hatte*. Fürchterlich wohl *war jener Fall, überraschend und eindringlich genug, um zeitlebens eine Ahnung und Vorstellung wiederkehrenden Unglücks ängstlich zurückzulassen, ...* (500-1)

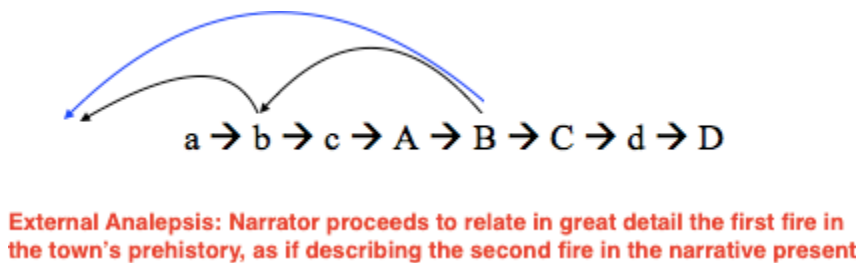
The pathology of the imagination in question traps its traumatized aristocratic victims in a repetitive cycle of imaginative fixation on past fearful events, which pre-contextualize present



events and themselves call for compulsively repetitive storytelling. The princess thus conducts an internal analepsis of the uncle's external analepsis that can be visualized as follows (Diagram 3):



After describing the princess's condition, the narrator himself takes up the story of the first fire at length and in great detail, finishing the uncle's external analepsis earlier interrupted by the anxious princess. This can be visualized as follows, the blue arrow indicating the level of discourse (Diagram 4):



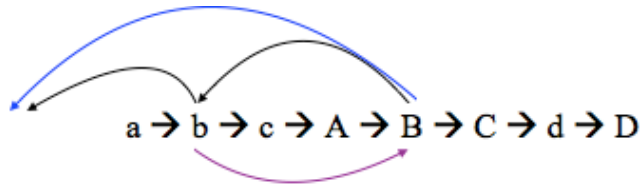
Even the verbal stylization of Goethe's prose here alters, shifting from a nominal style of syntactic parallelism, of an equilibrium in stillness, to a verbal style of dynamic action. The first style is characterized by a prevalence of substantives over verbs, often passive or reflexive, syntactically balanced main and subordinate clauses, as well as a self-contained rhythmic tempo. The second style is characterized by a prevalence of verbs over substantives, onomatopoeic associations, un-nested, direct, and shorter sentences, as well as a faster rhythmic tempo; for example: "... unten wütete das Element unaufhaltsam, die Bretter prasselten, die Latten knackten, Leinwand flog auf, und ihre duster, an den Enden flammend ausgezackten Fetzen trieben in der

Höhe sich umher...” (501).<sup>373</sup> This delicate transition in the text’s prose style, which coincides with the narrator’s external analepsis of the first fire at the level of discourse, also happens to coincide with the narrative event of the second fire’s outbreak at the level of story. Distinct textual levels are thus superimposed: first, at the level of story, the second fire in the narrative present; second, at the level of discourse, the first fire in the narrative’s past; third, at the sub-narrative level of prose texture, the present event of a stylistic shift. Through this superimposition of distinct structural levels, the narrative generates an anachronic event.

In other words, the ‘event’ of the prose style’s transition from balanced and nominal to dynamic and verbal modes generates the impression at the sub-narrative level of the sentence that the narrator now omnisciently describes the second fire actually taking place in town. In a sense, the narrator, too, cannot help repeating the uncle’s “wiederholte Erzählung” – this is his second external analepsis, as if the uncle’s earlier recounting of the first fire were actually an anticipation of the second. When seen in retrospect from a further position along the story’s event-series, the uncle’s first story {b} can thus be read as a retroactive prolepsis of {B}. The ‘event’ of style, its shift from nominal to verbal patterning, thus ‘sees’ the second fire through the ‘lens’ of the first, allows the first to come into view as a prolepsis of the second. Such a subtle alteration in the narrative’s syntactic texture metaleptically distorts the relationship of story- and discourse-levels to overlay a prolepsis onto an analepsis and so generate an anachronic event (Diagram 5):

---

<sup>373</sup> May also finds this distinction in the *Novelle*’s style, arguing that both are synthesized when the Orientalized family enters the scene. This argument for stylistic synthesis does not address the difference between prose and verse. Indeed, the *Novelle*’s prose seems to return to the first style even after the family arrives, the stylistic exception being the child’s lyric poems. The following reading will be concerned less with prose style per se and more with the imbrication of narrative and lyric, prose and verse, as modes of verbal presentation. Cf. Kurt May. “Goethes *Novelle*.” *Euphorion*. Vol. 1, No. 33. 1932. Pg. 278-283.



**Retroactive Prolepsis: Seen in retrospect, the uncle's story of the past fire determines how both princess and narrator will imagine/recount the future fire.**

What Honorio saw as a genuinely *novel* narrative event, “einen so unerwartet außerordentlichen Fall” (500), the princess and uncle imaginatively intuit as a traumatic repetition. Goethe’s *Novelle* does not so much stage a single unheard-of event as it negotiates the very distinction between the event’s singular novelty and its status as repetition. The anachronic event of the fire’s outbreak thus hovers unstably between past and present to elude its own presentness in the foggy space where “noch” and “schon” coincide. Indeed, the “dichter Herbstnebel” that forms the grammatical subject of the text’s very first sentence, which superimposed *still* and *already* into the paradoxical temporality of an event of sight, now recurs to mark the narrative’s first genuine anachronic event. After recounting the first fire in excruciating detail, the narrator returns to the narrative present proper: “Leider nun erneuerte sich vor dem schönen Geiste der Fürstin der wüste Wirrwarr, nun schien der heitere morgendliche Gesichtskreis *umnebelt*, ihre Augen verdüstert; Wald und Wiese hatten einen wunderbaren, bänglichen Anschein” (501, emphasis added). Under the conditions of a pathological imagination, the event of the present moment will only ever be perceptually accessible, only ever be ‘present’ (“nun [...] nun”), as the temporal blur of this thick transitional fog, both still and already something other than its own happening.

Tracking the narrative construction of such anachronic events allows us to specify more concretely what Goethe meant when referring to fire as the unleashing of the elements. In *Novelle*, the shift in prose style characterizes the outbreak of the first fire (recounted at the level of discourse so as to be coincident with the second fire at the level of story) as follows:

Die Häuser des Marktes, vom Widerschein gerötet, schienen schon zu glühen, drohen sich jeden Augenblick zu entzünden und in Flammen aufzuschlagen; unten *wütete das Element unaufhaltsam*, die [...] an den Enden flammend ausgezackten Fetzen trieben in der Höhe sich umher, als wenn die bösen Geister *in ihrem Elemente, um und um gestaltet*, sich mutwillig tanzend verzehren und da und dort aus den Fluten wieder auftauchen wollten. (501, emphasis added)

By the end of the sentence, the red glow on the houses has turned into an all-encompassing consumption in flame, figured as a diabolical dance among “die bösen Geister in ihrem Elemente, um und um gestaltet.” The element of fire bends all humanly formed constructions into formlessness and, ultimately, ash. In his *Versuch einer Witterungslehre* (1825), Goethe outlined strategies for defending against such elemental violence:

Es ist offenbar, daß das, was wir Elemente nennen, seinen eigenen wilden wüsten Gang zu nehmen immerhin den Trieb hat. [...] Aber einzelne Vorsichtsmaßregeln sind keineswegs so wirksam, als wenn man dem Regellosen das Gesetz entgegenzustellen vermöchte, und hier hat uns die Natur aufs herrlichste vorgearbeitet, und zwar indem sie ein gestaltetes Leben dem Gestaltlosen entgegensetzt. [...] Die Elemente sind die Willkür selbst zu nennen; [...] *das Feuer ergreift unaufhaltsam*, was von Brennbarem, Schmelzbarem zu erreichen ist [...] Das Höchste jedoch, was in solchen Fällen dem Gedanken gelingt, ist: gewahr zu werden, was die Natur in sich selbst als Gesetz und Regel trägt, jenem ungezügelden, gesetzlosen Wesen zu imponieren.<sup>374</sup>

Consumption in flames constitutes a perversion of genuine transformation (*Umgestaltung*) insofar as it remains irregular (i.e., normless) and ultimately deformative, a kind of transformative energy divested of stable form and set capriciously free: “Die Elemente sind die Willkür selbst zu nennen.” Goethe characterizes the element of fire as a privation (“dem Regellosen [...] dem Gestaltlosen [...] jenem ungezügelden, gesetzlosen Wesen”), a symbolic lack of lawfulness and form in the order of nature that nonetheless remains dynamically active despite its negative status. At the same time, in his literary works, fire comes to take on a number of proliferating referents, generating a symbolic excess by virtue of its unstoppable deformative energy. The fire, then,

---

<sup>374</sup> Cf. *HA* 13, pg. 309. Emphasis added.

functions just as much as a force of de-symbolization as well as an eminent projection-screen in the order of nature for Goethe's anxieties about the fragility of political orders.

Critics have devoted much attention to *what* such fires in Goethe's works (often in their narrative prehistory, as in *Novelle* and *Hermann und Dorothea*) mean, but more significant is *how* fires signify. The element of flame is a figure not for any specific content, but for a figural dynamic: a deformative force characterized by the coincidence of a natural lack of lawfulness and, via that very privation, a symbolic excess of multiple referents. Indeed, Goethe will invoke the same rhetorical formulas of privation when defining political revolution: "Jede Revolution geht auf Naturzustand hinaus, Gesetz- und Schamlosigkeit."<sup>375</sup> In *Die natürliche Tochter* (1801-3), for example, Goethe describes a political crisis as a matter of elemental violence once more.<sup>376</sup> *Novelle's* fire qua symbolically deformative force transgresses discursive boundaries between nature and society, story and discourse, blazing anachronically from narrative prehistory to narrative present, from the uncle's story into the princess's imagination, even lingering like a ghostly afterimage à la Purkinje on the very retina of her eye as it fogs with fear.

### **1.b *The outbreak of tiger and lion: The social imaginary as manipulated by the media***

Before crossing the semiotic border separating society from nature, the princess and uncle encounter images of trained animals performing in the circus that has entered town (497). Of note here is the narrator's framing of the images in a context of social viewing: "[Sie durften] die

---

<sup>375</sup> Cf. *WA* I/42, pg. 234.

<sup>376</sup> As Eugenie puts it in her monologue: "Diesem Reiche droht / Ein jäher Umsturz. Die zum großen Leben / Gefügten Elemente wollen sich / Nicht wechselseitig mehr mit Liebeskraft / Zu stets erneuter Einigkeit umfassen. / Sie fliehen sich, und einzeln tritt nun jedes / Kalt in sich selbst zurück. Wo blieb der Ahnherrn / Gewalt'ger Geist, der sie zu *einem* Zweck / Vereinigte, die feindlich Kämpfenden? / Der diesem großen Volk als Führer sich, / Als König und als Vater dargestellt? / Er ist entschwunden! Was uns übrigbleibt, / Ist ein Gespenst..." (2827-2837, emphasis in original). The passage figures society on the model of an organism, a system that must constantly maintain itself in active self-unity ("Zu *stets erneuter* Einigkeit") through reciprocal relations among its elements, which thereby coalesce "zum großen Leben." At the same time, the paternal king, who manages to catalyze this purposive social unification ("der sie zu *einem* Zweck / Vereinigte"), now lingers on as a mere "Gespenst," haunting a society that has decayed into atomistic individuation ("einzeln tritt nun jedes / Kalt in sich selbst zurück"), indeed, returned to a sort of "Naturzustand." Cf. Goethe. *Die natürliche Tochter*. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1963. Pg. 85.

bunten, kolossalen Gemälde nicht übersehen, die mit heftigen Farben und kräftigen Bildern jene fremden Tiere darstellten, welche *der friedliche Staatsbürger zu schauen unüberwindliche Lust* empfinden sollte. Der grimmig ungeheure Tiger sprang auf einen Mohren los, im Begriff ihn zu zerreißen...” (497, emphasis added). The images attempt to elicit the citizen’s “unüberwindliche Lust” for scenes of primal violence, as if such a performance might pacify this sensationalist desire in place of more political forms of satisfaction that would render “der friedliche Staatsbürger” violent. This civilization, it would seem, rests on a recalcitrant residuum of ineluctable barbarism. Friedrich continues to provide a critical interpretation of the images just conveyed in narratorial description:

-- “Es ist wunderbar,” versetzte der Fürst [Friedrich], daß der Mensch durch Schreckliches immer aufgeregter sein will. Drinnen liegt der Tiger ganz ruhig in seinem Kerker, und hier muß er grimmig auf einen Mohren losfahren, damit man glaube, dergleichen inwendig ebenfalls zu sehen; es ist an Mord und Totschlag noch nicht genug, an Brand und Untergang: *die Bänkelsänger müssen es an jener Ecke wiederholen*. Die guten Menschen wollen eingeschüchtert sein, um hinterdrein erst recht zu fühlen, wie schön und löblich es sei, frei Atem zu holen. (498, emphasis added)

The animals are actually “ganz ruhig” inside, but must be advertised as “grimmig” to the public outside. In associating a “Brand” with the human desire for sensationalized entertainments, Friedrich seems to differentiate implicitly between his own continual repetition of the tale of the first fire, conducted perhaps for the sake of working-through, and the scandalous news relayed via the stories repeated by “die Bänkelsänger.” Friedrich’s brief remarks sketch a media-critique: in their function as oral reporters of the news, such nomadic ‘balladeers’ set images and stories into public circulation and thereby come to determine the desires and imagination of the social body.

Tom Cheesam has argued that this mention of the *Bänkelsänger* allows the text to be read as “ein Palimpsest, eine Transformation des Bänkelsangs.”<sup>377</sup> According to this reading,

---

<sup>377</sup> Cf. Tom Cheesam. “Goethes ‘Novelle’ und der Bänkelsang.” In: *Goethe-Jahrbuch*. Vol. 111. 1994. Pg. 125-140 (here: 130).

Friedrich's continual repetition of the tale of the first fire renders him, critique of the *Bänkelsang* to the contrary, a "Krypto-Bänkelsänger."<sup>378</sup> Even the traveling family of performers become aestheticized *Bänkelsänger* on this view. Taking a different approach, the following discussion will take's Friedrich's critique seriously by focusing on how he channels much broader nineteenth-century political fears about the capacity of this oral praxis to manipulate the social imaginary and canalize collective desire. If the pathology of the imagination was an individual psychological problem for the princess in the previous section, then Friedrich's critique of the *Bänkelsänger* now generalizes that pathology into a societal problem: the human penchant for "Schreckliches" and, following the scare, the reassuring feeling of safety ("frei Atem zu holen"). In order to outline how the *Novelle*'s casual mention of a popularized oral medium of news-relaying implicitly points toward a social imaginary susceptible to violence, it will be worthwhile to take a detour that investigates the status of the *Bänkelsang* in Goethe's work and its more general social function and medial hardware. In the fifth chapter, second book of *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung*, such *Bänkelsänger* are described as capable of inordinately influencing the masses by colonizing their collective imagination:

Am stärksten aber wird das Volk gerührt von allem, was unter seine Augen gebracht wird. Weit mehr als eine ausführliche Beschreibung zieht ein gesudeltes Gemälde, ein kindischer Holzschnitt den dunklen Menschen an. Und wie viel Tausende sind, die in dem vortrefflichsten Bilde nur das Märchen erblicken. Die großen Bilder der Bänkelsänger drücken sich weit tiefer ein als ihre Lieder, obgleich auch diese die Einbildungskraft mit starken Banden fesseln.<sup>379</sup>

The semantics of impression ("drückten sich [...] tiefer ein") as well as the image's capacity to enthrall the "Einbildungskraft" elaborate Friedrich's media-critique in *Novelle*.

The *Bänkelsang* was a common, itinerant fairground attraction and constituted an early form of news reportage conducted with the medial implements of illustrated images and

---

<sup>378</sup> Ibid. Pg. 127.

<sup>379</sup> Cf. *WA* I/51, Pg. 150. Emphasis added.

accompanied songs, precursors to the *Kunstballade*.<sup>380</sup> Image, word, and music were thus theatrically synthesized in order to communicate noteworthy events of the day in a public forum, often in a sensationalist manner that appealed to the lowest common denominator. Typical themes for such illustrated songs included murders and other crimes, marital affairs, love stories (often between classes), political satire, natural catastrophes, and horrible accidents.<sup>381</sup> Goethe was usually quite negative about the *Bänkelsang*, using the adjectival form in a denunciatory manner, e.g. in his reviews of the individual poems published by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1806).<sup>382</sup> If Goethe hoped that such popular (*volkstümliche*) poems would move away from the *Bänkelsang* into more aesthetic spheres, he could also judge a literary work unworthy for not sufficiently channeling popular taste.<sup>383</sup>

Indeed, Goethe's substantive fears that such a theatricalized medium, with its use of images and music in particular, would overly distort the daily news and focus on what could easily grip the collective imagination of the masses were answered just three years after his death. A certain Friedrich Blaul writes in his memoir *Träume und Schäume vom Rhein* (1835) about how Bavarian principalities have begun to censor and publically regulate the *Bänkelsänger* in order to prevent the dissemination of inappropriate, tabloidesque stories and what one would today call

---

<sup>380</sup> Cf. Karl Veit Riedel. *Der Bänkelsang. Wesen und Funktion einer volkstümlichen Kunst*. Hamburg: Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte. 1963.

<sup>381</sup> Cf. Leander Petzoldt. *Bänkelsang. Vom historischen Bänkelsang zum literarischen Chanson*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler. 1974.

<sup>382</sup> He judged the "Rattenfänger von Hameln," for example, to "Zuckt auf's Bänkelsängerische, aber nicht unfein," while "Die Greuelhochzeit" was deemed an "Ungeheurer Fall, bänkelsängerisch, aber lobenswert behandelt." Such poems are good despite their proximity to the sensationalist form. Cf. *WA* I/40, pg. 340-3.

<sup>383</sup> In a devastating review of two fairytales anonymously published by Zacharias, Goethe does just this as he simultaneously reflects on the multi-medial hardware of the *Bänkelsang* qua performance: "ihm fehlt der Bänkelsängerblick, der in der Welt nichts als Abenteuer, Strafgericht, Liebe, Mord und Todschatz sieht, just wie alles in den Quadraten seiner gemahlten Leinwand steht." Cf. "Zwei schöne neue Märlein: als 1) Von der schönen Melusinen; einer Meerfey. 2) Von einer untreuen Braut, die der Teufel holen soll. Der lieben Jugend, und dem Frauenzimmer zu beliebiger Kurzweil in Reime verfasst. Leipzig in der Jubilatemesse 1772." In: *WA* I/37, pg. 229-30.



‘fake news.’<sup>384</sup> Censorship and state surveillance of the *Bänkelsänger* were oriented around the political goal of educating the people (*Volkserziehung*). When Friedrich critiques “die bunten, kolossalen Gemälde” in town and associates them with the *Bänkelsänger*, who repeat tales of “Tod und Mordschlag [...] Brand und Untergang [...] an jeder Ecke,” the narrator uses the term “Fürst” rather than “Oheim” or “Friedrich” to designate him, emphasizing his social status as a noble. The nobility’s dismay in *Novelle* that “der friedliche Staatsbürger” (497) finds such monstrous spectacles as lions and tigers entertaining thus invokes an ambivalent political discourse about the extent to which these immediate, ‘rooted’ songs and images that emanate from the people should be regulated. As Blaul makes clear, sensational *Bänkelgesänge* were “auf das Volk ebensowenig günstig [...] als öffentliche Hinrichtungen,” and in the background of this statement an anxiety becomes audible that such unregulated public circulation of news via song and image could channel collective desires and imaginations into a public beheading of a political authority, such as Louis XVI.

Friedrich’s discussion of the *Bänkelsang* thus expands the scope of the pathology of the imagination from an individual to a societal level by channeling the critical dimension of Goethe’s ambivalent engagement with the multimedial news-relaying practice. Despite Friedrich’s critical remarks, “die bunten, kolossalen Gemälde” depicting lion and tiger in town come to pre-contextualize the event of the princess’s encounter with the tiger in nature. Unlike her media-critical uncle in this case, the princess and her imagination remain primed: “heranspringend, wie sie [die Fürstin] ihn [den Tiger] vor kurzem gemalt gesehen, kam er entgegen, und dieses Bild zu den furchtbaren Bildern, die sie soeben beschäftigten, machte den wundersamsten Eindruck” (502). The structural principle of the phobic imprint here again allows a present event to be seen as the retrospection of a past image (seen in town) or as the anticipation

---

<sup>384</sup> Quoted in: Petzoldt. *Bänkelsang*. Pg. 15.

of a future event (in nature) – allows, that is, the generation of an anachronic event. Honorio, called “der Ritter” by the narrator, shoots the tiger or “das Ungeheuer” twice, first missing, then succeeding (502). The princess even pre-contextualizes not just the tiger’s entry, but the event of Honorio’s heroic deed:

Der Jüngling war schön, er war herangesprengt, wie ihn die Fürstin *oft* im *Lanzen- und Ringelspiel* gesehen hatte. *Ebenso* traf in der Reitbahn seine Kugel im Vorbeispringen den Türkenkopf auf dem Pfahl gerade unter dem Turban in die Stirne, *ebenso* spießte er, flüchtig heransprengend, mit dem blanken Säbel das *Mohrenhaupt* vom Boden auf. In allen solchen Künsten war er gewandt und glücklich, hier kam beides zustatten. (502-3, emphasis added)

It is as if Honorio were engaged once more in one of the “Lanzen- und Ringelspiel[e]” that the princess repeatedly witnessed beforehand. At the same time, the mention of “das Mohrenhaupt” recalls how the tiger was depicted on the image in town, “grimmig auf einen Mohren losfahren[d]” (498), as if to suggest that the violence attributed in representation to the tiger is in actuality located in Honorio, whose very name is emblematic of the aristocratic martial code of honor. Humans here are the true purveyors of violence, not the exotic animals. Indeed, with the news that the lion rests above as the fire rages below, the hunt suddenly ceases to be one among many such ritually codified courtly games and becomes earnest, an existential matter of survival. The scenes of violence against an Orientalized other that pre-contextualize the princess’s witnessing of Honorio’s heroic deed thus also foreshadow the arrival of the Orientalized family, the mother and “der schwarzäugige, schwarzlockige Knabe, der eine Flöte in der Hand hielt” (504). In a subtle ironic twist, it is this family that will pacify the violent potential of the hunting party through the power of music and poetry.

***1.c The arrival of the family: The sentence’s freedom to overcome itself***

The narrative’s prose transitions in three phases into poetic verse, corresponding to the three members of the family that arrive onto the scene centered on the tiger slain by Honorio: (1)

the mother's lament for the tiger, a discontinuous natural speech of affective exclamation; (2) the father's praise of creation, a continuous poetic prose; (3) the child's sung trio of poems, themselves repeated twice: first in front of the prince with his family as musical accompaniment, then in front of the lion with only mother and guard as audience. Like Mignon's poem about a land presumed to be Italy in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, the mother's lament forms a proto-poetic speech embedded within the narrative's pragmatic frame. Wilhelm takes on the role of a literary critic as he seeks to integrate Mignon's lyric into the narrative, to 'frame' and thereby contain it:

Melodie und Ausdruck gefielen unserm Freunde besonders, ob er gleich die Worte nicht alle verstehen konnte. Er ließ sich die Strophen wiederholen und erklären, schrieb sie auf und übersetzte sie ins Deutsche. Aber die Originalität der Wendungen konnte er nur von ferne nachahmen. Die kindliche Unschuld des Ausdrucks verschwand, indem *die gebrochene Sprache* übereinstimmend und das Unzusammenhängende verbunden ward.<sup>385</sup>

If Wilhelm in the *Lehrjahre* carries out the narrativization of the lyric by translating Mignon's poem and rendering its fragmented language semantically coherent, absorbing it into the novel's pragmatic frame, then *Novelle* carries out the inverse operation of the lyricization of the narrative.

The mother's lament, like Mignon's poem, is fragmented and in need of translation:

Den gewaltsamen Ausbrüchen der Leidenschaft dieses unglücklichen Weibes folgte, zwar *unterbrochen, stoßweise ein Strom von Worten, wie ein Bach sich in Absätzen von Felsen zu Felsen stürzt*. Eine natürliche Sprache, *kurz und abgebrochen*, machte sich eindringlich und rührend. Vergebens würde man sie *in unsern Mundarten übersetzen* wollen; den *ungefähren* Inhalt dürfen wir nicht verfehlen: 'Sie haben dich ermordet, armes Tier! ermordet ohne Not! (504-5)

When confronted with a translated lyric, only the "ungefähren Inhalt" of which is recounted, within a narrative's pragmatic frame, one can follow the narrator's interpretation of the framed speech or see whether the framed speech implicitly reflects on or undermines its pragmatic frame.

Though her "natürliche Sprache" has been translated into complete German sentences, the

---

<sup>385</sup> HA 7 145-6

mother's lament already implicitly begins as an anticipation of poetic verse: her first exclamation forms a perfect line of iambic pentameter, "Sie **haben dich ermordet, armes Tier!**" At the same time, she continues to relate how

Du warst zahm und hättest dich gern ruhig niedergelassen und auf uns gewartet; denn deine Fußballen schmerzten dich, und deine Krallen hatten keine Kraft mehr! Wie lange begleiteten wir dich auf deinen Fahrten, wie lange war deine Gesellschaft uns wichtig und fruchtbar! Uns, uns ganz eigentlich kam die Speise von den Fressern und süße Labung von den Starken. So wird es nicht mehr sein! Wehe! Wehe! (504).<sup>386</sup>

Her apostrophe refers to the deceased corpse of the tiger before her as an intimate "Du," as if she were able to bring the absent dead back into a kind of imaginative presence via the act of address. This address may very well be part of a genuine poem in a foreign language intelligible to the narrator only as broken speech.<sup>387</sup> At the same time, the mother exposes Honorio's previous heroic deed as an impuissant spectacle performed for the princess, for the animal was tame, even injured, to begin with. The martial code of honor for which Honorio stands as well as the premise of the courtly hunt, which seemed to have taken on existential urgency beyond aristocratic

---

<sup>386</sup> Commentaries note the confluence of three influences on the passage: (1) a "Grönländisches Todtenlied" from Herder's *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* ("Wehe mir, dass ich deinen Sitz ansehen soll, der nun leer ist! Deine Mutter bemühet sich vergebens, dir die Kleider zu trocknen!"), from which Goethe adopts the speech-situation of a mother's apostrophic address to a deceased 'child'; (2) a funeral lament for the deceased Mohican warrior Uncas in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* ("Obgleich ihre Worte durch die vielfachen, stärkeren Ausbrüche der Empfindung unzusammenhängend erschienen, so würde eine Übertragung derselben doch regelmäßig wiederkehrende Wechsel und in ihnen eine Reihenfolge von Gedanken zutage gebracht haben. [...] 'Warum hast du uns verlassen, Stolz der Wapanachki?'), from which Goethe adopts the pragmatic frame of the narrator's translation of "Ausbrüche der Leidenschaft," a catalogue of the deceased's strengths as synecdochally represented by its body parts (e.g., paws and feet); and (3) Samson's riddle from *Judges* ("Speise ging vom dem Fresser und Süßigkeit von dem Starken," *Richter* 14:14, *Lutherbibel*). In Goethe's imagination, the lamentations of Cooper's Native Americans are, like Mignon's song in the *Lehrjahre*, in need of translation, and yet they recall the familiar *Volkspoésie* collected and edited by Herder while at the same time channeling the legend of Samson, who found a honeycomb in a lion's corpse after wrestling it to death. Cf. Johann Gottfried von Herder. *Sämmtliche Werke. Zur schönen Literatur und Kunst. 7. Theil: Stimmen der Völker in Liedern. Neu herausgegeben durch Johann von Müller. 1. Antheilung. Ueber Ossian und die Lieder der alten Völker*. Stuttgart & Tübingen: J.G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung. 1828 [orig. 1773]. Pg. 97-99; Hermann Meyer. *Natürlicher Enthusiasmus: Das Morgenländische in Goethes 'Novelle.'* Heidelberg: Lothar Stiehm Verlag. 1973; James Fenimore Cooper. *Die Lederstrumpferzählungen. Der letzte Mohikaner*. Meersburg/Leipzig. 1936. Pg. 410-412; Sp. Wukadonovic. *Goethes 'Novelle.' Der Schauplatz – Coopersche Einflüsse*. Halle a.S.: Max Niemeyer. 1909; *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Ed. Michael D. Coogan. Oxford: OUP. 2007.

<sup>387</sup> Jonathan Culler has repeatedly returned to apostrophe in his studies of the lyric, seeing it not just as one poetic figure among many, but as essential to the very nature of lyrical language. For Culler, apostrophic address has the power to lend agency or voice to inanimate beings within the communicative scenario constituted via the act of poetic speech. Culler's view of apostrophe ultimately verges on seeing it as a kind of animistic spell. Cf. Jonathan Culler. "Lyric, History, and Genre." *New Literary History*. Vol. 40, No. 4. Autumn 2009. Pg. 879-899.

convention when the tiger appeared, are thus retroactively deflated by the lamenting mother. There here emerges another sociopolitical dimension to the princess's pathology of the imagination, for she was unable to 'see' what was before her eyes (an injured creature), seeing instead a monstrous animal that appeared to render the "Lanzen- und Ringenspiel" of the court an epic matter of life and death (502).

When the political authority, the prince, arrives onto the scene, the family will strategically convince him to allow them to tame the loose lion roaming above through music and poetry. Even before the child properly sings, however, the narrative delicately stages the prince's persuasion through a series of transitions. The first is the coincidence of music and militaristic order: the child's flute begins to play in the background as the prince simultaneously orders Honorio to make a fire with which to scare the lion. The child's music intertwines with the prince's "Befehle" so as to render their illocutionary force impotent. Indeed, Honorio will later be encountered melancholically looking westward toward the setting sun, not exactly following the noble authority's commands. As the narrative immediately continues: "Das Kind verfolgte seine Melodie, *die keine war, eine Tonfolge ohne Gesetz, und vielleicht eben deswegen so herzergreifend; die Umstehenden schienen wie bezaubert von der Bewegung einer liederartigen Weise, als der Vater mit anständigem Enthusiasmus zu reden anfing...*" (507, emphasis added). The child's music is not discontinuous, as his mother's discrete, natural speech of exclamation was, nor is it, however, articulated into a sequentially ordered "Melodie" that would follow an organizational "Gesetz." Rather, this lawless music forms a mellifluous, pre-articulate stream of sounds, an enchanting "Tonfolge" that subtly erodes the illocutionary force behind the prince's commands in the imperative tense ("vollende [...] Besetze [...]! Macht ein Feuer an," 507) so as to annul the legal force potentiating the speech act of decree.

It is no surprise, then, that the second transition in the narrative's metamorphosis into lyric – the father's praise of creation – begins by appealing to the prince's wisdom and subtly qualifying his political authority by situating it within the broader context of a divine authority: “Gott hat dem Fürsten Weisheit gegeben *und zugleich* die Erkenntnis, daß alle Gotteswerke weise sind, jedes nach seiner Art” (507, emphasis added). In conversation with Eckermann, Goethe referred to the father's speech as the “pathetische[ ] Rede des Mannes, die schon poetische Prosa ist.”<sup>388</sup> The father's continuous praise represents an intensification (*Steigerung*) of the mother's discontinuous lament. Hermann Meyer has demonstrated how this speech forms a rich tapestry of Old Testament allusions, but the father's rhetoric also refers more locally to the narrative-pragmatic frame within which it is embedded.<sup>389</sup> Indeed, the father's use of deixis begins to erode the very distinction between narrative frame and framed speech by indexing the context of the natural setting surrounding the characters so as to thematize it within the very text of his speech:

*Seht den Felsen, wie er fest steht und sich nicht rührt, der Witterung trotzt und dem Sonnenschein! Uralte Bäume zieren sein Haupt, und so gekrönt schaut er weit umher; stürzt aber ein Teil herunter, so will es nicht bleiben, was es war: es fällt zertrümmert in viele Stücke und bedeckt die Seite des Hanges. Aber auch da wollen sie nicht verharren, mutwillig springen sie tief hinab, der Bach nimmt sie auf, zum Flusse trägt er sie. Nicht widerstehend, nicht widerspenstig, nein, glatt und abgerundet gewinnen sie schneller ihren Weg und gelangen von Fluß zum Ozean... (507)*

This first half of the speech conveys Goethe's Neptunianism in Biblical cadences drawn from the Book of Job. At the same time, the father indexes the rocky mountainside on which the protagonists stand and proceeds to narrate the geological formation of this landscape, providing a visionary prehistory of the narrative setting in poetic prose. This is the first means through which his language begins to incorporate the pragmatic frame into the framed speech, overtaking that

<sup>388</sup> Cf. Gespräch mit Eckermann, 18. Jan. 1827. *WA* 5/6, Pg. 2

<sup>389</sup> Cf. Hermann Meyer. *Natürlicher Enthusiasmus. Das Morgenländische in Goethes 'Novelle.'* Heidelberg: Lothar Stiehm. 1973.

frame, as it were. Key to the father's speech is the gentle transitionality of the geological formative process. When Thales and Anaxagoras debate the nature of mountain formation in *Classische Walpurgisnacht*, the non-violent character of such formative processes in nature is also emphasized:

ANAXAGORAS.

Hast du, o Thales, je, in Einer Nacht,  
Solch einen Berg aus Schlamm hervorgebracht?

THALES.

Nie war Natur und ihr lebendiges Fließen  
Auf Tag und Nacht und Stunden angewiesen;  
Sie bildet regelnd jegliche Gestalt,  
Und selbst im Großen ist es nicht Gewalt. (*Faust II*, V. 7859-64)

Already in his account of the cliff's creation-history, then, the father's speech subtly engages in the prince's strategic persuasion towards pacifism with regard to the lion, for even the sublime mountains above them ("gekrönt" with trees as the prince may be by a crown) formed peacefully. The rocks themselves are attributed a kind of agency: "so [as roughly hewn fragments] wollen sie nicht verharren." The cliff actively desires transformation: "so will er [der Fels] nicht bleiben, was es war." Geological formation proceeds in pacifist manner, for the stones are "[n]icht widerstrebend, nicht widerspenstig." In relation to the first transition in the metamorphosis of prose into verse, the father takes up the metaphor used by the narrator to describe the mother's fragmented speech: "ein Strom von Worten, wie ein Bach sich in Absätzen von Felsen zu Felsen stürzt" (504). Rather than the stream's course being dictated by the discrete rocks, now the rocks themselves fall into the stream, their shape smoothed out by the stream's flowing. It is as if the father appropriated the narrator's naturalizing metaphor for the mother's speech, breaking the pragmatic frame from within his framed speech, in order to literalize it and so emphasize the great continuity (rather than fragmentation) that binds the rigid mineral realm with the gently flowing,

reshaping water. In the discursive flow of his own speech, the father thereby influences his audience of listeners to proceed in a manner that is “[n]icht widerstehend, nicht widerspenstig.”

Having recounted a kind of creation-story (*Schöpfungsgeschichte*) of the cliffs on the mountainside, the father’s use of deictic shifters continue to interweave the immediate context of the natural setting into the greater order of creation. He even begins with a latent allusion to the telescope:

Warum seht ihr aber im Fernen umher? Betrachtet *hier* die Biene! noch spät im Herbst sammelt sie emsig und baut sich ein Haus, winkel- und waagerecht, als Meister und Geselle. Schaut die Ameise *da!* sie kennt ihren Weg und verliert ihn nicht, sie baut eine Wohnung aus Grashalmen, Erdbröseln und Kiefernadeln, sie baut es in die Höhe und wölbt es zu; aber sie hat umsonst gearbeitet, denn das Pferd stampft und scharrt alles auseinander; *seht hin!*” (507-8, emphasis added).

In a sense, the entire pathology of the imagination consisted in a circumspective seeing “im Fernen umher,” a looking past the present event. The father now begins to ‘heal’ this pathology, allowing the protagonists to see, as if for the first time, the order of creation immanent in nature. As the first sentence’s “Herbstnebel” makes clear, the season is autumn, and so “die Biene” here takes on two roles: that of representative for its species, for its ‘rung’ on the ladder of nature, as well as that of an actual bee deictically pointed out “hier [...] im Herbst.” The father makes no facile recourse to a transcendent order, however, but recognizes the existence of great violence in nature: the ant’s “Haus” (507) is destroyed by the horse’s stamping hoof, while the horse itself is ridden by man, who may also tame the lion:

Es [das Pferd] zertritt ihre Balken und zerstreut ihre Planken, ungeduldig schnaubt es und kann nicht rasten, denn der Herr hat das Roß zum Gesellen des Windes gemacht und zum Gefährten des Sturmes; daß es den Mann dahin trage, wohin er will, und die Frau, wohin sie begehrt. Aber im Palmenwald trat er auf, der Löwe, ernsten Schrittes durchzog er die Wüste, dort herrscht er über alles Getier, und nichts widersteht ihm. Doch der Mensch weiß ihn [den Löwen] zu zähmen, und das grausamste der Geschöpfe hat Ehrfurcht vor dem Ebenbilde Gottes [...] Denn in der Löwengrube scheute sich Daniel nicht; er blieb fest und getrost, und das wilde Brüllen unterbrach nicht seinen frommen Gesang. (508).



In the father's speech, natural violence becomes intelligible once contextualized within ever expanding frames of hierarchized reference; what may appear to be senseless destruction at the level of an ant's life becomes part of the horse's form of life, which in turn is embedded within that of humans, "Ebenbilde Gottes" (508). On the whole, the father's strategic use of deixis thus functions to blur pragmatic frame and framed speech, the immediacy of his narrative context and the Biblical citations of his rhetoric. The father's invocation of the lion, for example, seems but a citation, yet another creature in his inventory of creation, and yet the lion may also quite specifically refer to the lion resting above the hunting party he is currently addressing. His frequent imperatives to see ("Seht den Felsen [...] Betrachtet hier die Biene! [...] seht hin!"), usually coupled with deictic shifters, also recall the Gospel of Matthew in particular:

*Sehet* die Vögel unter dem Himmel an; sie säen nicht, sie ernten nicht, sie sammeln nicht in die Scheunen; und euer himmlischer Vater nährt sie doch. Seid ihr denn nicht viel mehr denn sie? [...] Und warum sorget ihr für die Kleidung? *Schaut* die Lilien auf dem Felde, wie sie wachsen: sie arbeiten nicht, auch spinnen sie nicht. Ich sage euch, daß auch Salomo in aller seiner Herrlichkeit nicht bekleidet gewesen ist wie derselben eins. (*Lutherbibel: Matthaeus, 6:26-29*; emphasis added).

The theology of this passage envisions nature as an order of providential care. Indeed, Christ begins his exhortations to see such an order in nature by isolating anxiety as a form of idolatry: "Darum sage ich euch, Sorget nicht für euer Leben" (*Matthaeus 6:25*). The father's speech thus synthesizes a New Testament use of a perceptual imperative to see, meant to allow believers to overcome their worldly anxieties in perceiving the sustaining abundance of creation, with a Goethean emphasis on the pacifist unfolding of nature's transformative power. Through this rhetorical synthesis, the speech implicitly outlines the 'cure,' as it were, for the pathology of the imagination, the anxiety-ridden confusion of visual perception and mental apperception that plagues the princess and even the society of *Novelle*.

One symptom that this corrective reconfiguration has already begun to take place can be found in how the narrator shifts his description of the father's speech. The narrator frames the father's monologue as spoken "mit *anständigem* Enthusiasmus" (507, emphasis added) before 'hearing' the speech; after the father finishes, this has transformed into a "mit dem Ausdruck eines *natürlichen* Enthusiasmus gehaltene Rede" (508, emphasis added). The narrator's perception of a foreigner's laudable decorum (*Anstand*) before the prince and his court has morphed into one of a *natural* rhetorical enthusiasm. The Orientalized family has become less foreign; they now form a kind of secularized Holy Family. Indeed, critics have continually debated the status of *Novelle*'s Christianizing tendency toward its conclusion, some such as Ernst Beutler seeing the subject matter's origins in the time when Goethe was still a practicing believer, others such as Erwin Wäsche seeing instead a secular humanism at work.<sup>390</sup> In attending to the moments of transition from the father's "poetische Prosa" to the narrative-pragmatic frame it begins to overtake, Goethe's use of Biblical sources becomes legible as a secularization that preserves Christian theologemes (such as the idolatry of anxiety in the Gospel of Matthew) as it simultaneously transforms them, re-envisioning them for a post-Christian context by grafting them onto a natural scientific account of peaceful geological formation characterized by *Naturfrömmigkeit*. The prince's court hears biblical reminiscences in the father's speech as if for the first time, as if "[e]ine natürliche Sprache" (503), which scholars such as Meyer have related to Goethe's study of Herder's *Vom Geiste der ebräischen Poesie* (1782-3), which envisioned the Biblical language of the Old Testament as a kind of originary *Naturpoesie*.<sup>391</sup>

---

<sup>390</sup> Cf. Ernst Beutler. "Ursprung und Gehalt von Goethes 'Novelle.'" (cf. footnote 15); Erwin Wäsche. *Honorio und der Löwe: Studie über Goethes 'Novelle' mit einem Abdruck derselben*. Salckingen: Hermann Stratz Verlag, 1947.

<sup>391</sup> Another source can be found in Eichhorn. While working on *Hermann und Dorothea* in the 1790s, Goethe studied Eichhorn's *Einleitung ins Alte Testament* while concurrently reading Wolf's studies of Homer (Wolf himself borrowed his philological methods from Eichhorn, who first pioneered them for then-nascent Biblical criticism). Eichhorn there associates the enthused rhetoric of the Old Testament prophets with poetry: "Propheten sprachen wie Dichter. Und konnten sie auch im Zustand ihrer Begeisterung anders? Wer als Begeisterter redet, wird zu Bildern und

The narrative carefully relates just how imbricated the exchange of performative musical roles among the familial trio are: the child now begins to sing his poems as he switches roles with the father, who takes the child's flute, while the mother "trat hie und da als zweite Stimme mit ein" (508). Taking up his father's final reference to Daniel in the lion's den, the child's first poem is citational in character:

Aus den Gruben, hier im Graben  
 Hör ich des Propheten Sang;  
 Engel schweben, **ihn** zu laben,  
 Wäre da **dem Guten** bang?  
 Löw und Löwin, hin und wider,  
 Schmiegen sich um ihn heran;  
 Ja, **die** sanften, frommen Lieder  
**Habens ihnen angetan!** (508)

Emphasis has been added to first and second poems in order to explicate the precise substitutions conducted by the child's variation-in-repetition. Like the father in his rhetorical speech, the child in his poem uses deictic shifters to cast himself into the role of Daniel, now on the mountainside: "*hier* im Graben [...] hör *ich* des Propheten Sang." The child hears the prophet's song but also sings it. He thereby speaks the fact that he hears his very own act of song about the prophet. The second poem accordingly transitions from the third-personal situation of Daniel in the lion's den to the child's first-personal situation, shared with the courtly audience:

Engel schweben auf und nieder,  
**Uns** in Tönen zu erlaben  
 Welch ein himmlischer Gesang!  
 In den Gruben, in dem Graben  
 Wäre da **dem Kinde** bang?  
**Diese** sanften, frommen Lieder  
 Lassen Unglück nicht heran;  
 Engel schweben hin und wider,

---

Vergleichungen und Fiktionen fortgerissen. Bey allen Nationen fällt auch der Ursprung der Propheten und Orakel in solche Zeiten, wo noch keine Prosa existirt, und die poetische Farbe die natürliche aller Reden ist; und es war unter andern auch Folge ihres alten Ursprungs, daß auch die spätern Zeiten ihre Göttersprüche in hohe Poesien kleideten" (6). Cf. Johann Gottfried Eichhorn. *Einleitung ins Alte Testament. Dritter Teil.* 2. Ed. Reutlingen: bei Johannes Erzginer. 1790.

### Und so ist es schon getan. (509)

The child here transforms his citation of Daniel's situation into an interpretive frame for his own communicative situation. He has cast himself into the role of Daniel so as to reflect on the narrative-pragmatic context within which his poems are situated. A situation that cannot have an anxious outcome ("bang") now faces not Daniel, "dem Guten," but "dem Kinde." The prophet's song has now morphed into that of the angels, itself channeled by the child. No longer do "Engel schweben, *ihn* zu laben," as in the first song, but the angels now 'refresh' the child and courtly audience alike with music: "Engel schweben [...] *Uns* in Tönen zu erlaben." The child's poetic speech here becomes 'auto-generative:' he does not prosaically describe or refer, but speaks his pragmatic situation into being, collapsing the narrative frame around the lyric in favor of a simultaneity of the poetic act of speech and the contextual situation thereby spoken.<sup>392</sup> The deictic shifters accordingly reference the communicative circuit formed by the songs themselves, now "*diese* [...] Lieder" rather than "*Die* [...] Lieder," and the listening audience of "uns," which includes the child.

The poem's last line thus transforms from the declaration of an action conducted by the songs to pacify the lions ("die Lieder / Habens ihnen [den Löwen] angetan") into an illocutionary act of poetic song. This poetic act protects the child in this potentially violent 'den' of courtly hunters by taming the humans and ends with a statement of its own success: "Und so ist es schon getan," the child's poem has effected their pacification. All three family members now join together in a prayer-like song that praises a vision of creation in its harmonic totality rather than the limited, imaginatively pathological vision that has plagued the novella's protagonists: "Denn

---

<sup>392</sup> This is Klaus Hempfer's formulation, which he uses to delineate a transhistorical conception of the lyric not as genre, but as mode of verbal presentation on the same plane of generality as narrative and drama in the senses of mimesis and diegesis. Cf. Klaus W. Hempfer. *Lyrik. Skizze einer systematischen Theorie*. Stuttgart: Steiner. 2014. Pg. 30-45.

der Ewge herrscht auf Erden, / Über Meere herrscht *sein Blick*; / Löwen sollen Lämmer werden, / Und die Welle schwankt zurück” (509, emphasis added). The hunting party may now, like this “Welle,” restrain itself from killing a second animal, liberate itself from the cycle of anachronic events that are *already* pre-contextualized by phobic imprints *still* present to the imagination. The pragmatic consequence is the prevention of further needless violence: “Blankes Schwert erstarrt im Hiebe, / Glaub und Hoffnung sind erfüllt; / Wundertätig ist die Liebe, / Die sich im Gebet enthüllt” (509). In summary, the child’s first two poems transition in status from (1) a citation of the tale of Daniel in the lion’s den to (2) an interpretive frame for the child’s own narrative situation, a frame with which the child may replace the narrator’s own pragmatic frame. The child’s poems thus execute the lyricization of the narrative, the narrative’s staging of the lyric as a narrative event that transcends the chronologic of narrative emplotment. The child’s second poem specifically does this by ‘healing’ the princess and hunting trio. Every listener has accordingly been transformed by the aesthetic experience of poetry:

Alles war still, hörte, horchte, und nur erst, als die Töne verhallten, konnte man den *Eindruck* bemerken und allenfalls beobachten. Alles war *beschwichtigt*, *jeder in seiner Art gerührt*. Der Fürst, als wenn er *erst jetzt* das übersähe, das ihn vor kurzem bedroht hatte, blickte nieder auf seine Gemahlin, die, an ihn gelehnt, sich nicht versagte, das gestickte Tüchlein hervorzuziehen und *die Augen damit zu bedecken*. Es tat ihr wohl, die jugendliche Brust erleichtert zu fühlen, mit dem die vorhergehenden Minuten sie belastet hatten. Eine vollkommene Stille *beherrschte die Menge*; man schien die Gefahren vergessen zu haben, unter den Brand und von oben das Erstehen eines bedenklich ruhenden Löwen. (509, emphasis added)

It is no longer the “furchtbaren Bildern, die [...] den wundersamsten Eindruck [machten]” (502), but rather the child’s liberating acoustic “Eindruck.” A stillness now rules over (“beherrschte”) this potentially violent ‘mob’ (“die Menge”). The process of healing becomes clearest when one examines the condition of the princess’s eyes, including that of the mind’s eye: they were first described as “ihre glänzenden Augen” (493) when she looked upon the old ruins through the

distortive lens of the telescope; then her vision before the anachronic event of the fire was “umnebelt, ihre Augen verdüstert” (501); in contrast, she now lifts her handkerchief, “die Augen damit zu bedecken.” The fearful, subjective projections of her ‘lustrous’ eyes no longer cast the world in a “bänglichen Anschein” (501), no longer transpose onto present events an inner fog of anxiety cast outward. Her eyes are instead covered, her ears open to the present moment the lyric unfolds before her, attuned to the tonal flow that refreshes her senses and imagination alike.

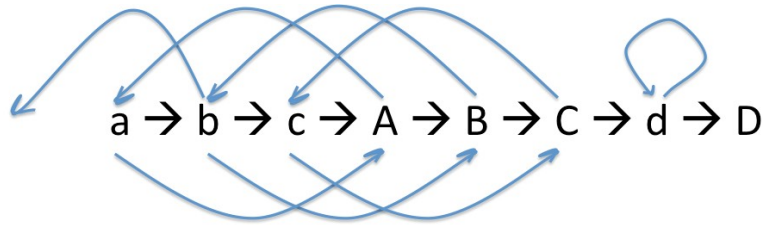
If even the deadly, sharp mountainous rocks may be rendered gentle and smooth, may undergo transformation, then so, too, may the princess and the prince, political authority itself, be “beschwichtigt, jeder nach seiner Art *gerührt*.” The same verb (*beschwichtigen*) will intradiegetically migrate from narrator to prince when the latter asks if the family may “durch den Gesang dieses Kindes, mit Hilfe dieser Flötentöne [den Löwen] beschwichtigen” (509). This lexical migration renders explicit that it is the hunting party and the prince’s political authority that is actually in need of taming, not the lion.<sup>393</sup> The formative stream of natural creation invoked by the father imaginatively becomes one with the mother’s verbal “Strom von Worten,” with the child’s musical “Tonfolge ohne Gesetz” to transform its listeners and prevent further violence by healing the pathology of their imaginations, ending the repetitive cycle of anachronic events by poetically attuning these humans to the now that is the present ongoingness of creation itself.

The narrative event of the lyric, one might say, restores presence to the temporal present through poetic language and thereby overcomes a narrative temporality out of joint by syncing characters to its meaningful sonic unfolding. This is represented in the diagram below by the

---

<sup>393</sup> Drawing on Goethe’s reading of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans*, Jane Brown reads the child as a figuration of the flute-playing David, whose songs intended to tame the Indians often tame the colonial settlers instead, allowing her to interpret the true ‘taming’ that takes place in the *Novelle* as referring to the humans rather than the animals, which, being circus performers and, for that matter, injured, are already tame. Cf. Jane K. Brown. “The Tyranny of the Ideal: The Dialectics of Art in Goethe’s ‘Novelle.’” (cf. footnote 2).

‘presentness’ of {d}, which refers only to itself rather than backwards or forwards to another time (Diagram 6):



Anachronic Events:	Princess sees/encounters the ruins:	{a, A}
	Princess hears about/encounters fire:	{b, B}
	Princess sees/encounters the tiger:	{c, C}
Synchronic Event of Lyric:	The child sings poems (before prince, before lion):	{d, D}

The textual mechanism that enables this poetic attunement of characters in the storyworld to the present moment is itself described by the narrator before the child begins his key, self-thematizing second poem. Spoken with Jakobson, the child projects the principle of equivalence from the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic one: “Eindringlich aber ganz besonders war, daß das Kind *die Zeilen der Strophe nunmehr zu anderer Ordnung durcheinander schob* und dadurch, wo nicht einen neuen Sinn hervorbrachte, doch das Gefühl in und durch sich selbst aufregend erhöhte” (508, emphasis added). As the previous analysis makes clear, the child *does* bring about “einen neuen Sinn,” but the narrator cannot recognize this, merely ascribing the child’s iterative rearrangement of verse lines an affective function. The narrator’s oversight is not altogether surprising, for, in the realm of narrative, repetitions are, in a sense, mute, incapable of partaking in the progressive momentum driving forward the action-sequences that make up the plot. Barthes hence claims that “the origin of a sequence [of narrative events] is not the observation of reality, but the need to vary and transcend the first *form* given man, namely repetition: a sequence is

essentially a whole within which nothing is repeated.”<sup>394</sup> In the realm of poetry, however, repetition, in a broad sense, forms the basic operation that projects paradigmatic equivalences onto the syntagmatic axis (for two phonemes or grammatical figures to be equivalent is for two syntagmatic elements to be seen as *variant iterations* of one and the same paradigmatic set). The metamorphosis of narrative into lyric thus takes place via the transformation of an iterative operation: whereas before, the narrative temporality of *Novelle* was governed by anachronic events that occlude the novelty of the event in favor of its apparent (often traumatic) *reenactment*, the narrative event of the lyric now re-synchronizes characters to the present moment as well as reconfiguring narrative time. As Barthes notes,

structurally narrative institutes a confusion between consecution and consequence, temporality and logic. This ambiguity forms the central problem of narrative syntax. [...] Analysis today tends to ‘dechronologize’ the narrative continuum and to ‘relogicize’ it, [...] the task is to succeed in giving a structural description of the chronological illusion – it is for narrative logic to account for narrative time. [...] Time belongs not to discourse strictly speaking but to the referent.<sup>395</sup>

Rather than debunking what Barthes terms “the chronological illusion,” analysis of the narrative ‘unit’ of the anachronic event in Goethe’s *Novelle* exposes the limits of such a structuralist approach to narrative. This is the case because the anachronic event turns out not to be a clearly demarcatable unit at all, but a kind of blurred transition, the coincidence of “noch” and “schon” with which the text’s very first sentence begins. Irrevocably temporal in character, then, a narrative made up of anachronic events cannot be elucidated into a static structure nor segmented into neatly demarcated action-sequences; an atemporal logic lying behind and surreptitiously driving the emplotment of narrative temporality cannot be found. This irreducibly temporal dimension becomes manifest at the subnarrative level of poetic prose: *Novelle*’s sentences continue onwards, not just actualizing the anachronic structure but, via the arrival and

---

<sup>394</sup> Cf. Barthes. “Structural Analysis of Narrative.” Pg. 124. Emphasis in original.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid. Pg. 99.



performances of the itinerant family, de- and transforming it through a carefully tuned re-synchronization. The structure *of* narrative time (the anachronic event) thus changes *in* time, the time of the prose sentence's unfolding.

The entire text concludes with the lines of verse sung by the child; the narrator does not even return to complete the narrative frame. If the child's first sung trio of poems constituted the narrative event of the lyric, then their second iteration constitutes the lyric's complete overcoming of the narrative, an opening onto the poetic event of ritual utterance meant to be repeated and brought to ever-renewed life in the present. Unlike the pre-contextualized, iterative semblance of anachronic events, the child's improvised variations on his former trio of poems repeat in a new context. Subject to the second, broader operation of recontextualization, poetic iteration functions to bring the singularity of the event to light, for repetition in a new context generates the possibility of novelty. While characters experiencing an anachronic event remain unaware of the event's occurrence in a different context, the semantic innovation of the child's final poem allows repetition in a new context to disclose the singularity of the situation, speaking that situation into being directly for the reader and without narratorial comment:

Und so geht mit guten Kindern  
Sel'ger Engel gern zu Rat,  
Böses Wollen zu verhindern,  
Zu befördern schöne Tat.  
So beschwören, fest zu bannen  
Liebem Sohn ans zarte Knie  
Ihn, des Waldes Hochtyrannen,  
Frommer Sinn und Melodie. (513)

If the sentence, for Barthes, formed a 'hollow' of verbal freedom for the writer, situated between the linguistic code and the narrative code, then Goethe crafts sentences so radically free in *Novelle* that they overcome the sentence altogether to enter the sphere of poetry. As a sentence, the text's last bit of discourse might read: 'So beschwören frommer Sinn und Melodie den Hochtyrannen

des Waldes, um ihn dem lieben Sohn ans zarte Knie fest zu bannen.’ As a series of verse lines, however, the poem violates grammatical word order to present us first with the verbs, then with the dative object of the child followed by the accusative object of the lion (referred to as a ‘tyrant,’ as if in allusion to the prince). Only at the very last line does the grammatical subject become clear: neither child nor lion, the only characters effectively left at the text’s conclusion, but “Sinn und Melodie.” The poem’s own musical mode of sense-making becomes the primary agent now, the verse line in its blatant, free disregard for word order as it overcomes the rule of the sentence.

The singing child hence comes to usurp the narrator, but the narrator willfully cedes his authority. Before conveying the last trio of poems, the narrator remarks of the child that “sein beschwichtigendes Lied abermals begann, *dessen Wiederholung wir uns auch nicht entziehen können*” (511, emphasis added). The use of litotes here is utterly characteristic of the narrator, indeed, it forms his favorite rhetorical device and embeds him within the social world of courtly protagonists whom he narrates.<sup>396</sup> Litotes at the level of discourse coordinates the narrator’s final ‘citation’ of the child’s poems with the characters whose febrile imaginings are exposed in the narrative and ‘healed’ by the emergence of poetry. In a sense, then, though the child’s singing overtake the narrator’s voice, the narrator also alerts us to the fact that he ‘cannot resist’ citing the child’s poems, as if the narrator, from the beginning, spoke the story we read from the position of a noble *already* healed.

---

<sup>396</sup> Only Swales has called attention to the rampant use of litotes. A few other uses can readily be found: in the first paragraph, the narrator refers to a horse-rider, “der selbst hier in der Halbhelle eine gewisse Eitelkeit, sich zu zeigen, *nicht verleugnen konnte*” (491); the prince, before departing, “*versäumte [...] nicht, einen Spaziertritt vorzuschlagen*” (492); the master of the hunt finds that “es unmöglich war, *der Versuchung zu widerstehen*, an diesen günstigen Herbsttagen eine schon verschobene Jagd zu unternehmen” (492); the narrator recounts, while describing the images of lion and tiger in town, that “man konnte der Bemerkung *nicht entgehen*, wie in dem friedlichen Wesen und Wirken der gebildeten Welt der König der Einöde sich so furchtbar verkündige,” while Friedrich could “die bunten, kolossalen Gemälde *nicht übersehen*” (497); later, Friedrich climbs the jagged mountainside, for he “wollte sich doch auch *nicht unkräftig zeigen*” (499); finally, the princess “*sich nicht versagte*, das gestickte Tüchlein hervorzuziehen und die Augen damit zu bedecken” (509). Cf. Martin Swales. “The Threatened Society: Some Remarks on Goethe’s *Novelle*.” In: *Publications of the English Goethe Society*. Vol. 38. 1967-8. Pg. 43-68.

More than a technically virtuosic execution of the narrative's self-transcendence into lyric, then, the numerous, delicate stylistic transitions and final lyrical blossom in *Novelle* capture the ever-shifting relationship between the psyche and time as mediated by affective dispositions such as anxiety or calm (e.g. the "Stille" that descends upon prince and princess after hearing the child). Such affective dispositions are correlated to narrative and poetic structures as well as to vague sociopolitical undercurrents in the story. The final textual transformation functions to resolve an instability built into (as) the narrative's structure of anxious anachronic events, but it also embodies on a thematic plane a kind of catharsis for the characters listening to the child's flute and song. The narrative event of the lyric establishes a proper relationship between the time of psychological introspection and the ongoing now in the order of natural creation.

One can find another diagnosis of the need for this catharsis of an anxiously febrile imagination in Schiller's *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*. Schiller associates the purgation not with tragedy, but with the idyll in its normative claim:

Denn für den Menschen, der von der Einfalt der Natur einmal abgewichen und der gefährlichen Führung seiner Vernunft überliefert worden ist, ist es von unendlicher Wichtigkeit, die Gesetzgebung der Natur in einem reinen Exemplar wieder anzuschauen, und sich von den Verderbnissen der Kunst in diesem treuen Spiegel wieder reinigen zu können.<sup>397</sup>

In a schema of enumerated narrative events written in preparation for *Novelle*, Goethe concludes the chain of events with an "Idyllische Darstellung" (he sketched a total of 107 events). *Novelle* ends, then, in an implicit text-immanent disavowal of the originally planned Homeric epic in favor of a cathartic idyll: while Honorio slays the tiger, this epic deed turns out to have been unnecessary in light of the child's non-violent taming of the lion. As Schiller argued, the idyll represents a normative archetype's actualizability in the sensuous realm ("die Ausführbarkeit der Idee in der Sinnenwelt"), yet it remains limited due to the fact that it must localize this normative

---

<sup>397</sup> Cf. Schiller. *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*. Reclam: Stuttgart. 2002. Pg. 69.

ideal ‘before’ civilized human history proper. The idyll cannot represent this normative ideal as a utopian future to be achieved, but must nostalgically render it a pastoral prehistory that has passed and hence calls for mourning: “Sie [Idyllen] führen uns also *theoretisch* rückwärts, indem sie uns *praktisch* vorwärts führen und veredeln. Sie stellen unglücklicherweise das Ziel *hinter* uns, dem sie uns doch *entgegen führen* sollten, und können uns daher bloß das traurige Gefühl eines Verlustes [...] einflößen.”<sup>398</sup> The idyll, on Schiller’s view, suffers from an anachronic representational paradox, nostalgically moving backwards to arcadia in order to point forwards to utopia, thereby rendering the present an historical anachronism, a future past.

*Novelle* does not begin as an idyll, simply *positing* a ‘pure exemplar’ of nature’s lawfulness in order to purge its protagonists of their febrile imaginations, but *becomes* one, stages the idyll as a self-conscious performance at its end. Goethe’s strategy for avoiding the anachronic pitfall inherent to the idyllic genre is, in a sense, to bite the bullet and begin with an anachronic narrative temporality. The built-in instability of this narrative structure brings about a text-immanent generic transformation from a latent epic to an explicit idyll. Honorio’s heroic deed of killing the tiger is hence symbolically transfigured into the lion’s taming, which mirrors the taming of human passions. Without the latter’s aesthetic catharsis, Honorio’s self-restraint would degrade into mere repression. Prose is the medium for such generic transformations (from prose to verse, from epic to idyll), and only against the backdrop of its ‘prosaic’ exposition does the ‘ideal’ poetic end become legible. This relativizes more local critical disputes about whether to emphasize the ideal character of the final idyllic scene as a mythical union of art and nature or its artificially theatrical, even citational status. Working to ‘actualize’ citations, the child constitutes a threefold citation: he pulls a thorn from the lion’s paw like Androcles while simultaneously channeling Daniel in the lion’s den and Orpheus enchanting the animals. Goethe himself

---

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., pg. 69-70. Emphasis in original.

emphasizes this performative character of the idyll: the child “verband die greuliche Tatz des Untiers, sodaß die Mutter sich vor Freuden mit ausgestreckten Armen zurückbog und vielleicht angewohnterweise Beifall gerufen und geklatscht hätte, wäre sie nicht durch einen derben Faustgriff des Wärtels erinnert worden, daß die Gefahr nicht vorüber sei” (511). The mother’s inappropriate applause suggests that this performance has occurred before, perhaps in a circus tent. The recontextualization of this repetition in the face of true “Gefahr” allows it, however, to become more than a ‘mere’ performance, allows it, that is, to speak the event in its novel singularity *as* the event of poetic speech. *Novelle* is thus a text performative of transformation on multiple levels: structural (anachronic narrative prose to synchronizing poetic verse), psychological (anxiously imaginative withdrawal to being-present before the event in its ‘unheard-of’ novelty), and generic (latent epic to explicit idyll). This overlay of multiple transformations ultimately provides an answer to the question of why Goethe titled *Novelle* after its generic designation. The “unerhörte Begebenheit” of its narrative is not simply the child’s act of song that tames the lion nor even the more technical ‘event’ of the prose sentence’s self-transcendence into the state of verse. Rather, the child’s poetic act allows an event, a *Begebenheit*, to be experienced as genuinely novel, as *unerhört*, in the first place by allowing us to hear it.

## **2. Catharses of the Imagination: Traces of the Riddle and Novella in *Das Märchen***

If Goethe’s *Novelle* does not simply exemplify its genre, but instead ‘becomes’ a novella by virtue of working through a variety of other generic guises, then Goethe’s *Märchen* (1795) similarly represents more than a straightforward paradigm of and for its genre. Beyond the fact that both texts are titled after their generic designation, what ties these experiments in narrative prose together is the idea that, for Goethe’s literary morphology, to exemplify a genre is necessarily to transform it, to elaborate and innovatively expand the game rules according to

which it is written. In the case of *Novelle*, these generic and narrative-structural transformations were correlated with the psychological and sociopolitical problematic of the pathology of the imagination. The imagination also plays a central role in Goethe's *Märchen*, not at a work-immanent level (i.e. within the storyworld as apprehended by protagonists such as the princess), but at the level of the reader's reception. Here too the text will perform intergeneric metamorphoses in order to reconfigure the imaginative faculty, above all with regard to how the fairytale overtakes its frame narrative in the *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* and yet transfigures elements drawn from the novellas that precede it.

### **2.a Auslegungssucht: *The Social Game of Interpretation***

The issue of reception and, more specifically, of how to interpret *Das Märchen* was a hotly debated concern already in Goethe's time. Perhaps only his closest interlocutors, the text's very first readers – Schiller and Wilhelm von Humboldt – fully understood what Goethe was trying to accomplish in this mysteriously opaque yet hyper-allusive story. In a letter to Goethe from August 29, 1795, Schiller reported on his first reading of the text, commenting in particular on Goethe's narrative method: “Uebrigens haben Sie durch diese Behandlungsweise sich die Verbindlichkeit aufgelegt, daß alles Symbol sey. Man kann sich nicht enthalten, in allem eine Bedeutung zu suchen.”<sup>399</sup> As Schiller remarked to Goethe during the course of reading the latter's submissions for *Die Horen* (the tales that comprise the *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*): “Sie werden mir meine eigene Auslegungssucht zu Gute halten.”<sup>400</sup> No other text by Goethe has elicited quite the same “Auslegungssucht” in its readers. Schiller accordingly warned the tale's publisher Cotta: “An dem ‘Mährchen’ werden die Ausleger zu käuen haben.”<sup>401</sup> And chewed they have. One of the tale's more prominent interpreters in Goethe's day, Prince

---

<sup>399</sup> *NA* 28, pg. 36

<sup>400</sup> In a letter to Goethe from November 19, 1794. Cf. *NA* 27 95

<sup>401</sup> From September 28, 1795. Cf. *NA* 28 64.

August von Sachsen-Gotha, even went so far as to claim that the Biblical John must still be alive, for only he could have written such a prophetic text. In an enthusiastic reply to the Prince, Goethe coyly claimed that he possessed his own interpretation (*Auslegung*), “die ich aber nicht eher heraus zu geben gedenke, als bis ich 99 Vorgänger vor mir sehen werde.”<sup>402</sup> Though primarily known as a collector of material items such as minerals and cameos, Goethe also collected interpretations of his own fairytale, even compiling a comprehensive table of three such readings in a diary entry from June 24, 1816 (Figure 18).

One of the defining literary effects of the *Märchen* thus consists in the elicitation of an inexhaustible hermeneutic drive (*Auslegungssucht*) in its readers. Anything but an abstract intellectual exercise, however, the text was also supposed to be pleurably entertaining. As Goethe told Schiller while writing the text: “es unterhält mich und wird also doch wohl auch einigermaßen für andere unterhaltend sein.”<sup>403</sup> A survey of the epistolary discourse surrounding Goethe’s tale makes readily apparent how his *Märchen* provokes interpretation not as a solitary endeavor, but as a social game, one that generates and sustains an interpretive community of readers that do not remain beholden to the author’s definitive intention, but playfully exercise their own imaginations in concocting their own readings. The fairytale thereby expands the conversations conducted by the German refugees within the frame narrative to include the reader. Those titular *Unterhaltungen* already involved a social mode of interpretation (e.g. the question of empirical vs. supernatural causes in the case of the first two ghost stories, or in later novellas the ethical question of duty vs. inclination). In his review of Goethe’s *Märchen*, A.W. Schlegel accordingly notes that “es [könnte] ihn [den Geist] noch unterhalten, nach einem haltbaren Faden

---

<sup>402</sup> From December 21, 1795. For more on the apocalyptic dimension of *Märchen*, see Clement. Cf. *WA IV*. Abteilung, Bd. 10, pg. 352 (hereafter: *WA IV* 10 352); Christian Clement. “‘Offenbares Geheimnis’ oder ‘geheime Offenbarung’? Goethes *Märchen* und die Apokalypse.” *Goethe Yearbook*, Vol. 17, 2010, pp. 239-257.

<sup>403</sup> From August 18, 1795. Cf. *WA IV* 10 289.

der Deutung zu suchen, welches wir noch nicht unternommen haben.”<sup>404</sup> Rather than interpret, Schlegel simply enjoyed the story; the task of interpretation here facilitates the social end of entertaining conversation. This should not suggest that the *Märchen* is an ultimately frivolous tale, for the act of interpretation itself engages the reader’s imagination as it is carefully channeled and restructured by Goethe’s text. Schiller suggested as much when he remarked to Goethe that the fairytale’s interpretations would bear witness to the reader’s own productive imagination, which might be as hermeneutically inventive as the text itself: “die Phantasie [erfindet] selbst nicht so viel, als die Tollheit der Menschen wirklich ausheckt, und ich bin überzeugt, die schon vorhandenen Auslegungen werden alles Denken übersteigen.”<sup>405</sup>

If one casts a glance at the interpretations that Goethe compiled (Figure 18), it becomes apparent that readings took an overtly allegorical character. Rather than posing the question ‘*What does Das Märchen mean?*’, the following discussion will instead ask *how* the text generates effects of overt yet elusive meaningfulness at the level of reader reception.<sup>406</sup> Goethe himself suggests such a privileging of effects of meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeitseffekte*) over meaning as such when he wrote to Wilhelm von Humboldt that in composing the tale he had taken on “eine schwere Aufgabe, zugleich bedeutend und deutungslos zu sein.”<sup>407</sup> The *Märchen*, in other words, does not in a strict sense ‘have’ a meaning at all, but unfolds as an exercise of the reader’s faculty

---

<sup>404</sup> Cf. A.W. Schlegel. Rezension: Nr. 6 of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* from Jan. 6, 1799, Sp. 44f.

<sup>405</sup> From December 12, 1795. Cf. *NA* 28 142.

<sup>406</sup> Jane K. Brown and Ingrid Kreuzer are among the interpreters who take a more structural, even morphological approach to reading the *Märchen*. Both commentators even construct spatial maps of the fairytale’s storyworld. Cf. Jane K. Brown. “Building Bridges: Goethe’s Fairy-Tale Aesthetics.” *Goethe Yearbook*, Vol. 23, 2016, pp. 1-17; Ingrid Kreuzer. “Strukturprinzipien in Goethes Märchen.” *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, Vol. 21 1977, pp. 216-246; Bernd Witte. “Das Opfer der Schlange. Zur Auseinandersetzung Goethes mit Schiller in den Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten und im Märchen.” In: *Unser commercium. Goethes und Schillers Literaturpolitik*. Ed. Wilfried Barner, Eberhard Lämmert, & Norbert Oellers. Stuttgart: Cotta’sche Buchhandlung 1984. Pg. 461-484; Jutta Osinski. “Goethes Märchen. Noch eine Interpretation.” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, Vol. 103 1984, pp. 38-64; Frederick Hiebel. “The Beautiful Lily in Goethe’s Märchen.” *Monatshefte*, Vol. 41, No. 3/4 (Mar. – Apr., 1949), pp. 171-185; Rudolf Steiner. *Goethes Geistesart in ihrer Offenbarung durch seinen Faust und durch das Märchen von der Lilie und der Schlange*. Rudolf Steiner Verlag 1918; Hermann Baumgart. *Goethe’s Märchen. Ein politisch-nationales Glaubensbekenntniß des Dichters*. Königsberg 1875.

<sup>407</sup> From May 27, 1796. Cf. *WA* IV 11 77.



of imagination. The hermeneutic question of meaning thus morphs into a pragmatic one, which asks how and to what end the text scripts the reader's imaginative activity rather than which determinate semantic contents (e.g. abstractions, mythologemes, etc.) one should correlate in allegorical fashion to each of the characters. In the same letter to Humboldt, Goethe alludes to a hypothetical second fairytale that would be "ganz allegorisch," implying that, in the case of the *Märchen*, he sought "durch eine sehr lebhaft Darstellung die Erinnerung an die Allegorie in jedem Augenblick zu tilgen."<sup>408</sup> The elicitation of this allegorizing hermeneutic drive should not result in a definitive reading, but in an inexhaustible play of the imagination that generates provisional, even deliberately playful interpretations to be shared with other readers.

This approach to the *Märchen* is not novel, but was already pioneered by Wilhelm von Humboldt in a letter to Goethe from February 9, 1796.<sup>409</sup> Humboldt was perhaps the most adept practitioner of the social game of interpretation elicited by the tale. Noting how most of his fellow readers have "sich über die Maaßen zerquält, einen philosophischen Sinn heraus- oder wenigstens hineinzudeuteln," Humboldt proceeds to categorize them into two groups: those incapable of 'conversion' ("Bekehrung"), for whom he hastily improvises a reading, and those who might understand "daß es keiner [Erklärung] bedürfe."<sup>410</sup> Humboldt sketches a theory of the fairytale that fits into his later endeavor to develop a morphological account of literary genres in their historical plasticity.<sup>411</sup> Humboldt does this by defining a genre not in terms of a taxonomic list of criteria that one might simply 'check off,' but by referring each genre back to a specific

---

<sup>408</sup> Ibid. Pg. 78.

<sup>409</sup> The only other attempt to read the *Märchen* through the analytic instrumentarium developed in Humboldt's letter can be found in: Katherine M. Arens. "Humboldt and Goethe's Märchen: A Generic Interpretation." *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Winter, 1984), pp. 42-58.

<sup>410</sup> Cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt. *Briefe. Bd. 3: 1795-1797*. Ed. Philip Mattson. de Gruyter: Berlin/Boston 2017. No. 406.

<sup>411</sup> Alongside the fairytale, Humboldt analyzed the epic at length. Cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt. *Aesthetische Versuche. Erster Theil. Ueber Göthes Hermann und Dorothea*. In: *Werke II: Schriften zur Altertumskunde und Ästhetik. Die Vasen*. Ed. Andreas Flitner & Klaus Giel. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 2002. Pg. 125-356.

attunement (*Stimmung*) of the cognitive-affective faculties into a coherent configuration that can be localized on both sides of the work, i.e. on the side of the author's production as well as on that of the reader's reception. Humboldt's approach to genre thus 'dissolves' the work itself in favor of a process of imaginative attunement as scripted by the work and enacted by author and reader alike.<sup>412</sup> In this sense, the 'immanence' of the work emerges only as a readerly enactment.

Rather than "das Märchen zur Allegorie herabstimmen [zu] wollen," Humboldt opts to define the genre in terms of a problem that each generic exemplar solves anew: the representation of the very form of the imagination in its purity ("die reine Darstellung der Form der Phantasie").<sup>413</sup> This does not imply that the fairytale can simply dispense with determinate semantic content altogether, of course (it remains unclear to what that would even amount). The tale instead incorporates enough objective content into its form such that the imagination may manifest itself in its ultimate purity, i.e. freedom ("die Beimischung des Objectiven, wodurch jene Form erst einen Körper erhält"). Humboldt carefully formulates the generic relation between form and content: the fairytale seeks to represent "ihre Freiheit *an* einem Objecte, nicht ein Object *in* dieser Freiheit."<sup>414</sup> This implies that the imagination's absolutized form remains ultimately indifferent to, yet nonetheless reliant on, content, for "alles, was Materie genannt werden kann [...], ihm [dem Märchen] nur mittelbar, nie wesentlich angehört." The fairytale's beauty thus increases insofar as "die Form mehr Materie trägt, ohne von ihrer Leichtigkeit zu verlieren."<sup>415</sup> This 'lightness' is an essential characteristic of the fairytale in its ability to absorb such 'matter'

---

<sup>412</sup> Humboldt's account thus accords with Karl's own characterization of the fairytale in the frame narrative of *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*: "Sie [die Einbildungskraft] muß sich, deutet mich, an keinen Gegenstand hängen, sie muß uns keinen Gegenstand aufdringen wollen, sie soll, wenn sie Kunstwerke hervorbringt, nur wie eine Musik auf uns selbst spielen, uns in uns selbst bewegen, und zwar so, daß wir vergessen, daß etwas außer uns sei, das diese Bewegung hervorbringt" (HA 6 209).

<sup>413</sup> Cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt. *Briefe. Bd. 3: 1795-1797*. No. 406.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

into its very form without being ‘weighed down’ by it, transforming that matter into a mere occasion through which to evince its free play.

The “Sinn für diese Gattung” hence consists in the reader being ‘attuned’ to the pure form of the imagination (“wer gestimmt ist, die Form bloß um der Form willen zu lieben”). In addition to contentual ‘lightness,’ Humboldt even goes so far as to associate the fairytale with a certain emptiness: “ihr Gesetz ist daher das Ideal der bloßen Form, die bloß formale Schönheit. Auch erkennt man diese in jedem guten Märchen an der Leichtigkeit, Sinnlichkeit, Bewegung, selbst an einer gewissen Leerheit, möchte ich hinzusetzen.”<sup>416</sup> This should not suggest that the *Märchen* exhausts itself in a sort of empty formalism; rather, the fairytale configures its semantic content so as to elucidate the absolute form of the imagination through the medium of that content. The genre is here and throughout described in terms of its pragmatic efficacy, what it does to the reader, not in terms of what it is: “den Einfluß zu erforschen, den es auf die Phantasie des Lesers ausübt.”<sup>417</sup> The fairytale liberates the reader’s imagination from all subservience to other faculties such as the understanding. Far from resulting in mere capriciousness, this process of readerly attunement vis-à-vis the text has an ultimate use-value, a pragmatic end: “sollte ich den Nutzen dieser Dichtungsart angeben, möchte ich sie ein Reinigungsmittel der Phantasie ihrer bloßen Form nach nennen.”<sup>418</sup> If the protagonists of *Novelle* underwent a cathartic cure of their pathology of the imagination upon hearing the child’s song, then the readers of *Märchen* experience a similar cathartic purge of their imaginative faculty that liberates it so as to render its absolute form accessible for hermeneutic play. In other words, what is represented through the narrative structure and within the world-semantics of Goethe’s *Novelle* is enacted by the pragmatics of his *Märchen*.

---

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

What exactly this catharsis of the imagination amounts to in the case of Goethe's text will have to be determined later. For now, it will suffice to track how the text organizes its narrative so as to channel productively and ultimately re-circuit the reader's imaginative activity. For Humboldt, the fairytale is not a 'natural' narrative that connects events according to an objective causality, but a series of 'fancies' loosely strung together according to the imagination's whimsy:

Bei der natürlichen Erzählung nimmt nemlich der Dichter eine Reihe von Begebenheiten, u. verknüpft sie auf eben die Weise, wie sie objectiv verknüpft zu seyn pflegen, verleiht ihnen aber zugleich die nur der Phantasie eigne Freiheit, und macht sie dadurch zu einem dichterischen Ganzen; bei dem Märchen hingegen verknüpft er eine Reihe bloßer Einfälle, allein nach der Willkühr der Phantasie, stellt sie aber dennoch zugleich als wirklich geschehen dar, und mischt ihnen daher soviel von dem Charakter der Wirklichkeit bei, als nothwendig ist einem bloßen Traum augenblickliche Wesenheit zu verschaffen.<sup>419</sup>

Humboldt's distinctions allow us to track how the *Märchen* does not so much evince a narrative structure, but functions as the catalyst for a readerly performance. The "Einfälle" in question are the tale's numerous characters. Indeed, as a reader one gets the unavoidable impression that the driving force of this tale simply cannot be a discernable plot ("eine Reihe von Begebenheiten [...] objective verknüpft"): were the reader to ask herself what happens next at any point in the story, her expectation would continually flounder over against the tale's stunning genius of invention. The only predictable occurrence is the eventual introduction of (yet another) new character, and this is not quite a narrative event, but a narratively unmotivated *Einfall*.

Goethe himself remarked on the plethora of characters that populate his fairytale world. One of his *Xenien* even suggests that the text is constituted by the characters themselves rather than any sort of overarching plot or background setting: "Mehr als zwanzig Personen sind in dem Märchen geschäftig. / 'Nun, und was machen sie denn alle?' Das Märchen, mein Freund."<sup>420</sup> In a letter to Schiller from September 26, 1794, Goethe further designated the eighteen characters

---

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> *WA* 5 224

‘riddles:’ “Ich hoffe die 18 Figuren dieses Dramatis sollen, als soviel Räzel [sic], dem Rätzelliebenden willkommen seyn.”<sup>421</sup> Taken in isolation, each character represents a sort of riddle that only becomes solvable once all characters form a cooperative union, what Goethe termed the tale’s ultimate aim: a demonstration of “das gegenseitige Hülfeleisten der Kräfte und das Zurückweisen auf einander.”<sup>422</sup> Each character embodies a magical ability that operates as a sort of quasi-narrative function; only when all functions intersect in cooperation does it become clear what the overarching aim of the story qua whole consists in. At the text’s conclusion with the transformation of the temple and the formation of the bridge, the reader’s imagination has itself transformed: no longer overtaxed by the surfeit of character-functions, the imagination sees how each character’s idiosyncratic transformative power interfaces with all the others toward one purgative scene of architectural metamorphosis.

For now it will help to return to a hitherto neglected aspect of Humboldt’s distinction between a series of events connected by objective causality (i.e. narrative plot) and a series of fancies connected according to the imagination’s whimsy (i.e. a paratactic series of character introductions). Humboldt thinks this distinction as sourced in chiasmically mirrored operations of the imagination that grant a series narratival wholeness. In the case of the ‘natural’ story, the author’s phantasy grants the event-series just enough of its ‘freedom’ so as to round out the narrative into a whole. In the case of the fairytale, however, the inverse operation takes place: the

---

<sup>421</sup> *WA* IV Abtheilung, Bd. 10, pg. 304. Goethe’s continual invocation of the riddle in his correspondence with Schiller further clarifies the game-character attained by the interpretations that the *Märchen* elicits. As Günter Oesterle has argued, “die sozial-gesellige Praxis des Rätselratens” is a lens through which to understand the fairytale’s horizon of reception in its own time, but riddles also populate the work on an immanent level, above all in the snake’s encounter with the three kings. These work-immanent riddles function as a ‘simple,’ or popular oral, form parasitic within the written literary ‘art form’ of the *Kunstmärchen*. Cf. Günter Oesterle. “Die ‘schwere Aufgabe, zugleich bedeutend und deutungslos’ sowie ‘an nichts und alles erinnert’ zu sein. Bild- und Rätselstrukturen in Goethes ‘Das Märchen.’” In: *Bildersturm und Bilderflut um 1800. Zur schwierigen Anschaulichkeit der Moderne*. Ed. Helmut J. Schneider, Rolf Simon, & Thomas Wirtz. Bielefeld 2001. Pg. 184-209; André Jolles. *Einfache Formen. Legende, Sage, Mythe, Rätsel, Spruch, Kasus, Memorabile, Märchen, Witz*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1969 [orig. 1930].

<sup>422</sup> The letter in which Goethe actually states this has been lost, but Schiller quotes Goethe back to himself in a letter from August 29, 1795. Cf. *NA* 28 36.

author's phantasy must 'mix in' just enough of the character of objective reality as necessary for the series of fancies to achieve a sense of wholeness ("mischt ihnen daher soviel von dem Charakter der Wirklichkeit bei, als nothwendig ist einem bloßen Traum augenblickliche Wesenheit zu verschaffen"). In the specific case of Goethe's *Märchen*, the objective conditions that grant the paratactic series of loosely interconnected narrative functions a semblance of reality are spatiotemporal: from the very beginning, the will-o-the-wisps' problem is one of transport, of bridging a stream that semantically divides two spatial domains. As the snake will later explain to them, there are three constrictions on this spatial movement, two of which are temporal in nature: the ferryman may only bring passengers from the east bank to the west, but not vice versa; the snake may morph into a bridge, but only at noon, when the sun is at its highest point; the giant's shadow may similarly transport beings across the stream, but only at dusk. At the fairytale's conclusion, this destructive giant will metamorphose into a giant column that functions as a sundial, bringing order to the temporality of the storyworld at the same time as the snake miraculously transforms into a bridge that facilitates spatial connection at all times of day. What little narrative progression there is here takes shape as this lifting of spatiotemporal conditions on movement, a newfound mobility coincident with a mythic societal renewal. As Humboldt claimed, these spatiotemporal limitations on traffic across both domains separated by the stream grant the characters qua transformational functions a semblance of objective reality insofar as they generate the impression of a background setting that is otherwise only allusively described if described at all.

### ***2.b Chronic Indebtedness and Utopian Debt Relief in Märchen***

Just as *Novelle* began with the dramatization of a structural instability in its narrative (the anachronic event) that catalyzed a process of intergeneric transformation, so the *Märchen* begins

with an analogous structural instability: the problem of chronic indebtedness as triggered by a seemingly paratactic series of magical exchanges and subsequent transformations. Each 'event' in the first two-thirds of the fairytale unfolds as a kind of exchange between two characters, a confluence of two transformational functions that results in a change that is not stable and permanent, but instead calls for further exchanges in order for a character to 'pay off' the debt incurred for the last magical conversion. This chronic indebtedness of one character to another prevents the series of magical exchanges from reaching stability.

The first such exchange event can be taken as paradigmatic for the rest: the will-o'-the-wisps wish to be taken across the stream. In exchange for this service, the ferryman demands payment: "Wo bleibt nun mein Lohn? Ihr müßt wissen, daß man mich nur mit Früchten der Erde bezahlen kann."<sup>423</sup> The will-o'-the-wisps, who are foreigners within this realm, can only pay in the gold coins that they shake off as they correspondently diminish in illumination. The ferryman is quick to reject this defunct currency, for were "das gefährliche Gold" to fall into the stream, it would violently overflow and overturn the boat.<sup>424</sup> The will-o'-the-wisps thus remain indebted to the ferryman: they owe him three onions, three cabbages, and three artichokes. The ferryman, on the other hand, must dispose of this dangerous foreign currency, casting it into the rift between two cliffs. Key here are two aspects: the debt, which necessitates further exchanges in order to be repaid, and the unexchangeable remainder of the "Goldstücke." Within the mountainous rift, a snake devours this otherwise unassimilable remainder and subsequently begins to glow, transforming from a solely tactile being beholden to the grooves of the earth to one capable of casting light onto the world and thereby better knowing it. A new character – the snake – is here introduced in order for the unexchangeable remainder to gain a function. At the same time, the

---

<sup>423</sup> HA 6 210

<sup>424</sup> Ibid. Pg. 211.

native snake becomes kin to the foreign will-o'-the-wisps, the horizontal counterpart to their vertical inclination.

Before turning to the significance of the snake's sacrifice, it will help to dwell with the will-o'-the-wisps. This comic duo has been associated with the French *lumières* and *esprit* more generally, but they also clearly function as "Prägstöcke für den Geld- wie für den Gedankenverkehr," as Camilla Lucerna puts it.<sup>425</sup> The will-o'-the-wisps are agents of circulation that bring the storyworld of *Märchen* into motion, ultimately allowing it (above all through the snake) to overcome its state of cosmic infertility as symbolized by Lilie, whose touch kills living beings as it simultaneously (in a chiasmic inversion) brings inorganic stones and crystals to life. While they are indebted to the ferryman, the will-o'-the-wisps eventually pass on their debt to the elderly wife of the man with the magical lamp, who has agreed "ihre Schuld beim Fährmann abzutragen."<sup>426</sup> Unlike the unexchangeable gold coins they jostle from themselves, their debt is subject to trade and circulation among the characters. As the woman tries to pay her newly acquired debt, however, the giant's shadow steals one of each vegetable from her as she is taking them to the stream, who refuses to accept partial payment. She can only pay the will-o'-the-wisp's debt in part by indebting herself in turn to the stream: "Wenn Ihr Euch gegen den Fluß verbürgt und Euch als Schuldnerin bekennen wollt, so nehm ich die sechs Stücke zu mir [...] Steckt Eure Hand in den Fluß [...] und versprecht, daß Ihr in vierundzwanzig Stunden die Schuld abtragen wollt."<sup>427</sup> As a result of this exchange, her hand becomes black and begins to shrink and disappear. If she refuses to pay, it will disappear forever. To complicate matters, once she has reached Lilie's realm on western side of the stream, she can find no artichoke, for no flowers

---

<sup>425</sup> Lucerna wrote a number of articles and even an entire monograph, strikingly perceptive, on Goethe's *Märchen* throughout her career, a testament to the tale's mystery. Cf. Camilla Lucerna. *Das Märchen. Goethes Naturphilosophie als Kunstwerk. Deutungsarbeit*. Leipzig: Fritz Eckardt Verlag 1910.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid. Pg. 218.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid. Pg. 219.



grow in this sterile garden, which is nourished by the deceased victims of Lilie's touch. The melancholic prince introduced halfway through the story becomes one such victim.

The debt generated by the text's very first 'event' – the exchange of transport for nine vegetables – can only be repaid (or rather annulled) once the snake has sacrificed itself. The snake converts the unexchangeable remainder of gold coins into illumination and thus renders this defunct currency productive in the storyworld. In order to resurrect the fallen prince, the snake forms an ouroboros around him and sacrifices itself, after which it morphs into a circle of gemstones. The man with the lamp "schüttelte die ganze Ladung [...] in den Fluß. Wie leuchtende und blinkende Sterne schwammen die Steine mit den Wellen hin, und man konnte nicht unterscheiden, ob sie sich in der Ferne verloren oder untersanken."<sup>428</sup> Whereas the gold coins were before 'dangerous' if they fell into the stream, eliciting a destructive elemental violence, they are now through a series of magical exchanges and conversions (from gold to light via the snake, from light to gemstones via its sacrifice) capable of entering the stream and bringing about a transformation that is stable and lasting: The temple emerges from the waters; the ferryman's hut metamorphoses into an altar; the prince is resurrected as the new king; the elderly man with the lamp and his wife are rejuvenated as a young couple; a new social order is mythically established.

The most immediate consequence of this pan-transformative event at the story's end, however, is debt relief. Amidst the changes, the man with the lamp tells his wife to bathe in the stream's flowing metamorphic waters; she replies: "Welch ein Rat! [...] ich soll ganz schwarz und ganz verschwinden; habe ich doch meine Schuld noch nicht bezahlt' – 'Gehe', sagte der Alte, 'und folge mir! *Alle Schulden sind abgetragen.*'"<sup>429</sup> This utopian debt relief should not be

---

<sup>428</sup> Ibid. Pg. 233.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid. Pg. 236. Emphasis added.

understood as but one transformation among many at the story's conclusion, but rather as their necessary precondition. Insofar as the snake's sacrifice allows the unexchangeable remainder to be brought into generative circulation within the storyworld, the tale's inaugural debt and motivating lack finds itself not so much fulfilled as dispensed with as irrelevant. The narrative's 'linear,' paratactic series of magical exchanges and conversions may thus morph into a 'circular,' synchronized interrelation of all character-functions towards the shared goal of reviving the young prince and facilitating the emergence of the temple. As the man with the lamp proclaims, "Wir sind zur glücklichen Stunde beisammen, jeder verrichte sein Amt, jeder tue seine Pflicht, und ein allgemeines Glück wird die einzelnen Schmerzen in sich auflösen."<sup>430</sup> Only at the tale's conclusion does it become clear to the reader how each riddle-like character fits into a larger scheme that brings about a transformation of the whole. The plethora of paratactically introduced characters burdens the reader's memory and imagination only for the end to purge these faculties, as it were, by allowing all character-functions to interface and unite as one.

This focus on chronic indebtedness as the narrative's inaugural structural instability may seem idiosyncratic to "die Alte" and her encounter with the will-o'-the-wisps, but indebtedness (unlike a specific debt) takes multifarious shapes in the tale. The characters remain deeply dependent on one another even as this interdependence remains unconscious until the snake's sacrifice, which mobilizes everyone to cooperate. The shift from dyadic magical exchanges to polyvalent synchronic cooperation becomes most apparent when one examines two transformational sequences that warrant comparison due to the fact that they are both resurrections: those of Mops and the young prince. Mops is the dog owned by the man with the lamp and his wife. When the will-o'-the-wisps enter the old woman's home, they lick the gold from her hut's walls, turning them into stone. They then 'shake off' the light they thereby gain,

---

<sup>430</sup> Ibid. Pg. 231.

converting it into stamped gold coins left behind in their wake. Mops eats these coins on the floor and dies as an indirect result of the will-o'-the-wisps' transformational function. The woman's husband, however, possesses a magical lamp that converts stone to gold, wood to silver, and dead animals to gemstones. The lamp's illumination (which can only shine in the presence of other light, casting no shadow) restores the stone walls to their golden state and transforms the dead Mops into onyx. This is but an intermediate solution, however, for the couple now depends on Lilie's touch in order to bring the inorganic Mops back to life (her touch animates the inorganic and deadens the organic). The onyx dog now functions as a gift, albeit one exchanged in return for the restoration of life. One can notate the series of magical conversions as follows (M = Mops / subscript <sub>D</sub> = dead /  $\rightarrow[x]\rightarrow$  = transformational function executed by character  $x$ ):

$$M \rightarrow[\text{Irrlichter}] \rightarrow M_D \rightarrow[\text{Mann mit der Lampe}] \rightarrow \text{Onyx} \rightarrow[\text{die schöne Lilie}] \rightarrow M$$

As the notation makes clear, the sequence as a whole is reversible and thus does not constitute a genuine transformation at all. The only irreversible dimension here is the fact that the reanimated Mops is confined to the sterile realm of Lilie's garden and must be separated from his owners, his 'resurrection' thus limited to living on a shade-like existence in a kind of nether region.

The character that paradigmatically mirrors this transformational sequence undergone by Mops is the young prince, who must also be resurrected, for he has received Lilie's lethal touch. In his case, however, two character functions must coincide simultaneously and not merely successively in order for the resurrection to take place (J = Jüngling / <sub>D</sub> = dead / P = Prinz):

$$J \rightarrow [\text{die schöne Lilie}] \rightarrow J_D \rightarrow [\text{Selbstopfer der Schlange}] \rightarrow + \rightarrow [\text{Lilie}] \rightarrow J' (= P)$$

The text only refers to the "Jüngling" as "Prinz" after this series of magical conversions. Furthermore, the snake does not quite execute a pre-established character-function, such as the intrinsic magical abilities exercised by Lilie or the man with the lamp. Rather, the snake

innovatively decides to sacrifice itself for the greater good: “Mich aufzuopfern, ehe ich aufgeopfert werde.”<sup>431</sup> This is the fairytale’s only genuine narrative event, one of self-renunciation (*Selbstentsagung*) that reconfigures the series of magical exchanges and ultimately institutes the utopian debt relief that allows the establishment of a new mythical kingdom. Unlike Mops, the prince does not simply return to his former state in diminished form, but transforms definitively into the ruler of the new realm, regaining the armor with which he had dispensed in order to make lethal contact with Lilie. These two resurrections are thus ultimately asymmetrical, for that of Mops keeps the cycle of magical conversions and chronic indebtedness intact, while that of the prince brings it to a definitive end.

The asymmetry raises the question of why the snake may function to bring about this cooperative spirit among the characters. Indeed, the scenario bears a striking resemblance to the scapegoating mechanism.<sup>432</sup> In *Märchen*, however, there is no collective made up of psychologically thick subjects of mimetic desire, only a grouping of function-like one-dimensional characters. Instead of being arbitrarily selected and murdered by the collective so as to render their mimetic violence unilateral and thereby establish unity, the snake willfully sacrifices *itself*. The sacrificial myth of Goethe’s *Märchen* might be said to lie in this phantasy of willful self-sacrifice, the idea that the victim understands the sacrificial mechanism better than the rest of the group on whose behalf it is executed. The victim here takes on the guise of the priest administering his own ritual death, for he is the one ‘in the know,’ the keeper of the secret. Sacrifice in Goethe’s text ultimately takes on the status of a kind of hermetic riddle, an *offenbares Geheimnis* open to view yet obscured by the tale’s inventive whimsy.

---

<sup>431</sup> Ibid. Pg. 233.

<sup>432</sup> Cf. René Girard. *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Hopkins UP 1972.

If Goethe referred to each of the characters that constitute his fairytale as “soviel Räzel [sic], dem Rätzelliebenden willkommen,” then the issue of hermeneutically deciphering riddles extends from the plane of reader reception to that of the work itself.<sup>433</sup> There are countless riddles told within the storyworld, above all by the four metal kings encountered by the snake. The golden king plays this riddling game with the snake, initiating it into his subterranean secrets: “‘Was ist herrlicher als Gold?’ [...] ‘Das Licht,’ antwortete die Schlange. ‘Was ist erquicklicher als Licht?’ fragte jener. ‘Das Gespräch,’ antwortete diese.”<sup>434</sup> The golden king similarly asks the old man with the lamp how many ‘mysteries’ there are:

“‘Wieviele Geheimnisse weißt du?’ – ‘Drei,’ versetzte der Alte. ‘Welches ist das wichtigste?’ fragte der silberne König. ‘Das offenbare,’ versetzte der Alte. ‘Willst du es uns eröffnen?’ fragte der ehernen. ‘Sobald ich das vierte weiß,’ sagte der Alte. ‘Was kümmerts mich!’ murmelte der zusammengesetzte König vor sich hin. ‘Ich weiß das vierte,’ sagte die Schlange, näherte sich dem Alten und zischte ihm etwas ins Ohr. ‘Es ist an der Zeit!’ rief der Alte mit gewaltiger Stimme.”<sup>435</sup>

Each of the four kings – golden, silver, iron, and mixed – represent one of these four mysteries. Once the temple has risen out of the waters at the text’s finale, the metal kings unmask themselves as representatives of the three ‘forces’ (*Kräfte*) that rule the world: gold for wisdom (*Weisheit*), silver for semblance (*Schein*), and iron for power (*Gewalt*). The fourth force is love, presumably represented by the snake and young prince. Commentators have sought all sorts of extratextual allegorical correspondences for the kings, sometimes correlated to distinct social classes in pre-revolutionary France, for example. Most immediately, they form a clear allusion to Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in *Daniel 2* of the Bible, in which the king of Babylon dreams of a giant statue composed of four metals: a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and brittle feet of intermingled iron and clay. The prophet Daniel interprets

---

<sup>433</sup> *WA* IV Abtheilung, Bd. 10, pg. 304.

<sup>434</sup> *HA* 6 215

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 216.

these metal layers to represent four successive kingdoms. As in *Daniel*, in *Märchen* a prophecy about the providential course of history is also at issue: the raising of a new temple.

Relevant here, however, is not what the kings mean, but how they generate effects of meaningfulness: through a riddling game that establishes the snake as initiator and keeper of the secret of his own necessary victimage. Only the snake is in a position to trigger the cascade of transformations that will bring about the fulfillment of the prophecy alluded to five times in the story with the Biblical formula “Es ist an der Zeit!”<sup>436</sup> The fourth king of intermingled ores, on the other hand, refuses to pose a riddle, refuses to engage in the social game of interpretation that they elicit. Not only do the kings pose riddles within the storyworld, but they also represent riddles to the reader that the text itself answers in its conclusion by associating each king with a world-ruling force. It is no wonder, then, that the *Märchen* elicits an “Auslegungssucht” in its readers, for the text is, in a sense, auto-interpretive. The pragmatic aim of such riddling games at both text-immanent and -reception levels is to initiate the reader into an interpretive community. The societal whole that emerges within the storyworld accordingly remains indebted to the snake just as readers’ interpretations of the story remain hermeneutically beholden to making sense of its seemingly unmotivated self-sacrifice: “‘Gedenke der Schlange in Ehren!’ sagte der Mann mit der Lampe; ‘du bist ihr das Leben, deine Völker sind ihr die Brücke schuldig, wodurch diese nachbarlichen Ufer erst zu Ländern belebt und verbunden werden.’”<sup>437</sup> This mode of indebtedness, however, does not call for further exchange and transformation, for the snake is dead; remembrance of the original sacrifice suffices.

---

<sup>436</sup> Cf. Friedrich Ohly. “Römisches und Biblisches in Goethes ‘Märchen.’” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*. Bd. 91, H. 2 (1961), pp. 147-166.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid. Pg. 238.

Through its many metamorphoses, the snake was able to bring the initially unexchangeable will-o'-the-wisps' gold coin into generative circulation.<sup>438</sup> As the *Goethe-Wörterbuch* notes, “im ‘Märchen’ treten differenzierte symbolhaft-geistige Aspekte hervor [...] Als Inbegriff des Wertvollen, Kostbaren repräsentiert ‘Gold’ unter den metaphorischen Verwendungen [...] ein ganzes Spektrum wesentlicher ideeller Werte.”<sup>439</sup> Wolfgang Emrich further claims that “Gold hat hier [in Goethes *Märchen*] eine betont lebenszerstörende, bedrohliche Funktion. Wohl aber ist es fruchtbar, schöpferisch, ja rettend durch die Vermittlung der Schlange [...] wobei [...] bei ihr das Gold zum rein ideellen ‘Schein’ wird.”<sup>440</sup> While Emrich is certainly correct about the snake’s productive mediation of the gold, he neglects the conclusion’s deep ambivalence, an ambivalence tied to how gold is charged with conflicting symbolic values. If gold initially functioned as a sort of hyperallusive substance, ultimately transforming into ‘ideal semblance,’ by the end of the fairytale it has undergone a kind of desymbolization, becoming literal functional currency.

The mark of the fairytale’s conclusion, in other words, can be found in how the initially unexchangeable remainder of gold coin becomes, in a sense, exchangeable legal tender. Right at the story’s apparently happy ending, the will-o'-the-wisps shake off gold coins that rain down on the masses congregated around the temple on the bridge. This riotous crowd is “begierig zu wissen” and see firsthand what lays hidden behind a veil in the fourth niche of the temple: the deformed, collapsed fourth king. So great is this collective desire that it threatens to become violent and perhaps even place the temple itself in jeopardy: “Das Volk hatte kein Ende seines

---

<sup>438</sup> One of the few commentaries to pay serious attention to the economic dimension of Goethe’s *Märchen* is Wolf Kittler. Other commentaries focus on the text-immanent network of relations into which gold enters, such as Solberg. Cf. Wolf Kittler. *Die Geburt des Partisanen aus dem Geist der Poesie. Heinrich von Kleist und die Strategie der Befreiungskriege*. Freiburg a.B.: Rombach 1987. Pg. 150-162; Ingeborg H. Solberg. “Symbolik und ambivalente Funktion des Goldes in Goethes ‘Märchen.’” *Jahrbuch des Wiener Goethe-Vereins*. Vol. 73 (1969). Pg. 40-59.

<sup>439</sup> Cf. <http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/GWB?lemma=gold>

<sup>440</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Emrich. *Die Symbolik von Faust II. Sinn und Vorformen*. Frankfurt a.M./Bonn: Athenäum 1957. Pg. 193-4.

Schauens und seiner Bewunderung gefunden, und die zudringende Menge hätte sich in dem Tempel selbst erdrückt, wäre ihre Aufmerksamkeit nicht wieder auf den großen Platz gelenkt worden.”<sup>441</sup> The kingdom’s first official act beyond the prince’s coronation seems to be the distribution of a kind of universal basic income vis-à-vis the will-o’-the-wisps, which distracts the mob from overcrowding the temple:

Unvermutet fielen Goldstücke, wie aus der Luft, klingend auf die marmornen Platten, die nächsten Wanderer *stürzten darüber her*, um sich ihrer zu *bemächtigen*, einzeln wiederholte sich dies Wunder, und zwar bald hier und bald da. Man begreift wohl, daß die abziehenden Irrlichter sich hier nochmals eine Lust machten und das Gold aus den Gliedern des zusammengesunkenen Königs auf eine lustige Weise vergeudeteten. *Begierig* lief das Volk noch eine Zeitlang hin und wider, *drängte* und *zerriß sich* auch noch, da keine Goldstücke mehr herabfielen. Endlich verlief es sich allmählich...<sup>442</sup>

Rather than unveiling the misshapen fourth king, “ein Mittelding zwischen Form und Klumpen,” the mob receives his gold in the form of newly minted currency, which presumably facilitates traffic and trade across the bridge.<sup>443</sup> The people clamor to see the ultimate source of wealth behind this redistribution, the deformed remnant that cannot be exchanged and yet cannot be disposed of, but the comically ugly sight of the fourth king must be kept from them at all costs: “wohlmeinende Bescheidenheit hatte eine prächtige Decke über den zusammengesunkenen König hingebreitet, die kein Auge zu durchdringen vermag und keine Hand wagen darf wegzuheben.”<sup>444</sup>

This peculiar scene casts the tale’s apparently utopian conclusion into doubt and has on the whole been neglected in commentaries. Indeed, no one has remarked just how strange it is that, seemingly out of nowhere, an anonymous crowd, a populace (*Volk*), suddenly emerges at the bridge, perfectly coincident with the mythical installation of the youth as the new king. This “Volk” or “Menge” might be considered the last ‘character’ introduced in the storyworld, and

---

<sup>441</sup> HA 6 241.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid. Pg. 237.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid. Pg. 241.



how one interprets this last riddle and its narrative function depends on how one reads the will-o'-the-wisps' gold at the conclusion. If one takes the gold coin to be identical with that with which the tale began (an unexchangeable remainder), to form but a hyperallusive symbol, then the conclusion does represent a utopian resolution achieved through the snake's *Entsagung* and the characters' cooperation. If, however, one takes the gold coin to represent a literal and newly instituted currency, to have undergone a kind of desymbolization, then the conclusion remains far more ambiguous. The prophetic arrival of a new kingdom that would bridge both realms separated by the stream then coincides with the emergence of a riotous mob that threatens to overrun the temple unless held back and placated with currency. These "Goldstücke" were extracted from the fourth monarch, the defunct royal source of redistributed wealth hidden behind a veil like the uncanny specter of a foregone era. The ambiguity of the tale's conclusion is thus ultimately generated by the ambivalence of gold in Goethe's *Märchen*, which is an ambivalence not only about what the gold coin means symbolically, but about whether it is a symbol in the first place by the story's end.

This reading brings the *Märchen*'s conclusion in thematic proximity to the first act of *Faust II*. In a sense, both scenes inversely mirror one another: in *Faust*, the invention of an illusionary paper currency that is only nominally backed by underground gold reserves; in *Märchen*, the establishment of a true-value golden currency. Just a year after writing the fairytale, Goethe reports on a *Festzug* performed by the Weimar court that involved participants masked as will-o'-the-wisps: "Eine andere Gesellschaft hatte einen Zug von gemischten Masken aufgeführt, unter welchen sich ein paar Irrlichter sehr zu ihrem Vortheil ausnahmen, sie waren sehr artig gemacht und streuten, indem sie sich drehten und *schüttelten*, Goldblättchen und Gedichte

aus.”<sup>445</sup> Goethe here uses the exact same verb that designates how the *Irrlichter* generate gold coin in *Märchen*. The fact that the will-o’-the-wisps in the *Festzug* distribute poems in addition to gold attests to their deep imaginative kinship with the *Knabe Lenker* in *Faust II*, for he represents poetry qua squandered surplus: “Bin die Verschwendung, bin die Poesie; / Bin der Poet, der sich vollendet / Wenn er sein eigenst Gut verschwendet” (V. 5573-5). The *Knabe Lenker* is the principle of distribution that brings the static accumulated wealth of Plutus (Faust in costume) into circulation. He does this by scattering coins, jewels, and trinkets into a tumultuous crowd that snatches them up as they transform into a beetles or ignite in a Pentecostal contagion of flame: “Wie greift und hascht die Menge! / Fast kommt der Geber ins Gedränge” (V. 5590-1). The *Irrlichter* of the fairytale similarly distribute gold coin to “die zudringende Menge” below: “Begierig lief das Volk noch eine Zeitlang hin und wider, drängte und zerriß sich auch noch.”

The complementary financial imaginaries operative in both texts further correspond to a difference in strategies of figuration. The *Knabe Lenker* introduces himself and Faust qua Plutus as ‘allegories:’ “Denn wir sind Allegorien / Und so solltest du uns kennen” (V. 5531-2). He engages the Herold in a riddling game, taunting the latter to determine what he and Faust allegorically represent: “fahre fort, / Erfinde dir des Räthsels heitres Wort” (V. 5541-2). In a letter to Schiller, Goethe noted that he sought in *Märchen* “die Erinnerung an die Allegorie in jedem Augenblick zu tilgen,” while a future fairytale yet to be written would be “ganz allegorisch.”<sup>446</sup> As Heinz Schlaffer has argued, the *Mummenschanz* of *Faust II* reveals how the arbitrary representational dynamics of allegory accord with the universal fungibility enabled by paper

---

<sup>445</sup> Goethe to Schiller on January 20, 1796. Cf. *WA* IV/11 16. Emphasis added.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 78.

money that is arbitrarily backed by nothing other than royal fiat and societal consensus.<sup>447</sup> The paper money invented in the *Mummenschanz* thus represents the ‘completely allegorical’ imaginative counterpart to the golden coin of Goethe’s *Märchen*, about which Schiller said “daß alles Symbol sey.”<sup>448</sup> Unlike the allegories that invent paper money in *Faust II*, the fairytale’s gold coin brings the very material substance of wealth into circulation as symbol.

Goethe continually associated the mediation facilitated by money with semiotic processes. In a discussion of symbolism, for example, he notes: “Verba valent sicut numi. [Worte gelten wie Münzen.] Aber es ist ein Unterschied unter dem Gelde. Es gibt goldne, silberne, kupferne Münzen und auch Papiergeld. In den erstern ist mehr oder weniger Realität, in dem letzten nur Convention.”<sup>449</sup> Not only is money a kind of arbitrary sign insofar as its value depends on societal convention rather than metallic reality, the phantasmatic consensus that undergirds paper currency in particular can distort and even ‘consume’ the real itself: “Alles Ideelle, sobald es vom Realen gefordert wird, zehrt endlich dieses und sich selbst auf. So der Credit (Papiergeld) das Silber und sich selbst.”<sup>450</sup> As *Mummenschanz* makes clear, the invention of paper money is closely tied in Goethe’s imagination to unlocking the insatiable abyss of human desire. After Plutus ‘unleashes’ the treasures in his “Kiste” (“Nun ist es Zeit die Schätze zu entfesseln!” V. 5709), the “Menge” reports on what it sees within the phantasmatic source of wealth presumably backing the future paper currency: “Gefäße golden schmelzen sich, / Gemünzte Rollen wälzen sich. / Dukaten hüpfen wie geprägt, / O wie mir das den Busen regt – / Wie schau ich alle mein Begehrt!” (V. 5715-20). The metamorphic interplay of molten gold and freshly stamped coin reveals to the

---

<sup>447</sup> A more contemporary reading of the invention of paper money can be found in Vogl (2002). Cf. Heinz Schlaffer. *Faust Zweiter Teil. Die Allegorie des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Metzler 1981; Joseph Vogl. *Kalkül und Leidenschaft. Poetik des ökonomischen Menschen*. München: Diaphanes 2002.

<sup>448</sup> *NA* 28, pg. 36

<sup>449</sup> From the *Allgemeine Naturlehre* of 1791. Cf. *WA* II/11 167.

<sup>450</sup> From the *Maximen und Reflexionen* drawn from *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum*. Cf. *WA* I/42 152.

crowd the abyssal plasticity of their own desire as unleashed by newfound ‘liquidity.’ It makes perfect sense, then, that *Mummenschanz* ends in flames: once the real demands the ideal, attempts to materialize its transformative power in unbacked paper currency, then that currency renders everything universally exchangeable, albeit in the form of ash. The analogue to Plutus’s dangerous yet revelatory “Kiste” in the world of Goethe’s *Märchen* would be the source of the crowd’s redistributed wealth: the inner sanctum of the deformed fourth king that they transgressively seek to penetrate before distracted by the will-o’-the-wisps. On the whole, the end of *Märchen* and its shower of ideal golden coin represent the positive ‘utopian’ counterpart to the dystopian conflagration caused by paper currency in *Mummenschanz*. This inverse resemblance further rests on a distinction in representational dynamics (the allegorical vs. the symbolic). At the same time, however, the presence of a riotous crowd in both imaginative scenes casts the fairytale’s utopian resolution into doubt.

### 2.c “Reinigungsmittel der Phantasie:” Desire and Exchange

This interpretive emphasis on the economic dimension of Goethe’s fairytale – on the problem of chronic indebtedness and on the gold-backed currency with which it might conclude – may strike the skeptical reader as a capitulation to contemporary relevance. The series of novellas that comprise the *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* takes, however, as two of its principal themes erotic desire and economic exchange.<sup>451</sup> The first two stories (on *die Sängerin Antonelli* and the *Klopfgeist*), concern themselves with the empirical order of nature and the possibility of supernatural phenomena, though already in the case of Antonelli romantic desire is at issue (her lover comes back to haunt her after dying of rejection). The next two stories (*die*

---

<sup>451</sup> My account builds on the approach to Goethe’s *Unterhaltungen* developed by Gerhard Neumann, who sees the text as principally concerned with the salvation of love out of its entanglement with bourgeois exchange relations. Cf. Gerhard Neumann. “Die Anfänge deutsche Novellistik. Schillers ‘Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre’ – Goethes ‘Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten.’ In: *Unser commercium*. Ed. Wilfried Barner, Eberhard Lämmert, & Norbert Oellers. Stuttgart: Cotta’sche Buchhandlung 1984. Pg. 433-460.

*schöne Krämerin* and *der Schleier*) thematize relations between the sexes in a similarly supernatural key. The two novellas that immediately precede *Das Märchen* (on the procurator and Ferdinand) deal with the precarious imbrication of erotic desire and economic exchange. The *Märchen* also concerns itself with this imbrication: in the case of erotic desire, through the magically enforced initial separation of the prince and Lilie; in the case of economic exchange, through the will-o'-the-wisps' golden coin. Both narrative strands come to intersect as the will-o'-the-wisps aid in the prince's resurrection to help fulfill the prophecy by opening the doors to the underground chambers housing the four kings ("geschäftig mit ihren spitzesten Flammen Schloß und Riegel aufzehrten"). Most importantly, they redistribute the gold contained in the irregular fourth king while simultaneously leaving the golden king of wisdom intact (as he warns them, "Hebet euch weg von mir; mein Gold ist nicht für euren Gaum!").<sup>452</sup> Indeed, from the very beginning the will-o'-the-wisps are in search of Lilie, yet disoriented in the foreign realm of the storyworld, as they ask the snake for directions in exchange for more gold coin, which the snake ingests so that it might glow more intensely.

Dwelling with Ferdinand's novella will allow a number of structural similarities with the subsequent *Märchen* to become clear. For most commentators the fairytale represents a sudden departure from the bourgeois milieu of the novellas that precede it.<sup>453</sup> Goethe himself told

---

<sup>452</sup> HA 6 234

<sup>453</sup> Numerous interpretations have sought to systematize and elucidate the inner connection between the multiple novellas as well as the fairytale that surpasses them. One of the most suggestive organizations of the novellas is developed in conversation with Schiller's *Ästhetische Briefe* by Marius Tölzer. Cf. Marius Tölzer. "Wissen sie nicht [...] uns irgend ein Märchen zu erzählen?" Betrachtungen zur Struktur von Goethes *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* hinsichtlich Schillers Briefen *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*." DVJS 92. Jahrgang, 2018; Ulrich Gaier. "Soziale Bildung gegen ästhetische Erziehung. Goethes Rahmen der 'Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten' als satirische Antithese zu Schillers 'Ästhetischen Briefen' I-IX." In: *Poetische Autonomie? Zur Wechselwirkung von Dichtung und Philosophie in der Epoche Goethes und Hölderlins*. Ed. Helmut Bachmaier & Thomas Rentsch. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1987. Pg. 207-272; Gert Ueding. "Gesprächsgesellschaft in Utopia. Goethes Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten." In: *Aufklärung über Rhetorik. Versuche über Beredsamkeit, ihre Theorie und praktische Bewährung*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer 1992. Pg. 125-137; Lothar Bluhm. "In jenen unglücklichen Tagen..." Goethes *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* oder: Die Ambivalenz von Kunst und Gesellschaft." In: *Erzählte Welt – Welt des Erzählens*. Ed. Rüdiger Zymner et al. Köln 2000. Pg. 27-45; Sigrid

Schiller: "Mehr Ein Uebersprung als ein Uebergang vom bürgerlichen Leben zum 'Mährchen' ist mein diessmaliger Beitrag geworden."<sup>454</sup> The fairytale is even divided from the preceding series of novellas by its title: "*Das Märchen*;" no other novellas are granted this privilege. Indeed, the novellas progressively increase in length until one reaches the fairytale, which is the longest and ends without a return to the frame narrative. Like a Klein bottle, the framed stories gradually encroach upon the frame narrative that contains them until the fairytale completes the overtaking of the narrative frame by the framed. As Goethe wrote to Schiller while he was still conceiving the final fairytale, "Ich würde die Unterhaltungen damit [mit dem Mährchen] schließen, und es würde vielleicht nicht übel seyn, wenn sie durch ein Product der Einbildungskraft gleichsam ins Unendliche aus liefen."<sup>455</sup> Goethe's remark suggests that the fairytale not only turns the relationship between narrative frame and framed novellas inside out, but that it furthermore transcends the bourgeois world they represent altogether. Commentators have on the whole followed Goethe's hints here, but the fairytale might more accurately be said to transfigure the precedent novellas' bourgeois milieu rather than transcending it completely. What ultimately ties the *Märchen* to the bourgeois world out of which it emerges and from which it departs is money: the imbrication of economic exchange and erotic desire.

Attending to the many connections between the Ferdinand novella and *Märchen* will allow a generic transformation to become legible: not the caesura-like leap from a novella to a fairytale, but the imaginative transfiguration of the former into the latter. The central problematic of the Ferdinand novella might be said to be money qua facilitator of mimetic desire. Ferdinand has been raised by his mother to avoid debts at all costs: "Schulden hatte er bisher nicht gemacht,

---

Bauschinger. "Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten (1795)." In: *Goethes Erzählkunst*. Ed. James McLeod & Paul Michael Lützeler. Stuttgart: Reclam 1986. Pg. 134-167.

<sup>454</sup> Letter from August 21, 1795. Cf. *WA* IV/10 289.

<sup>455</sup> From August 17, 1795. Cf. *Ibid* Pg. 286.

denn seine Mutter hatte ihm davor den größten Abscheu eingeflößt.”<sup>456</sup> In no other novella from the *Unterhaltungen* are moral guilt and economic debt so closely intertwined. Ferdinand falls in love with the immensely popular Otilie and seeks to gain her attention through extravagantly expensive gifts. These gifts are financed through an accidentally discovered defect in his father’s writing desk, which, when struck on the right spot, pops open to allow access to the father’s store of coin. In a sense, Otilie becomes the fixed object of Ferdinand’s desire precisely because she is so fervently desired by the fellow young men in town: “Eins der schönsten, angenehmsten und reichsten Mädchen der Stadt, gab ihm [Ferdinand], wenigstens für den Augenblick, den Vorzug vor seinen vielen Mitbewerbern.”<sup>457</sup> Rene Girard would call this a case of triangulated desire: Ferdinand desires Otilie through the mediating third (or ‘model’) of his fellow “Mitbewerber[.]”<sup>458</sup> At the same time, Otilie understands her own self-worth not as intrinsic, but as dependent on how she is seen by those around her. In desiring Otilie, Ferdinand desires social distinction itself, which depends on taking others as the external mediators of one’s own self-desire. His inclination is thus described as “die Neigung zu einem sehr schönen Mädchen, verflochten in größere Gesellschaft, [das] sich andern nicht allein gleichstellen, sondern vor andern sich hervortun und zu gefallen wünschte.”<sup>459</sup> Before he has found a secret source of funds with which to regale Otilie with gifts, Ferdinand is quite frustrated with his lack of money; he even begins to be jealous of and even resent his father. A former parental model has now morphed into a god-like mimetic rival, what Girard would call his desire’s internal mediation:

Hatte er sonst seinen Vater als sein Muster angesehen, so beneidete er ihn nun als seinen Nebenbuhler. Von allem, was der Sohn wünschte, war jener im Besitz; alles, worüber

---

<sup>456</sup> HA 6 189

<sup>457</sup> Ibid. Pg. 190.

<sup>458</sup> Cf. René Girard. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Trans. Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Hopkins UP 1965.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid. 189-90.

dieser sich ängstigte, ward jenem leicht. Da glaubte denn der Sohn, daß der Vater wohl auch manchmal entbehren sollte, um ihn genießen zu lassen.<sup>460</sup>

Both model and rival, Ferdinand's father lives a highly profligate, financially carefree lifestyle that the son envies. Though the father does not desire Otilie, he is in possession of the currency Ferdinand needs in order to attain his object of desire. In this sense, their shared object is money, which facilitates the mimetic contagion.

Once Ferdinand discovers an illicit source of coin, however, he begins to incur *Schuld* in both senses of the word. Indeed, the compartment of the father's writing desk that opens onto copious funds bears a striking resemblance to the fairytale trope of the endlessly generous money purse. Even the Abbé (the narrator) refers to this source of money in ominous terms as a he recounts how Ferdinand attempts to resist "der Versuchung, aus der verbotenen Quelle in dringenden Fällen zu schöpfen."<sup>461</sup> Much like the snake transforms upon ingesting the surplus of golden coin by being ennobled through the gift of sight, Ferdinand undergoes an inverse moral transformation in response to his newfound wealth: "seine Lebhaftigkeit und Anmut hatten sich in ein heftiges, ja beinahe wildes Wesen verwandelt."<sup>462</sup> In order to atone for this moral lapse, Ferdinand must pay his debts and so attempts to profit from a manufacturing venture undertaken in a village away from town. Resolved to carry through with this ethico-economic *Wiedergutmachung*, he returns home with "das Lösegeld [...], wodurch er sich von den geheimen Verbrechen zu befreien gedachte."<sup>463</sup> His mother, however, has by now inferred that he stole the money, alerted to its loss by Otilie's parents, who report the extravagant gifts, and the father's discovery of missing funds. Ferdinand tells the truth, but the numbers simply do not add up: "er konnte sich nicht einmal ganz zu dem Silber bekennen, und hoch und teuer schwur er, von dem

---

<sup>460</sup> Ibid. Pg. 191.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid. Pg. 195.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid. Pg. 193.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid. Pg. 201.



Golde nichts angerührt zu haben. [...] Wie wollte er seinen Eltern überreden, daß er das Gold nicht angegriffen?“<sup>464</sup> Like the erotic desire for Otilie, moral guilt and atonement here are subject to an economic calculus.

As in the *Märchen*, at issue in Ferdinand’s novella is the mysterious circulation of a foreign gold currency: “Der Alte hatte das Geld, das ihm der Sohn entwendete, nicht eben gemerkt, außer daß unglücklicherweise darunter ein Paket *einer in dieser Gegend ungewöhnlichen Münzsorte* gewesen war [...] Diese vermißte er.”<sup>465</sup> Only when the father discovers the misplaced gold coin does the mother believe her son, for now the balance sheets return to normal: “Das Gold habe ich gefunden; der Vater [...] durch die vielen Beschäftigungen des Tages zerstreut, hat es vergessen. Mit dem Silber stimmt deine [Ferdinands] Angabe ziemlich zusammen, die Summe ist nun viel geringer.”<sup>466</sup> Now that Ferdinand has repaid his economic debts and morally atoned in one stroke, he begins to see Otilie for who she really is. Freed from the enthrallments of monetarily mediated mimetic desire, he sees the other as other as if for the first time: “nun bemerkte er Fehler an ihr, die ihm sonst verborgen geblieben waren.”<sup>467</sup>

Though magical rather than economic exchanges are at issue in *Märchen*, in both Ferdinand’s novella and the fairytale a foreign gold currency plays a crucial role in bringing the narratives to a resolution. In both cases, gold coin functions as a kind of unexchangeable remainder: the ferryman refuses to accept it as payment, which allows the snake to take the wasted surplus and spiritually mediate it so as to bring it into magical circulation, while in Ferdinand’s case the fact that the gold coin was never exchanged spells out his moral redemption. Like the old woman indebted to the stream whose black hand is shrinking, Ferdinand also finds

---

<sup>464</sup> Ibid. Pg. 202.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid. Pg. 199. Emphasis added.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid. Pg. 203.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid. Pg. 204.

himself chronically indebted. When he takes on the manufacturing project in the village, for example, Ferdinand receives travel money from his father. Given that he is already indebted to his father, however, Ferdinand decides to travel frugally in order to take the surplus travel money left over and funnel it back to repay his debt. Far from having no connection to the bourgeois world of trade and commerce that precedes it, the *Märchen* takes up the Ferdinand novella's exploration of the imbrication of erotic desire and economic exchange, the nexus of moral guilt and financial debt, and transfigures its literal golden currency into a potent symbol. Both stories deal with moralized debt markets: whether the psychologized bourgeois ethics of the novella or the idealized collaborative ethos of the fairytale. It is as if Goethe found the ultimate mythic solution to the problem of mimetic desire on view in the novella within his fairytale: sacrifice.

It may seem as if erotic desire plays a less prominent role in Goethe's *Märchen* than it does in the Ferdinand novella. This is because the fairytale does not deal with individuated, psychologically thick desires, but with anthropologically constant desires intrinsic to the human being. The branch of pre-modern science that sought to think through how such universal human desires might be satisfied was alchemy. Indeed, the nexus of magical exchange and transformation on view throughout Goethe's *Märchen* has often been interpreted in terms of alchemical symbols, while Hans Binswanger has argued in the case of *Faust II* that Goethe mobilizes an alchemical imaginary in order to figure the seemingly magical capacity of modern economies to generate profit ex nihilo and even 'limitless' growth.<sup>468</sup> In the science-historical part of his *Farbenlehre*, Goethe renders alchemy intelligible by framing it as a fairytale, calling alchemy "ein aus allgemeinen Begriffen entspringendes, auf einen gehörigen Naturgrund

---

<sup>468</sup> Cf. Hans Christoph Binswanger. *Geld und Magie: Eine ökonomische Deutung von Goethes Faust*. Hamburg: Murmann 2018.

aufgebautes Märchen.”<sup>469</sup> Alchemy represents “ein Sprung von der Idee, vom Möglichen, zur Wirklichkeit, eine falsche Anwendung echter Gefühle [...] wodurch unsern liebsten Hoffnungen und Wünschen geschmeichelt wird.”<sup>470</sup> As a ‘false application of genuine feelings,’ alchemy deludes people into thinking that their deepest desires might attain fulfillment through magical means. Goethe defines a triad of such desires, correlating them to Kant’s necessary postulates of practical reason: freedom of the will (which makes genuine virtue or the good possible), immortality, and the existence of god:

Hat man jene drei erhabnen, untereinander im innigsten Bezug stehenden Ideen, Gott, Tugend und Unsterblichkeit, die höchsten Forderungen der Vernunft genannt, so gibt es offenbar drei ihnen entsprechenden Forderungen der höheren Sinnlichkeit, Gold, Gesundheit und langes Leben. Gold ist so unbedingt mächtig auf der Erde, wie wir uns Gott im Weltall denken. Gesundheit und Tauglichkeit fallen zusammen. Wir wünschen einen gesunden Geist in einem gesunden Körper. Und das lange Leben tritt an die Stelle der Unsterblichkeit. Wenn es nun edel ist, jene drei hohen Ideen in sich zu erregen und für die Ewigkeit zu kultivieren, so wäre es auch gar zu wünschenswert, sich ihrer irdischen Repräsentanten für die Zeit zu bemächtigen. Ja diese Wünsche müssen leidenschaftlich in der menschlichen Natur gleichsam wüten und können nur durch die höchste Bildung ins Gleichgewicht gebracht werden. Was wir auf solche Weise wünschen, halten wir gern für möglich; wir suchen es auf alle Weise...<sup>471</sup>

For Kant, god, immortality, and freedom are ideas that we cannot prove, but that we must necessarily postulate in order to so much as be able to conceive of ourselves as beings capable of moral action.<sup>472</sup> Similarly, for Goethe there are three necessary postulates of ‘higher sensuality’ (“Forderungen der höheren Sinnlichkeit”): gold, health, and a long life. These represent anthropologically intrinsic desires, “Wünsche [,die] leidenschaftlich in der menschlichen Natur gleichsam wüten.” The alchemist erroneously grants his imagination free reign in thinking that he might somehow concoct a series of magico-chemical conversions that will grant him all three in

---

<sup>469</sup> From: *Zur Farbenlehre. Historischer Theil I. Vierte Abtheilung. Sechzehntes Jahrhundert. Alchymisten*. Cf. *WA* II/3 207-208.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>471</sup> From: *Zur Farbenlehre. Historischer Theil I. Vierte Abtheilung. Sechzehntes Jahrhundert. Alchymisten*. Cf. *WA* II/3 207-208.

<sup>472</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant. *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Meiner 2017 [orig. 1793/94].

one stroke: “Daß sich hierbei die Einbildungskraft sogleich tätig erzeuge, läßt sich erwarten.”<sup>473</sup>

All alchemical conversions, however fanciful, thus testify to the imagination’s power to impose pattern onto empirico-sensuous chaos: “ihre Operationen [deuteten] sämtlich auf Übergänge, Metaschematismen und Verwandlungen hin[.]”

Like the ‘fairytale’ of alchemy, Goethe’s *Märchen* is made up of such schematic operations of transition and transformation: the old man’s lamp, for example, transforms stone to gold, wood to silver, and dead animals to gemstones. There is not, however, a single character or even group thereof who desire to obtain long-lived health and omnipotence on earth, which Goethe associates with gold (“Gold ist so unbedingt mächtig auf der Erde”). Rather, the fairytale leads the reader’s imagination to co-construct a storyworld in which the anthropologically intrinsic demands of our sensual nature – what Goethe called the “drei [...] Forderungen der höheren Sinnlichkeit” – find themselves bracketed, as it were, as irrelevant. In its alchemical operations of magical exchange, *Das Märchen* allows the reader to imagine a world in which our sensual natures would never need to register as ‘demands,’ as lack and thus as motivators of desire in the first place. This accords with Goethe’s general definition of the fairytale genre. In the *Wanderjahre*, for example, fairytales are read, “Mährchen, die den Mensch aus sich selbst hinausführen, seinen Wünschen schmeicheln und ihn jede Bedingung vergessen machen, zwischen welche wir, selbst in den glücklichsten Momenten, doch immer noch eingeklemmt sind.”<sup>474</sup> In the *Noten und Abhandlungen* that accompany the *Divan*, Goethe similarly speaks of the fairytale’s main goal as one of ‘unconditioning’ the human being. The prophet Mohammed banned fairytales, for “Ihr eigentlicher Charakter ist, daß sie keinen sittlichen Zweck haben und daher den Menschen nicht auf sich selbst zurück, sondern außer sich hinaus in’s unbedingte Freie

---

<sup>473</sup> *WA* II/3 208 (see footnote 128)

<sup>474</sup> *WA* 24 144

führen und tragen.”<sup>475</sup> Key here is that the fairytale does *not* ‘uncondition’ the human being with regard to his spiritual or intellectual (*geistigen*) nature, which would result in the sort of noumenal being about which Kant speculates. Rather, the fairytale unconditions the human being with regard to the sensual (*sinnliche*) dimension of his nature; its world is one of oneirically metamorphic phenomenality.

In the case of Goethe’s *Märchen*, the reader finds her imagination overtaxed by what initially seems like an endless paratactic series of characters and correspondent magical abilities introduced one after another. Only after the snake’s self-sacrifice does this chain of magical exchanges and conversions begin to coalesce into a coherent form, a holistic interface of all character-functions that brings about the total transformation of the storyworld. Humboldt associated this moment with the fairytale’s pragmatic end as “ein Reinigungsmittel der Phantasie der bloßen Form nach.”<sup>476</sup> We can now specify exactly why the human imagination is in need of such cathartic purgation. Unlike alchemy, which flatters our anthropologically innate desire for unconditioned power and the utility of long health, the *Märchen* divests us of the phantasy of ever seamlessly attaining such a sensuous state: the final transformation must be paid for by the snake’s act of *Selbstentsagung*. Despite their magical abilities (their transformational functions), each character remains quite limited in the scope of his or her power; only when all work together does their individual limitation achieve an ‘unconditioned’ state capable of fulfilling the prophecy. As the man with the lamp puts this, “ein einzelner hilft nicht, sondern wer sich mit vielen zur rechten Stunde vereinigt.”<sup>477</sup> Far from representing a complete break with the novellas that precede it, the fairytale presents a continuation of the central thematic of self-renunciation in a new key. *Das Märchen* transfigures the central nexus of the Ferdinand novella – the imbrication

---

<sup>475</sup> *WA* 7 37

<sup>476</sup> Cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt. *Briefe*. Bd. 3: 1795-1797. No. 406.

<sup>477</sup> *HA* 6 250

of erotic desire and economic exchange – in order to work through imaginatively how innate human desires rooted in our sensual natures achieve expression in its magical exchanges. In his discussion of alchemy, Goethe wrote that these “Wünsche müssen leidenschaftlich in der menschlichen Natur gleichsam wüten und können *nur durch die höchste Bildung* ins Gleichgewicht gebracht werden.”<sup>478</sup> It is no surprise, then, that alongside the three kings, who represent the world-ruling forces of wisdom, semblance, and power, a fourth force, emblemized by the snake’s self-sacrifice and the youth’s dedication to Lillie, manifests itself at the text’s conclusion, namely love: “Die Liebe herrscht nicht, *aber sie bildet*, und das ist mehr.”<sup>479</sup>

### 3. The Essential Kinship of Goethe’s *Märchen* and *Novelle*

Both *Novelle* and *Das Märchen* are connected by virtue of their titles, which name their genres. And yet there is nothing particularly paradigmatic or typical about how these narratives exemplify their genre. The stories instead stage intergeneric metamorphoses that allow them to become the genre that they exemplify, thereby transforming what it means to belong to that genre. In the case of *Novelle*, a latent epic morphed into an explicit idyll, a transformation associated with the narrative’s self-transcendence into the state of lyric. The narrative-structural pattern of the anachronic event was correlated in turn with the text-immanent problematic of the pathology of the imagination, its propensity to look past the novelty of the present event by experiencing it as a traumatic repetition of the past (akin to the fulfillment of a curse) or as a fearful premonition of the future (akin to the prophecy of an omen).

In the case of *Märchen*, the thematic nexus of erotic desire and economic exchange in the Ferdinand novella was incorporated and transfigured into the more universal nexus of innate human desires and alchemical exchanges in the fairytale, a transformation associated with the

---

<sup>478</sup> From: *Zur Farbenlehre. Historischer Theil I. Vierte Abtheilung. Sechzehntes Jahrhundert. Alchymisten*. Cf. *WA* II/3 207-208. Emphasis added.

<sup>479</sup> *HA* 6 238. Emphasis added.

fairytale's auto-interpretive dramatization of multiple riddles (e.g., the four kings who represent forces only named at the text's conclusion, or even the characters, each of which Goethe said represents a 'riddle'). The narrative-structural pattern of magical exchange and chronic indebtedness was correlated in turn with the reception-level problematic of the catharsis of the imagination, the overcoming of its overtaxed remembrance of multiple disparate character-functions through the coalescence of one transformative gestalt (the resurrection of the king & emergence of the temple) that productively coordinates all characters' magical abilities to one shared end.

What characters undergo within the storyworld of *Novelle* – a cathartic purge of a pathologically inventive imagination – readers undergo during the course of reading *Märchen*. Goethe did not indiscriminately celebrate the imagination in its free productive activity; as *Novelle* demonstrates, its inventions and projections can run awry and lose touch with reality. In his natural-scientific writings, Goethe would hence speak of the morphologist's need to incorporate grounded exercises of the imagination into the act of observation. In a conversation with Eckermann in which he praises the botanist Martius, Goethe notes:

‘Im Grunde [...] ist ohne diese hohe Gabe ein wirklich großer Naturforscher gar nicht zu denken. Und zwar meine ich nicht eine Einbildungskraft, die ins Vage geht und sich Dinge imaginirt, die nicht existieren; sondern ich meine eine solche, die den wirklichen Boden der Erde nicht verläßt und mit dem Maßstabe des Wirklichen und Erkannten zu geahnten, vermutheten Dingen schreitet.’<sup>480</sup>

This imaginative activity that lawfully unfolds according to the 'norm' of the real into the realm of the unknown may seem germane only to the natural sciences, irrelevant for literary production. In the realm of Goethe's literary morphology of genres, however, nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, Goethe ascribed the fantastical genre of the fairytale in particular the ability to allow the imagination's lawfulness to shine forth even in the midst of apparently arbitrary whimsy.

---

<sup>480</sup> Cf. *Gespräch mit Eckermann*, 21.1.1830. Cf. *WA Gespräche* 7 192.

In a review of *Tausend und ein Tag*, translated by Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen (1827), Goethe claims of the fairytale that

Die Einbildungskraft in ihrer ausgedehnten Beweglichkeit scheint zwar kein Gesetz zu haben, vielmehr wie ein wacher Traum hin und her zu schwanken; aber, genau besehen, wird sie auf mannichfaltige Weise geregelt: durch Gefühl, durch sittliche Forderungen, durch Bedürfniß des Hörers, am glücklichsten aber durch den Geschmack, wobei die Vernunft ihre edlen Gerechtsame leitend ausübt.

In the case of his own fairytale, Goethe's *Märchen* leads its reader through a similar "wach[en] Traum," a parade of new characters whose introductions appear unmotivated in a plot that seems to be going nowhere, until the snake and the young prince finally grant the narrative a telos that coordinates the character-functions so as to allow the reader to apprehend them as one whole that purges his imagination by rendering it regular ("geregelt").

Beyond a deep concern with the inner lawfulness of the productive imagination in (not despite) its freedom, both *Novelle* and *Märchen* evince a further inner connection. For Jolles, the fairytale is a 'simple' form (*einfache Form*), the novella an 'art-form' (*Kunstform*).<sup>481</sup> Simple forms such as riddles and legends are predominantly oral popular forms, while art-forms such as novels are printed and circulated among a literary elite. Despite this difference, Jolles discerns a systematic interconnection between the literary novella and the simple fairytale:

Betrachten wir die Tätigkeit der Novelle, so sehen wir, wie sie gestaltend in die Welt eingreift, einen Teil dieser Welt festlegt, ihn bindet in einer Weise, daß nur durch diese Form dieser Teil endgültig und schlechterdings vertreten wird.  
Reden wir von der Tätigkeit des Märchens, so sehen wir, daß es an erster Stelle sich selbst gestaltet und nun bereit ist, in dieser Gestalt die Welt in sich aufzunehmen.<sup>482</sup>

---

<sup>481</sup> Jolles's approach to literary forms explicitly draws on Goethe's morphology; a remarkably lucid reconstruction of this theoretical affinity and of Jolles's model of literary meaning more generally can be found in Axer (2018). Cf. André Jolles. *Einfache Formen. Legende, Sage, Mythe, Rätsel, Spruch, Kasus, Memorabile, Märchen, Witz*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1969 [orig. 1930]; Eva Axer. "Die 'morphologische Aufgabe' in der Literaturwissenschaft. Zum Verhältnis von Form und Zeit in André Jolles *Einfache Formen*." In: *Literarische Form / Literary Form. Theorien – Dynamiken – Kulturen. Beiträge zur literarischen Modellforschung. Theories – Dynamics – Cultures. Perspectives on Literary Modelling*. Ed. Robert Matthias Erdbeer, Klaus Stierstorfer, Florian Kläger. Heidelberg 2018. Pg. 51 – 68.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid. Pg. 233.



The novella intervenes in the world by selecting part of it and lifting it, as it were, into a sphere of representation wherein the world-events thereby told become one with their mode of literary telling. In a prologue to Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Jolles will go on to claim that the novella is defined by its primary interest in the events that happen rather than the people to whom they happen; the inner life of characters or the trials of the hero remain secondary.<sup>483</sup> In the novel, by contrast, the characters take primacy over the events through which they live. Goethe's novel *Werther*, for example, depicts a young man who perishes due to love, while Mérimée's novella *Carmen* depicts love so intense it necessitates perishing. For Jolles, the difference between the novel and novella amounts to the subtle distinction between a particular man's fate and fate's chosen man. Above all, the novella's selected event must possess (or be written so as to possess) the quality of urgency (*Eindringlichkeit*).

The fairytale, on the other hand, does not select part of the world so as to grant the urgency of the event literary finality, but rather absorbs the totality of the world into itself so as to reconfigure the world according to its own autonomous law. In other words, fairytales transform the world into a storyworld, while novellas allow the singular urgency of part of the world, one of its events (*Begebenheiten*), to shine forth. For Jolles, the fairytale leaves the reader with a distinct kind of moral satisfaction, what he terms *naïve Moral*, the anthropological "Geistesbeschäftigung" from which all simple forms of the fairytale emanate. A comparison to the novel again brings out the uniqueness of the simple form more clearly. In the world of a novel, it makes sense for the reader to ask at multiple points in the story: 'And then what did the protagonist do?' An ethics of action (*Handeln*) is operative here, one rooted in the idea of an ethical agent capable of first-personal reference ('What must I do?'). In the world of a fairytale, on the other hand, it does *not*

---

<sup>483</sup> Cf. Giovanni di Boccaccio. *Das Dekameron*. Trans. Albert Wesselski. Vorwort von André Jolles. Frankfurt a.M. 1967 [orig. 1921].

make sense for the naïve reader to ask: ‘And then what did the prince do?’ Rather, the fairytale reader foregoes all implicit first-personal reference and more naturally asks: ‘And what happened then to the prince?’ An ethics of happenings (*Geschehen*) is operative here, one rooted in what Jolles terms *naïve Moral* or “[d]iese Erwartung, wie es eigentlich in der Welt zugehen müßte.”<sup>484</sup> Unlike novellas, which lift an event out of the world so as to render its singular urgency manifest in literary rendition, fairytales absorb the entire world so as to reconfigure it according to a naïve morality of happenings that knows no psychologically thick or socially conditioned moral deliberation or ambiguity. The generic difference here is ultimately a temporal one: the novella grants the event in its novel singularity the aura of having occurred but once (*Einmaligkeit*), while the fairytale grants the happenings of its naively moral storyworld the aura of occurring iteratively (*Jedesmaligkeit*).<sup>485</sup> The truth behind the fairytale formula ‘Once upon a time’ lies not in its literal semantics, but in its ubiquitous repetition as the stock phrase for invoking a world that knows no singular times or places.

Given the interconnection between the novella and fairytale genres that Jolles elucidates, we are now in a position to specify the essential kinship between Goethe’s *Novelle* and *Märchen*. In short, Goethe writes a fairytale-like novella and a novella-like fairytale. When the narrator of *Novelle* relinquishes the last word to the flute-playing child, he allows the simple form of the child’s song to overtake the literary form of the novella. Unlike the pre-contextualized, iterative anachronic events anxiously projected by the princess, the child’s improvised variations of his stock of verse repeat in a new context when he sings before the lion in the wild. Such poetic

---

<sup>484</sup> Ibid. Pg. 240.

<sup>485</sup> As Jolles puts this, “Wenn wir nun noch einen Augenblick über die Richtungen reden, in denen sich *Novelle* und *Märchen* bewegen soll, so stellen wir folgendes fest: der *Novelle*, die einen Teil der Welt abschließt, kommt es darauf an, alles in diesem *bündigen* Abschluß fest, besonders, einmalig zu gestalten; in dem *Märchen* dagegen, das sich der Welt offen gegenüberstellt und die Welt in sich aufnimmt, behält die Welt auch in ihrer Umwandlung ihre Beweglichkeit, ihre Allgemeinheit und das, was ich ihre *Jedesmaligkeit* nennen möchte” (234).

repetition (in contrast to the narrative principle of irreversible change) was found to bring the singularity of the event to light, for repetition in a new context generates the possibility of novelty. And yet the mother, who witnesses this event, feels the urge to clap before the performance, as if unaware of the iteration's high-stakes recontextualization in a crisis. Ending with neither a radically singular event nor a straightforward repetition, Goethe's *Novelle* allows the final event's singular urgency to come to appearance precisely through the iterability and recontextualizability of poetic language in recitation. The events that make up Goethe's novella achieve *Einmaligkeit*, in other words, through poetic *Jedesmaligkeit*. As a consequence, perhaps, no one in *Novelle* has a particular name beyond their station or rank (e.g. *Prinzessin*, *Mutter*, even *Honorio* is emblematic). Similarly, the kingdom is set in an unspecified somewhere, not even necessarily in a Germanic land. It is as if the Oriental family of circus performers and their wild animals escaped from the more realistic world of the novella into a fairytale by the story's end, transforming that world along the way.

In the case of Goethe's *Märchen*, the fairytale shrouds its happenings in the aura of iterability from the beginning, but the foreign will-o'-the-wisps and their unexchangeable gold trigger a cascade of transformations that will eventually end with the singular event of a total renewal of the storyworld. In other words, the happenings that make up *Märchen* revoke *Jedesmaligkeit* in order to achieve the *Einmaligkeit* of the temple's emergence out of the waters, which transforms every character and bridges both realms. Within the fairytale's storyworld, this intergeneric narrative tendency toward the temporality of the novella is tracked by the continual invocation of a prophecy that will soon reach fulfillment, a fivefold repeated "Es ist an der Zeit!" Indeed, when the man with the lamp calls on all characters to cooperate in order to resurrect the deceased youth, he specifies the crucial importance of timing: "Wir sind *zur glücklichen Stunde*

beisammen, jeder verrichte sein Amt, jeder tue seine Pflicht, und ein allgemeines Glück wird die einzelnen Schmerzen in sich auflösen.”<sup>486</sup> Such cooperation depends on temporal luck, on the coordinated repetition of each character function in a novel collaborative context, in order to bring about the singular event. In a letter to a friend, Goethe associated one of the *Märchen*’s central events – the snake devouring its own tail in ouroboros formation around the youth just before sacrificing itself – with a ‘lucky temporality:’

Man bedient sich als Symbol der Ewigkeit der Schlange, die sich in einen Reif abschließt, ich [sic] betrachte dieß hingegen gern als Gleichniß einer glücklichen Zeitlichkeit. Was kann der Mensch mehr wünschen, als daß ihm erlaubt sey das Ende an den Anfang anzuschließen, und wodurch kann dieß geschehen, als durch die Dauer der Zuneigung, des Vertrauens, der Liebe, der Freundschaft.<sup>487</sup>

Far from ending in blindly optimistic utopian conclusions, Goethe’s *Novelle* and *Märchen* ultimately explore what it means for the human imagination to attain shared self-understanding through the template of narrative, which allows us “das Ende an den Anfang anzuschließen.” Goethe’s two experiments in intergeneric prose thus interrogate how to imagine the Janus-faced narrative event in its polarity: caught between iterability and singularity, transformable from one into the other.

---

<sup>486</sup> Or: “ein einzelner hilft nicht, sondern nur wer sich mit vielen *zur rechten Stunde* vereinigt” (250). Cf. *HA* 6 231. Emphasis added.

<sup>487</sup> From a letter to von Treba, 5.1.1814. Cf. *WA* IV/24 92.

## Chapter 4. Poetic Form as Sonically Sensuous Thought in Goethe's *terza rima* Works

*A poem is an activity, seeking to become itself.*  
— I. A. Richards

In September 1826, Goethe wrote the only two poems he would ever write in *terza rima*: Faust's monologue in *Anmuthige Gegend* and the untitled meditation reflecting on Schiller's death, "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's."<sup>488</sup> A gesture of formal homage to Dante, the use of *terza rima* has led critics to search for intertextual affinities between Dante's *Divina commedia* and the two poems, especially Faust's monologue. Foremost among these affinities is Goethe's adaptation of the Platonic movement upwards to a blinding divine light. Rather than simply taking the rhyme as a basis for intertextual relations of a thematic nature between Goethe and Dante, the following argument will instead attempt to make sense of the rhyme as a sensuous form of thought. This will involve a historicization of the rhyme scheme within its local German, rather than world historical, context – not, however, in order to note the way the poems reflect or passively register that context, but in order to investigate the manner in which they refract or actively interpret it. In other words, once situated within its reception by the German Romantics, *terza rima* ceases to be a mere poetic constraint of Italian provenance and instead emerges as a parasemantically fraught figure, as laden with implicit conceptual content. Goethe's sporadic engagement with *terza rima* thereby becomes legible as the articulation of a poetic problem – specifically, the problem of poetic closure, of coming to an end – emergent around 1798 and solved in 1826.

---

<sup>488</sup> The poem "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's, wo ich beschaute" has formerly been known as *Bei Betrachtung von Schillers Schädel* (a title perhaps appended by Eckermann in 1833) and as *Die Reliquien Schillers* (from a reference to the poem made by Goethe in a letter to Zelter from Oct. 24, 1827, though avoided by Goethe himself in the *Ausgabe letzter Hand*). It can be dated precisely to September 25/6 given Goethe's diary entries, among them "Nachts. Terzinen." The dating of Faust's monologue remains more difficult. Critics fall into two camps, most arguing on stylistic grounds that the poem arose in the same month and year as the skull poem, while a smaller contingent, inspired by the monologue's linguistic parallelisms with Goethe's diary entries from September 18, 1797, noted upon his visit to the Rhine Falls of Schaffhausen, argue for an earlier dating to that period. For a detailed overview of the debate on the monologue's chronology, see Emil Sulger-Gebing. *Goethe und Dante*. Berlin: Verlag von Alexander Duncker. 1907. Pg. 90.

The argument will therefore proceed in two parts. The historical background of the Romantics' reception of the rhyme scheme will be sketched before turning to a reading of Goethe's "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's" with this background in mind as an interpretive frame. Not only should this validate Barthes's now old dictum that "a little formalism turns one away from History, but [...] a lot brings one back to it," it should also aim for an overcoming of any positivist formalism that would content itself with the elucidation of general patterns at the expense of semantic content.<sup>489</sup>

At the same time, Goethe's engagement with *terza rima* allows crucial aspects of his late style to come into view. Reading the *Beinhaus* poem will allow us to isolate key structural components that undergo re-constellation in Faust's monologue of *Anmuthige Gegend*. Both texts thereby become legible as a kind of poetic diptych that sheds light on the late Goethe's 'pagan' religiosity.<sup>490</sup> Indeed, the two texts came to inhabit prominent positions in Goethe's oeuvre: Faust's very first words after the Gretchen tragedy consist in this monologue, which opens *Faust II*, while Goethe published the *Beinhaus* poem in the 1829 *Ausgabe letzter Hand* at the very conclusion of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, setting it off in Antiqua from the rest of the novel in *Fraktur*.<sup>491</sup> The following interpretation will only address the *Beinhaus* poem, reading it as a

---

<sup>489</sup> The historicization of formal and stylistic devices as a method for literary analysis has recently become more prominent in the discipline of English, especially Victorian studies. Interesting work has been done, for example, by Meredith Martin on iambic pentameter and the construction of English national identity. In historicizing, one should be wary of relying to heavily on historical source study in order to generate equations between verse form and a given historical or conceptual content. Historicist approaches can also tend toward neglecting the ways in which poems, as aesthetic artifacts, are never mere seismographs of historical circumstance, but assert a kind of freedom to challenge, even judge, their historical contexts. Cf. Roland Barthes. "Myth Today." In: *Mythologies*. New York: The Noonday Press. 1957. Pg. 112; Meredith Martin. *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930*. Princeton: Princeton UP. 2012; Caroline Levine. "Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies." *Victorian Studies*. Vol. 48. No. 4. 2006. Pg. 625-657

<sup>490</sup> That both texts are connected *beyond* their common rhyme is by no means critical consensus. The Frankfurt edition, for example, claims that "Terzinen gebraucht Goethe sonst nur noch am Anfang von *Faust II*. Inhaltlich ist jedoch kaum eine Brücke zu finden" (FA I, 2, 1201).

<sup>491</sup> Eckermann excised the *Beinhaus* poem as well as *Vermächtnis*, which ended the second book, from the edition of the *Wanderjahre* printed in the *Weimarer Ausgabe*, an excision repeated in Trunz's *Hamburger Ausgabe*. For an

self-standing text, but the way in which the poem deals with the immanent problem of poetic closure itself has interpretive consequences for its functional position at the end of the *Wanderjahre*, which cannot be addressed here.

Above all, tracking Goethe's late engagement with *terza rima* allows us to concretize in interpretive praxis theoretical claims made on behalf of late style. Adorno, for example, claims that "[d]as Verhältnis der Konventionen zur Subjektivität selbst muß als das Formgesetz verstanden werden, aus welchem der Gehalt der Spätwerke entspringt [...] Dies Formgesetz wird aber gerade im Gedanken an den Tod offenbar."<sup>492</sup> For Adorno, the late Beethoven's mortal subjectivity does not come to expression ("Ausdruck") in his late works; rather, the artist's mortal subjectivity has evacuated itself from the work, abandoned the work to leave behind 'ruins' ("Konventionstrümmer") of seemingly unmotivated convention and empty 'gaps' ("Hohlstellen") that testify to a creative subject *via negativa*.<sup>493</sup>

Adorno notes in this regard the heterogeneity and seemingly incomplete character of Goethe's *Faust II* and the *Wanderjahre*. As a text explicitly about mortality written in the foreign rhyme scheme of *terza rima*, the *Beinhaus* poem presents an exemplary test case for making sense of how the late Goethe qua creative subject took up a newly imported formal convention. The convention of *terza rima* turns out not so much to illustrate Adorno's claim as to qualify it, indexing not the evacuation of subjectivity from the work and its resultant fragmentation and incompleteness, but rather the non-closure and processuality characteristic of an ever-generative nature. The rhyme convention turns out to itself enact a complex temporal self-relation that

---

overview of the publication history of the *Wanderjahre*, see Ehrhard Bahr: *The Novel as Archive: The Genesis, Reception, and Criticism of Goethe's "Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre"*. Columbia, SC 1998.

<sup>492</sup> Theodor W. Adorno: „Spätstil Beethovens“ [1934]. In: T.W.A.: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. by Rolf Tiedemann. Bd. 17: *Musikalische Schriften IV*. Frankfurt/Main 1982, pp. 13–17, here p. 15.

<sup>493</sup> Adorno: “Spätstil Beethovens” (see fn. 5), p. 15.

overcomes the poem's beginning with death qua end. This processualized self-relation of the text can be thought of as one aspect of Goethe's late style as exemplified by this poem.

More directly than Adorno, Kommerell richly described Goethe's late style as "ein System des Verkürzens, das Bestimmteste als das Allgemeinste gebend, von scharfer Sinnlichkeit des Abstrakten."<sup>494</sup> This characterization allows us to get a grip on two further aspects of Goethe's late style that come to the fore vis-à-vis the *Beinhaus* poem: its deeply 'recollective' or intertextual nature as well as its transformation of language into a medium of sensuous thought. As will become apparent, the poem refers in its most idiosyncratic details to a vast array of other Goethean intertexts from earlier periods of his life, themselves remembered, archived, and reconfigured by the text at hand. Kommerell calls this a kind of systematic shorthand or even symbolic procedure, later associating it with the capacity of memory in old age: "Alter heißt bei Goethe: gesteigerte Erinnerung. [...] Goethe erlebt mit der Weisheit des tausendsten Males und mit der Ergriffenheit des ersten Males."<sup>495</sup> In this sense, it is important to disassociate the "Beinhaus" poem from its apparent biographical context in the recollection of Schiller's death, for Schiller is never once named in the text. Rather, the singular memory of this individual's passing has been 'intensified' into a general meditation on mortal time itself without thereby robbing the poem of its affective urgency. Furthermore, *terza rima*, as a means of sonically shaping the time of the poem, allows Goethe to mobilize concepts drawn from his natural science (e.g., polarity and intensification) in order to think sensuously about the finality of time in language.

### **1. From *terza rima* to *Terzinen*: The Historical Poetics of a Rhyme Scheme**

Among the many studies of Goethe and Dante, Paul Friedländer's in particular has worked out the "Dantische Linie der Ouvertüre," as he calls *Anmuthige Gegend*, setting it in contrast with

---

<sup>494</sup> Max Kommerell: „Faust II. Teil. Zum Verständnis der Form“. In: M.K.: *Geist und Buchstabe der Dichtung. Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, Hölderlin* [1940]. Frankfurt/Main <sup>6</sup>1991. pp. 9–74, here p. 11.

<sup>495</sup> Kommerell: "Faust II. Teil. Zum Verständnis der Form" (see fn. 8), p. 13.



a Shakespearean line of influence prominent in the elfin choir that opens the scene.<sup>496</sup> Friedländer reconstructs Goethe's engagement with Karl Streckfuß's Dante translation in September of 1826, identifying a number of lexical and figurative borrowings, among them the compound *Flammen-Übermaß*. Beyond the details of a philological source study, however, Friedländer makes the genetic argument that Goethe originally composed Faust's monologue as part of a cycle of poems that would include the poem on Schiller's skull. Such a cycle would have evinced "naturesymbolische[n] Gehalt," thus fulfilling Goethe's unrealized plans to write a didactic poem on the philosophy of nature modeled on Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. As the cycle never realized itself, the monologue was "eingeschmolzen" into *Faust II*. One of the merits of Friedländer's study is his reconstruction of this original, yet unrealized, context. Most commentators, on the other hand, seem to have forgotten Erich Auerbach's decisive claim that "Es kann gegenüber der Neigung zu einer vergleichenden Annäherung zwischen der Komödie und dem Faust nicht deutlich genug gesagt werden, daß sie völlig unvergleichbar sind und nichts miteinander zu tun haben" (686).<sup>497</sup> Auerbach continues to characterize the drastic difference, emphasizing Faust's active role enabled by Mephistopheles and Dante's largely passive role as a spectator led by Virgil:

Faust sucht sich selbst auf tausend Wegen, Dante leiten seine Führer zum Anblick Gottes auf so schmale Pfade, jaß jede Abweichung ewiges Verderben wäre; Faust fühlt in sich selbst und dem eigenen irdischen Wirken die wechselnde Fülle des Göttlichen, Dantes Betrachtung findet jenseits allen Wirkens die konkrete und unverschiebbare Gestalt der göttlichen Ordnung; die Figuren und Szenen im Faust sind individuelle Seelengeschichte, sinnlos ohne den Bezug auf den Erlebenden, die der Komödie sind ein objektives und geordnetes Außen.<sup>498</sup>

---

<sup>496</sup> Cf. Paul Friedländer. *Rhythmen und Landschaften im Zweiten Teil des Faust*. Weimar: Hermann Beyer & Söhne. 1953.

<sup>497</sup> Cf. Erich Auerbach. "Entdeckung Dantes in der Romantik." In: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*. VII. 1929. Pg. 682-692.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 686-687.

Building on Auerbach's short study of the German Romantic reception of Dante, the following historical reconstruction will shift the emphasis to the interpretation of Dante's rhyme scheme.<sup>499</sup>

Streckfuß's translation of Dante was the first in German to make use of *terza rima* successfully. Goethe, however, had encountered *terza rima* long before reading Streckfuß. In the issue of Schiller's *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1798*, A.W. Schlegel published a long *terza rima* poem titled "Prometheus."<sup>500</sup> In response to this poem, Goethe wrote a letter to Schiller on 21 February 1798 asking for advice:

Sagen Sie mir doch Ihre Gedanken über die Versart, in welcher der Schlegelsche Prometheus geschrieben ist. Ich habe etwas vor, das mich reizt, Stanzen zu machen; weil sie aber gar zu obligat und gemessen periodisch sind, so habe ich an jenes Silbenmaß gedacht, es will mir aber bei näherer Ansicht nicht gefallen, weil es gar keine Ruhe hat und man wegen der fortschreitenden Reime nirgends schließen kann.<sup>501</sup>

Schiller responded two days later in agreement with Goethe's verdict:

Was Ihre Anfrage wegen des Silbenmaßes betrifft, so kommt freilich das meiste auf den Gegenstand an, wozu Sie es brauchen wollen. Im allgemeinen gefällt mir dieses Metrum auch nicht, es leiert gar zu einförmig fort, und die feierliche Stimmung scheint mir unzertrennlich davon zu sein. Eine solche Stimmung ist es wahrscheinlich nicht, was Sie bezwecken. Ich würde also die Stanzen immer vorziehen, weil die Schwierigkeiten gewiß gleich sind und die Stanzen ungleich mehr Anmut haben.<sup>502</sup>

---

<sup>499</sup> Wolfgang Kayser, for example, has examined an intertextual field of poems constituted on the basis of the shared verse form of the Italian *Stanze*, allowing him to conclude that "die Stanze bei Goethe von der *Zueignung* an immer wieder die Nebel-, Wolken-, Schleier-Bildlichkeit trägt, in über sich und zwar auf das Geheimnis der Poesie wissender Bedeutsamkeit" (96). Not only does Kayser's method allow him to identify the *Stanze* as a verse form used by Goethe for poetological poems, but the verse form continually exhibits the symbol of *Nebel*, in turn embedded within a symbolic network associating *Schleier*, *Trübe*, *Wolken*, *Klärung*, and even *Hoffnung*. Such analysis demonstrates the remarkable degree to which the imagery of Goethe's poetic oeuvre manifests an immanent systematicity. As Kayser demonstrates, this internal coherence does not limit itself to poetic imagery, but encompasses verse forms as well. The latter may even serve as clues to symbolic networks that would otherwise remain undisclosed. Cf. Wolfgang Kayser. "Goethes Dichtungen in Stanzen." In: *Kunst und Spiel: Fünf Goethe-Studien*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 1961. Pg. 86-99.

<sup>500</sup> Schlegel's Prometheus poem evinces a number of resonances with Faust's monologue in *Anmuthiger Gegend*. A single citation from Schlegel's poem – its axiomatic last line – should suffice to make the force of the intertextuality felt: „Der freye Mensch blickt zur verwandten Sonne.“ Cf. A.W. Schlegel. "Prometheus." In: Friedrich Schiller. *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1798*. Tübingen: J.G. Cotta. Pg. 48.

<sup>501</sup> WA IV. Abt. CIII, 71f.

<sup>502</sup> Schillers Briefe, ed. Jonas. Bd. V, 349f.

This epistolary exchange articulates Goethe's perception of a problem, namely the problem of poetic closure created by *terza rima*'s triadic rhyme. Insofar as the *framed* middle rhyme term (say, *aba*) generates the *framing* pair of rhyme words for the next stanza (or *bcb*), bringing a *terza rima* poem to an adequate close poses a unique challenge to the poet.

Seen in light of its historical context, Goethe's comment evinces an uncanny poetic awareness, for Ludwig Tieck responded in a review to the same poem of Schlegel by attributing a temporal momentum to its triadic rhyme scheme:

Welcher Ernst herrscht in dem Gedichte Prometheus! In diesem schweren Sylbenmaße zeigt der Dichter seine ganze Kunst im Versbau [...] das Ganze scheint sich selbst erschaffen zu haben. Ich möchte behaupten, daß uns das wunderbare *Verschlingen* der Strophen durch die Reime *in eine ferne Zeit versetze*; wie ein *ernster Strom* rauscht ohne Absatz und Pause das Gedicht uns vorüber. Der Dichter hat hier, soviel ich weiß, den ersten und ohne Zweifel völlig gelungenen Versuch gemacht, uns im Deutschen die Terzinen des Dante zu geben.<sup>503</sup>

If Tieck shares Goethe's sentiment that this rhyme "gar keine Ruhe hat," he nonetheless appraises that poetic effect differently. What causes Goethe to distance himself from the rhyme in 1798 forms the basis for laudatory enthusiasm on Tieck's part. Tieck refers to the rhyme's cumulative temporal momentum as a *Verschlingen*, a kind of engulfment in a progressive movement of concatenation troped as a "Strom."<sup>504</sup> Moreover, this forward-thrusting form of temporality functions to displace the reader into a distant time, "[uns] in eine ferne Zeit versetze[n]."

In his 1799 art historical *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst*, Tieck discusses "Das jüngst Gericht von Michael Angelo" and comes to a comparison of the painter with Dante. In this later discussion of the Italian poet, Tieck specifies the rhyme's imaginative function with the predicate 'prophetic,' as if *Terzinen*'s temporal momentum were not only

---

<sup>503</sup> Ludwig Tieck. *Die neuesten Musenalmanache und Taschenbücher (1796-1798)*. In: *Kritische Schriften*, Bd. 1. Leipzig. F.U. Brockhaus. 1848. Pg. 108-9 (emphasis mine).

<sup>504</sup> According to the *Grimm-Wörterbuch*'s entry on *verschlingen*, the word meant both "schlingend hinunterschlucken" as well as "schlingend verknüpfen." Cf. <http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GV03599#XGV03599>

future-oriented, but folded the future into the present by virtue of its middle term (*aba...*), which already grants the reader an anticipatory sense of the next or ‘future’ stanza (...*bcb*):

Dante singt in *prophetischen*, wunderbar *verschlungenen* Terzinen seine Dichtung, nirgend ein Stillstand, nirgend wo die Pracht der gewaltigen Verse aufhörte, immer tiefer wirst du in die geheimnisreiche Allegorie hineingeführt, hier findest du keine Nebensachen, keinen Ruheplatz, auf dem der Dichter stille steht, alle Kräfte spannen sich zum großen magischen Eindruck, aller Reiz ist vernachlässigt, die Erhabenheit nimmt dich in Empfang, die Wunder des Christentums, die mystischen Geheimnisse *verschlingen* dich in ihren unbegreiflichen Zirkeln, und nehmen dich mit sich fort.<sup>505</sup>

*ohne Absatz und Pause – nirgend ein Stillstand – keinen Ruheplatz*: Tieck emphasizes what might be called the phenomenology of the verse form, i.e. the way in which the *Terzinen* shape and reconfigure the experiential temporality of reading. Tieck’s lengthy paratactic sentence runs on and models the very rushed phenomenal effect it describes. Such an effect is the same one isolated by Goethe in his letter to Schiller, namely that “wegen der fortschreitenden Reime [man] nirgends schließen kann.” Tieck further names the progressive temporal momentum wrought by the rhyme scheme twice more a *Verschlingen*. Dante’s rhyme emerges here as a kind of sonic motor fueling the reader’s imaginative propulsion onward in the now of reading, tensing the reader’s “Kräfte” into one “großen magischen Eindruck” that ‘transports’ him into ever wider spheres of divine proximity.

Goethe, Schiller, and Tieck each react in a remarkably consistent manner to A.W. Schlegel’s “Prometheus,” but Schlegel not only introduced the ‘sound’ of *Terzinen* to German ears. He also developed a sophisticated analysis of the rhyme scheme in his *Vorlesungen über die romanische Poesie* from 1803–1804. There, Schlegel elaborated exactly the same problem of poetic closure that Goethe addressed to Schiller. For Schlegel, *Terzinen*, by virtue of their triadic concatenation, constitute a form of poetic temporality comparable to that of a dynamically self-

---

<sup>505</sup> Ludwig Tieck. *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst*. In: *Werke und Briefe*. Ed. Wilhelm Wackenroder. Berlin & München: 1984. Pg. 276 (emphasis mine).

generative nature or *natura naturans*. Schlegel's analysis is so rich that it deserves to be quoted at length:

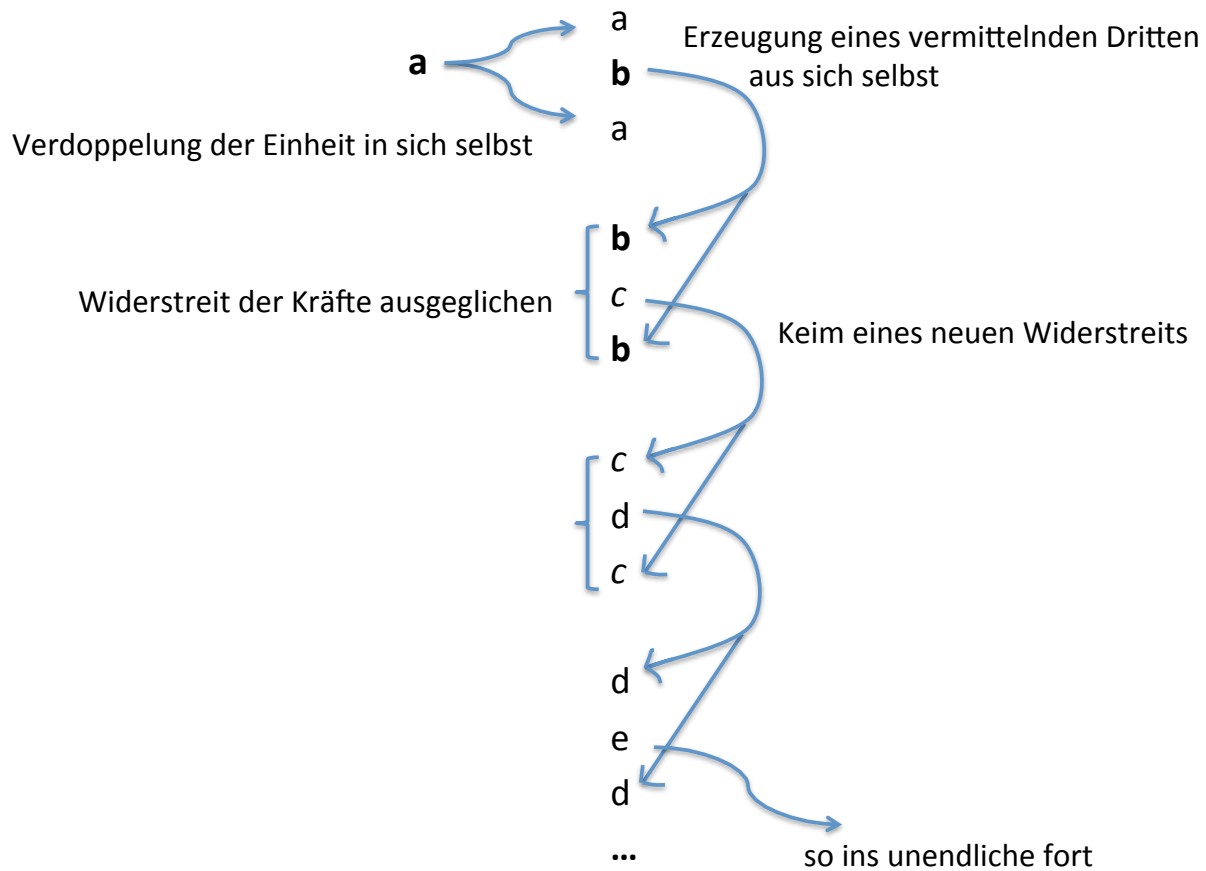
Die Dreyheit entsteht aber nicht nach der gewöhnlichen Meynung durch *Addition*, sondern durch *die Verdoppelung oder Entzweyung der Einheit in sich selbst*, und *Erzeugung eines vermittelnden Dritten aus sich selbst*. Dieß ist in der Terzine dargestellt: Der erste Reimvers ist gleichsam der *Vater* der 3ten ihm entsprechenden Zeile, und der 2te trennt und verknüpft sie beyde. Freylich erscheint diese erste in sich vollständige Zahl hier *unter den Schranken der Endlichkeit*, indem jede Terzine, vermöge des vereinzelt Reimes in der Mitte eine folgende fordert, grade wie durch *die Productivität der Natur* immer in jeder *Erzeugung* ein Widerstreit der Kräfte ausgeglichen, zugleich aber der *Keim* eines neuen Widerstreits ausgestreut wird, und so ins unendliche fort. Dieß begründet denn die Verkettung der Terzinen, die darin liegende *Hinweisung auf die Zukunft*, welche dieß Sylbenmaß zu einer *prophetischen* Bedeutung so geschickt macht. Und wie der Geist in dem Progressus der *Endlichkeiten* nur durch einen *freyen Akt*, durch einen unbegreiflichen Sprung *das Unendliche zur Einheit zusammenfassen* kann, so kann auch die Kette der Terzinen nur willkürlich durch einen zugegebenen Vers geschlossen werden. [...] Es fehlt ihrem Universum [dem von Milton und Klopstock im Vergleich mit dem der *Göttlichen Komödie*] an der organischen, von sich ausgehenden und in sich zurückgehenden Einheit.<sup>506</sup>

A.W. Schlegel elucidates what might be called the idea of *Terzinen*, the organizing thought that reaches concretion and poetic articulation in the general rhyme scheme. For just this is the implication of Schlegel's rejection of "Addition," of a merely *descriptive* account of how the three rhymed words emerge "nach der gewöhnlichen Meynung." Rather, the principle that generates the rhymed words consists in "die Verdoppelung oder Entzweyung der Einheit in sich selbst, und Erzeugung eines vermittelnden Dritten aus sich selbst." In other words, the initial and unified *a* doubles and divides itself into *a*<sub>1</sub> and *a*<sub>2</sub>, but not without the emergence of a latent third element that would mediate this self-division back into a higher, potentiated unity, the *b* in *a*<sub>1</sub>-*b*-*a*<sub>2</sub>. Crucial to this kind of analysis is the organicist terminology of which Schlegel makes use. The first *a* is hence said to be the "Vater" of the second *a*, while the mediating third (*b*) is said to be generated by "Erzeugung." The metaphors of (pro)creation (*Erzeugung*) as a figure for nature's

---

<sup>506</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel. *Vorlesungen über die romanische Poesie*. In: *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik. Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*. II/I. Hsg. Georg Braungart & Ernst Behler. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh. 2007. Pg. 151-3 (emphasis mine).

dynamic self-generativity might be said to make Schlegel’s reading of *Terzinen* possible, for the same *b* that mediates self-division into a potentiated, higher unity (the return to *a*) also simultaneously functions as “Keim” in generating the next stanza, the next division-in-unity (*a b a* → *b<sub>1</sub> c b<sub>2</sub>*) (Diagram 7):



Schlegel’s interpretation of *Terzinen* accords with Tieck’s insofar as it, too, lays emphasis on the rhyme as a ‘prophetic’ form of temporality that folds the future into the present. Schlegel calls this “die darin liegende Hinweisung auf die Zukunft, welche dieß Sylbenmaß zu einer prophetischen Bedeutung so geschickt macht.” Schlegel diverges from his Romantic contemporaries, however, in his bold and novel thought of the rhyme scheme as homologous with *natura naturans*: “grade wie durch die Productivität der Natur immer in jeder Erzeugung ein

Widerstreit der Kräfte ausgeglichen, zugleich aber der Keim eines neuen Widerstreits ausgestreut wird, und so ins unendliche fort.” One can recognize here the influence of Schelling, not of his Dante essay, but of his *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* from 1799, published just four years before Schlegel’s *Vorlesungen über die romanische Poesie*.

This is not the proper forum for reconstructing Schelling’s philosophical argument, but a general summary should suffice to make the line of influence clear. Schelling begins with a view of nature inherited from Spinoza, namely as original, unconditioned activity. Given this starting point, the philosophical question becomes not how to characterize this unconditioned productivity, but how it becomes *possible* that we apprehend nature as a realm of distinct, conditioned products in the first place. As Schelling puts this, “Das Hauptproblem der Naturphilosophie ist nicht, das *Thätige* in der Natur, (denn das ist ihr sehr begreiflich, weil es ihre erste Voraussetzung ist), sondern das *Ruhende, Permanente* zu erklären.”<sup>507</sup> If nature is “absolute Productivität” (the same Latinate word used by A.W. Schlegel), it becomes inhibited (“gehemmt”) and thereby distinct as product due to a “Schranke” or limitation of its productivity (another term that resurfaces in Schlegel’s account).<sup>508</sup> Given that this productivity is by definition unlimited, however, its limitation must not be imposed from without (for what would be outside of nature?), but rather immanently emerge from the unconditioned productivity itself. Schelling resolves the issue by conceiving of nature as limiting *itself* in its unlimited productivity, its autonomous self-limitation thus a transformation of nature into an object for itself.<sup>509</sup> Schelling hence speaks of how “Die Natur muß ursprünglich sich selbst Objekt werden, diese Verwandlung des *reinen Subjekts* in ein

---

<sup>507</sup> F.W.J. Schelling. *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie. Zum Behelf seiner Vorlesungen*. Jena & Leipzig: Christian Ernst Gabler. 1799. Pg. 2

<sup>508</sup> Ibid. Pg. 23.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid. Pg. 27-8

*Selbst-Objekt* ist ohne ursprüngliche Entzweiung in der Natur selbst undenkbar.”<sup>510</sup> This self-limiting principle or “in sich selbst entzweite Productivität” is then fixed as product, i.e. self-division, and mediated “durch ein Drittes” that immanently emerges from the opposition that is self-division.<sup>511</sup> The product (the distinct natural being or phenomenon) is only a “Scheinproduct,” however, for the unlimited productivity of nature can never fully exhaust itself in its limited products; rather, nature oscillates between apparently limited product and ultimately unlimited productivity.<sup>512</sup>

This excursus has been necessary in order to dispel the potential impression of capriciousness or whimsy that may confront one upon reading Schlegel’s comparison of *Terzinen* to “die Productivität der Natur.” It should also demonstrate the semantic kinship of Schlegel’s critical vocabulary and Schelling’s philosophical terminology, for each of the terms used by Schlegel – *Productivität*, *Entzweiung*, *Widerstreit der Kräfte*, *Schranken der Endlichkeit*, *das Unendliche* – finds its counterpart in Schelling’s earlier text. The ultimate point of the comparison is not just a claim of influence, however, for the semantic loan also allows us to reach a general conclusion about Schlegel’s mode of literary criticism as exemplified in his reading of *Terzinen*. Schelling’s terminology aims at getting a conceptual grip on something as difficult and dynamic as nature’s absolute productivity, specifically in its capacity for *self*-limitation, that is, in its unconditioned autonomy. Schlegel’s critical vocabulary likewise aims at characterizing poetic *forms* – not just rhymes, but the entire repertoire of stanzas, meters, etc. – as autonomous *norms* of poetic production. The autonomy of the norm is what distinguishes it from a simple canon of

---

<sup>510</sup> Ibid. Pg. 28 (emphasis in original).

<sup>511</sup> Ibid. Pg. 60.

<sup>512</sup> My summary accords with that of Eckart Förster, who gives a detailed discussion of the triadic schema used by Schelling to potentiate the self-divided, unlimited productivity of nature into ever-higher realms of natural ‘product’ (e.g., potentiating the inorganic into the organic realm). Förster outlines the iterable schema as: 1) Duplicity in Identity, 2) Polarity, and 3) Indifference. Schelling himself notes this general schema in an “Allgemeine Anmerkung” on pg. 72. Cf. Eckart Förster. *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*. Trans. Brady Bowman. Cambridge: Harvard UP. 2012. Pg. 237-8.



poetic rules to be followed or diverged from, for a poetic form qua autonomous norm encompasses divergences from itself within itself as the principle of their intelligibility *as* deviations. In other words, Schlegel's criticism attempts to conceive of rhyme not as rhyme scheme, of stanza not as stanzaic architecture, but instead as *self-generative* principle of its own eventual scheme and architecture. Schlegel thus temporalizes *Terzinen* into a simultaneously self-transformative *and* self-identical process of unfolding sonic resonance.

We are now in a position to appreciate the last point of Schlegel's account, in particular its relevance for Goethe's short remarks in his 1798 letter to Schiller. There, Goethe articulated a problem of poetic technique opened up by the triadic concatenation of *Terzinen*, namely that "wegen der fortschreitenden Reime [man] nirgends schließen kann."<sup>513</sup> A.W. Schlegel was himself aware of the difficulty created by the rhyme scheme he first introduced to German ears. In a letter from 28 July 1797 written in response to Schiller's suggestions for that poem's revision, Schlegel remarks that "Das Ändern ist bey diesem verzweifelten Sylbenmaße, wo alles wie Glieder einer Kette in einander greift, sehr schwierig, ja manchmal fast unmöglich."<sup>514</sup> In his lectures, Schlegel correspondingly proposes a solution to this problem of poetic closure. He argues that, in order to bring the chain of rhymed words to a finish, the poet must make a willful cut:

Und wie der Geist in dem Progressus der Endlichkeiten nur durch einen freyen Akt, durch einen unbegreiflichen Sprung das Unendliche zur Einheit zusammenfassen kann, so kann auch die Kette der Terzinen nur willkührlich durch einen zugegebenen Vers geschlossen werden.<sup>515</sup>

Of note is the continuation of the comparison ("Und wie... , so...") that was begun in the philosophical terminology borrowed from Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. Schlegel interprets the

---

<sup>513</sup> WA IV. Abt. CIII, 71f.

<sup>514</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel und Friedrich Schlegel im Briefwechsel mit Schiller und Goethe. Hg. v. Josef Körner u. Ernst Wieneke. Leipzig: 1926. Pg. 44-48. URL: <http://august-wilhelm-schlegel.de/briefedigital/>

<sup>515</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel. *Vorlesungen über die romanische Poesie*. Pg. 151.

ending of poems written in *Terzinen* as nothing other than a manifestation of poetic freedom. That is, given that such poems are written in a rhyme that necessitates self-generative, progressive concatenation, the achievement of poetic closure will need to *counteract* the rhyme's force of continuation. The poem's closural strategy will be most successful, most in accord with the normative idea of *Terzinen*, if it manages to carry out a sudden, unexpected turn in tone, address, or figuration that manages to summarize or congeal the rhyme's sonic force of semantic continuation – the “Progressus der Endlichkeiten” – into one unified statement of concise density that would “das Unendliche zur Einheit zusammenfassen.”<sup>516</sup> Such a conclusion will not simply bring the poem to an abrupt end, but bind the rhyme's *unlimited* force of continuation into one coherent, *limited* statement, a finite part that mirrors the infinite whole. Like a triangle circumscribed by a circle, the triadic (or ‘triangular’) rhyme manages to suggest the unlimited (the ‘circular’) by virtue of its ‘free,’ *self-limiting* conclusion.

An unsystematic glance at how Goethe ended his only two poems written in *Terzinen* justifies Schlegel's analysis, for they end in some of Goethe's most famous lines, so didactically concise and symbolically suggestive that they are often invoked as self-standing citations. Faust's monologue in *Anmuthiger Gegend* ends:

D e r spiegelt ab das menschliche Bestreben.  
Ihm sinne nach und du begreifst genauer:  
Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben. (4725-7)

The *Beinhaus* poem similarly concludes:

Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen,  
Als daß sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare?  
Wie sie das Feste läßt zu Geist verrinnen,  
Wie sie das Geisterzeugte fest bewahre. (31-34)

---

<sup>516</sup> One might note, again, the similarity to Schelling's terminology in the *Erster Entwurf*: “Möglichkeit der Darstellung des Unendlichen im Endlichen – ist höchstes Problem aller Wissenschaften” (7). Interestingly, these terms (the limited, the unlimited) are also repurposed in the 1802/3 lectures on *Philosophie der Kunst*.

Though this is not the proper place to read these saturated lines, it should be noted that, given the problem of poetic closure articulated by Goethe in his letter to Schiller and given the solution provided by A.W. Schlegel in his lectures, an interpretive frame is in place for reading these poetic conclusions as sites of confluence where closural forces meet to strategically offset the force of continuation generated by the triadic rhyme. Indeed, an examination of other *terza rima* poems from the same period allows the importance of the poetic conclusion to become apparent. Schlegel ends his own “Prometheus” with the motif of gazing at the sun:

Der freye Mensch blickt zur verwandten Sonne. (338)<sup>517</sup>

while Tieck ends his “Die neue Zeit 1800” (written that same year):

Ein Regenbogen will sich oben zeigen,  
Er dämmert bunt mit rätselhaftem Schein,  
Und muß sich herrlich um die Erde neigen –  
Er soll ein edles Bild dem Dichter sein,  
Nach Sturm und Regen Sonne zu verkünden,  
Das Lied spannt sich durch alle Wolken rein  
Den künft’gen Glanz in Farben zu verkünden. (154-160)<sup>518</sup>

Schelling, too, wrote a number of poems in *Terzinen*, among them “Die letzten Worte des Pfarrers zu Drottning auf Seeland” (1802), a ghost story in rhymes, and “Lebenskunst:”

Zum Leben ward uns selber nur das Leben,  
Drum muß der Mensch, will er sich was erwerben,  
Vom Leben selbst zu leben sich bestreben. (4-6)<sup>519</sup>

Though these are not the concluding words of Schelling’s poem, they make another potential influence on Faust’s monologue visible, for that monologue’s opening line (“Des Lebens Pulse

---

<sup>517</sup> A.W. Schlegel. “Prometheus.” In: Friedrich Schiller. *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1798*. Tübingen: J.G. Cotta. Pg. 48.

<sup>518</sup> Ludwig Tieck. “Die neue Zeit 1800.” In: *Gedichte*. Hg. von Ruprecht Wimmer. Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag. 1995. Pg. 408-414 (citation pg. 414).

<sup>519</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. *Aus Schellings Leben. Bd. 1: 1775-1803*. Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel. 1869. Pg. 292-293.

schlagen frisch lebendig”) also pivots around the same semantic redundancy (*Leben – lebendig*) that structures Schelling’s poem (e.g., line sixteen, “Das Leben soll im Leben sich vergessen.”).

These intertextual affinities between Faust’s monologue and Romantic *terza rima* poems lend support to the claim that Goethe would have been aware of how other poets were managing to overcome the difficulty of poetic closure inherent to the triadic rhyme scheme.<sup>520</sup> In general, though, Goethe associated the rhyme scheme not only with technical difficulty, but with the artifice of poetic technique itself. In his short fragment *Epoche der forcirten Talente*, written in Weimar on 17 December 1812, the sixty-three-year-old Goethe reflects on the negative influence of Idealist philosophy on poetry and criticism in his era. He there makes the telling remark that

Außer diesem [Voß] ahmte man italienische und spanische Silbenmaße mit größerer Sorgfalt und Gewissenhaftigkeit nach, indem man die Oktaven-, Terzinen- und Sonettform auch im Deutschen ausbildete. Die beiden Enden der Dichtkunst waren also gegeben, entschiedener Gehalt dem Verstande, Technik dem Geschmack, und nun erschien das sonderbare Phänomen, daß jedermann glaubte, diesen Zwischenraum ausfüllen und also Poet sein zu können.<sup>521</sup>

Goethe associates the Italian and Spanish verse forms with “Technik,” as if getting the external form of a stanza or rhyme scheme correct, combined with the proper pre-ordained contents, could make one, by sheer force of technique and thematic selection, a good poet. Goethe even goes so

---











<sup>520</sup> Indeed, Goethe expressed this difficulty a number of times throughout his writings. A conversation with Eckermann and v. Müller from 3 December 1824, relates how Goethe took out a bust of Dante’s head and commented on its suggestive physiognomic features: “Er ist schon alt, gebeugt, verdrießlich, die Züge schlaff und herabgezogen, als wenn er eben aus der Hölle käme” (112). In comparison to the bust, a medallion in Goethe’s possession, displaying a profile of the Italian poet carved while he was still alive, shows “was hier die Nase für Kraft hat, wie die Oberlippe so kräftig aufschwillt, und das Kinn so strebend ist...” (113). As the conversation moves on to other topics, it soon returns to Dante. Eckermann relates: “Und so kam das Gespräch wieder auf die vor uns stehende Büste des Dante und dessen Leben und Werke. Besonders ward der Dunkelheit jener Dichtungen gedacht, wie seine eigenen Landsleute ihn nie verstanden, und daß es einem Ausländer um so mehr unmöglich sei, solche Finsternisse zu durchdringen. [...] Goethe bemerkte ferner, daß der schwere Reim an jener Unverständlichkeit vorzüglich mit schuld sei“ (116). Two years later, on 12 August 1826 (a month before Goethe wrote his two *terza rima* poems), Goethe remarked in a letter to C. F. Zelter: “Als ich vor einigen Tagen Herrn Streckfußens Übersetzung des Dante wieder zur Hand nahm, bewunderte ich die Leichtigkeit, mit der sie sich in dem bedingten Sylbenmaaß bewegte“ (122), and further goes on to suggest that he would like Streckfuß to translate an Italian tragedy, Manzoni’s *Adelchi*, “da ihn der Reim nicht hindert.” Cf. WA. *Anhang: Gespräche*. 5. Band: 1824-1826. (1890). Pg. 112 -116. & WA. IV. *Abtheilung*: 41. Band. (1907). April-December 1826.

<sup>521</sup> WA. I. *Abtheilung*: 42. Band. Zweite Abtheilung (1907). Anhang: Vorarbeiten und Bruchstücke. Paralipomena. Pg. 442-3.

far as to designate *Terzinen* the most artificial of verse forms available to a German poet in one of the paralipomena to his work on a *Lyrisches Volksbuch*:

Was die äußern poetischen Formen betrifft; so dürfte gleichfalls keine fehlen. Im Knittelverse würde die für uns natürlichste, und vielleicht die künstlichste in Sonett und Terzinen aufzunehmen seyn.<sup>522</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that one of the few precious glimpses into Goethe's compositional practice of crafting verse involves a draft of what would become his poem "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's, wo ich beschaute." Most striking in the draft is Goethe's peculiar use of occult-like icons along the left margin, which have been electronically reproduced below from the online *Weimarer Ausgabe* (Diagram 8):<sup>523</sup>

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 1  |    | So nah der Freund von der und jener Seite          |
| 2  | —   | Und immer ich gebunden an der Stelle               |
| 3  |   | Von wo ich gern [?] ins Breite und ins [?] Weite   |
| 4  | —   | Mich oft erkühnte wider Meereswelle                |
| 5  |  | Und wenn ich so zu manchen Buchten dringe          |
| 6  | —   | Entgegnet mir doch selten frische Quelle           |
| 7  |  | Die von des Freundes innrem [?] reichlich springe. |
| 8  |  | Die Strömung bricht an Felsen, schäumt an Riffen   |
| 9  |  | Und ... ein Schaum [?] um[?]wogen schnelle         |
| 10 |  | Der kluge Segler eilt vorbey zu schiffen           |
| 11 |  | [...]  |
| 12 |  | [...] ergriffen                                    |
| 13 |  | [...]  |

<sup>522</sup> WA. I. Abtheilung. 42. Band: Zweite Abtheilung (1907). Anhang: Vorarbeiten und Bruchstücke. I. Vorarbeiten zu einem Deutschen Volksbuch. Paralipomena. Lyrisches Volksbuch. Pg. 417.

<sup>523</sup> The Weimar edition of Goethe's works notes the following with regards to the draft: "Der obige Entwurf zu einem Gedicht in Terzinen bietet durch flüchtige Schrift und vielfache, theilweise nur angedeutete, nicht ausgeführte Correcturen der Entzifferung besondere Schwierigkeit." WA. I. Abtheilung: 5. Band: Zweite Abtheilung (1910). Lesarten zum 4. und 5. Bande der Gedichte. Paralipomena. Einzelnes. Pg. 409.

The Weimar edition leaves these strange icons unremarked, and whatever they may mean, they clearly follow the pattern of the *Terzinen* rhyme scheme: **aba** or circle/dash/circle, **bcb** or dash/moon/dash, **cdc** or moon/scepter/moon, **ded** or scepter/dotted-circle/scepter, and so forth. The icons thus function as a visual tool for keeping track of the knotty triadic rhyme, just as the anticipated rhyme word “ergriffen” was written down before the line that would so end.<sup>524</sup>

Given the problem of poetic closure articulated by Goethe in his letter to Schiller and given the solution provided by A.W. Schlegel in his lectures, an interpretive frame is now in place for reading Goethe’s poetic conclusions as sites of confluence where closural forces meet to *offset* strategically the force of continuation generated by the triadic rhyme. Indeed, from Tieck to Schlegel, common to all of the German Romantic sources outlined is their association of the rhyme with a prophetic form of temporality. In other words, the rhyme scheme’s historicization has hermeneutic implications for the reading of Goethe’s *terza rima* conclusions. One should not, however, assume that Goethe was writing ‘prophetic’ poems like his Romantic contemporaries simply because he took up the rhyme. Rather, Goethe’s poems become legible as a rejection and replacement of the Romantic model of prophetic anticipation with a model of immanent unfolding wherein the end is *already* present, yet implicit, at the beginning. Put somewhat schematically, the argument’s second half will demonstrate how Goethe inverts the rhyme scheme’s temporal direction from a future-oriented, proleptic tendency to a past-oriented, retrospective one. The poetic strategy of enunciating a *prophecy* that would achieve (non)closure in a divinatory statement pointing to a future event shifts to a strategy of self-manifesting *latency*, of (dis)closure as the rendering explicit of the conditions of enunciation. This implies that the temporality of

---

<sup>524</sup> Three of the four signs used by Goethe are clearly astronomical symbols derived from the astrological signs of the Zodiac. For example, the symbol ☾ denotes the Moon, while the following ☿ denotes Mercury. Interestingly, the last symbol, ☀, denotes the Sun, but in the alchemical tradition the symbol also referred to gold. The sunlight will be central for Goethe’s finished *terza rima* poems. Cf. Johann Elert Bode. *Von dem neu entdeckten Planeten*. Berlin: Von dem Verfasser in Berlin, und in der Buchhandlung der Gelehrten in Dessau und Leipzig. 1784. Pg. 95-96.

reading intrinsic to Goethe's *terza rima* poems looks not like a linear progress into the future, onto the next line, but rather like moving along a straight line that turns out to have been drawn on a sphere, where the end reconfigures everything that has preceded it up to the beginning, where the poetic whole is apprehended anew from the concluding part, which functions *pars pro toto*. Given this diachronic conception of structure, one must read the famous concluding lines of Goethe's poem in terms of the coincidence of multiple closural strategies that secure the poem's conclusion as a precarious point of achieved stability and global retrospection.<sup>525</sup>

Before turning to Goethe's *Beinhaus* poem, however, it will be worthwhile to reflect here on the procedure of historicization conducted thus far. In taking account of what has been said *about* a rhyme scheme one should not assume that the rhyme scheme's embodiment in a given poem bears out that content. In other words, there is room for tension between the rhyme's historical theorization and poetic praxis. Moreover, the historicization should not effectively turn verse forms or meters into symbols of some predetermined historical content. An alternative mode of historicization would not concern itself with such brute symbolic equations, but attempt to disclose problems of poetic technique that became salient for poets under given cultural-historical circumstances. In other words, this second mode of historicization discloses a problem-oriented frame for close reading rather than its outcome or, even worse, its avoidance altogether.

---

<sup>525</sup> The problem of poetic closure identified by Goethe in poetic praxis and by A.W. Schlegel in literary criticism does not limit itself, of course, to a particular rhyme scheme. A number of modern studies have devoted themselves to the issue of identifying a poem's "closural strategies", i.e. how an ensemble of poetic maneuvers and patterns (both formal and thematic) coincide to offset (or fail to offset) the forces of continuation that would prevent the poem from ending. Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Poetic Closure. A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago 1968) remains the best study, cataloguing various strategies and ending with a riveting discussion of non-closure in modern poetry. More suggestive, if less systematic, is I.A. Richards's "How Does a Poem Know When It Is Finished?" from 1963 (in: *Parts and Wholes*. Ed. by Daniel Lerner. New York 1963, pp. 163–173), where Richards articulates a conception of the poem as self-articulating "organism". More contemporary engagements with the topic that shift emphasis to the creative potential of non-closure can be found in Agamben (*The End of the Poem. Studies in Poetics*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford 1999) and Bahti (*Ends of Lyric. Direction and Consequence in Western Poetry*. Baltimore 1996). Common to these approaches in general is a displacement of critical emphasis from static linguistic patterns to a conception of structure as diachronic, i.e. as subject to temporal constitution and dissolution. As Smith puts this, "[t]he perception of poetic structure is a dynamic process: structural principles produce a state of expectation continuously modified by successive events" (Smith: *Poetic Closure*, p. 33).

## 2. The Sense of an Ending: Poetic Closure & the (Dis)Closure of Death in Goethe's "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's"

- 1 Im ernsten Beinhaus war's wo ich beschaute
  - 2 Wie Schädel Schädeln angeordnet paßten;
  - 3 Die alte Zeit gedacht' ich, die ergraute.
  - 4 Sie stehn in Reih' geklemmt die sonst sich haßten,
  - 5 Und derbe Knochen die sich tödtlich schlugen
  - 6 Sie liegen kreuzweis zahm allhier zu rasten.
  - 7 Entrenkte Schulterblätter! was sie trugen
  - 8 Fragt niemand mehr, und zierlich thät'ge Glieder,
  - 9 Die Hand, der Fuß zerstreut aus Lebensfugen.
  - 10 Ihr Müden also lagt vergebens nieder,
  - 11 Nicht Ruh im Grabe ließ man euch, vertrieben
  - 12 Seid ihr herauf zum lichten Tage wieder,
  - 13 Und niemand kann die dürre Schale lieben,
  - 14 Welch herrlich edlen Kern sie auch bewahrte.
  - 15 Doch mir Adepten war die Schrift geschrieben
  - 16 Die heil'gen Sinn nicht jedem offenbarte,
  - 17 Als ich in Mitten solcher starren Menge
  - 18 Unschätzbar herrlich ein Gebild gewahrte,
  - 19 Daß in des Raumes Moderkält' und Enge
  - 20 Ich frei und wärmefühlend mich erquickte,
  - 21 Als ob ein Lebensquell dem Tod entspränge.
  - 22 Wie mich geheimnißvoll die Form entzückte!
  - 23 Die gottgedachte Spur die sich erhalten!
  - 24 Ein Blick der mich an jenes Meer entrückte
  - 25 Das fluthend strömt gesteigerte Gestalten.
  - 26 Geheim Gefäß! Orakelsprüche spendend,
  - 27 Wie bin ich werth dich in der Hand zu halten,
  - 28 Dich höchsten Schatz aus Moder fromm entwendend
  - 29 Und in die freie Luft, zu freiem Sinnen,
  - 30 Zum Sonnenlicht andächtig hin mich wendend.
  - 31 Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen,
  - 32 Als daß sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare?
  - 33 Wie sie das Feste läßt zu Geist verrinnen,
  - 34 Wie sie das Geisterzeugte fest bewahre.
- (Ist fortzusetzen)<sup>526</sup>

The poem's conclusion (understood as the last four lines before the enigmatic parenthetical remark) has elicited a polarized spectrum of critical response. Max Wundt found the poem's conclusion so extraneous "daß ein völliges Mißverhältnis zu der breit ausholenden

---

<sup>526</sup> *WA*. I. Abtheilung. 3. Bd. Pg. 93-94.



Einleitung entsteht, wie es der naive Leser sofort empfindet.”<sup>527</sup> Ernst Feise similarly remarked that “die Schlußstrophe *abschließt*, aber sie *rundet* nicht; sie ist meinem Empfinden nach ein Notdach.”<sup>528</sup> A more sensitive commentator, Franz Mautner sees the lines “wie durch eine Kluft getrennt von den vorherigen [Versen],” even claiming that “das Gedicht als Ganzes zwar nicht fragmentarisch, aber übervollendet ist – es hat zwei Schlüsse (V. 30 und V. 34), von denen der zweite zugleich als ein starker Anfang wirkt.”<sup>529</sup> Karl Viëtor, on the other hand, hears in these four lines a kind of musical *summa*, “wie ein Fokus, in dem aus der Breite eines ganz weiten Bezirks die Strahlen sich sammeln, — wie ein voller Akkord, in dem viele Obertöne mitklingen.”<sup>530</sup> Günther Müller, continuing the acoustic register within which Viëtor’s critical judgment was formulated, claims that “Man vernimmt ja schon im einfachen Mitvollzug der sprachlichen Entfaltung diese Schlußstrophe nicht nur als Sinnhöhe, sondern auch als Sinnmitte und Kraftmitte.”<sup>531</sup> The poem’s conclusion thus seems to vacillate between being an extraneous appendage, a “Notdach,” on the one hand, and a harmonizing musical “Akkord” on the other, between being “übervollendet” or ‘hyper-closural’ and an effectively new “starker Anfang” or even “Sinnmitte.” This critical confusion results from the inattention that has been paid to the poem’s closural strategies or, to put it differently, to the semantic operations that secure the text’s remarkable degree of poetic economy in comparison to its lengthy, triadically rhymed Romantic peers.

---

<sup>527</sup> Max Wundt. “Aus Makariens Archiv: Zur Entstehung der Aphorismensammlung in den Wanderjahren.” In: *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift* 7 (1915). Pg. 177-184.

<sup>528</sup> Ernst Feise. “Goethes Terzinen.” In: *PMLA*. Vol. 59, No. 4 (Dec., 1944). Pg. 1162-1166 (citation pg. 1166, emphasis in original).

<sup>529</sup> Franz H. Mautner. “‘Ist fortzusetzen.’ Zu Goethes Gedicht auf Schillers Schädel.” In: *PMLA*. Vol. 59, No. 4 (Dec., 1944). Pg. 1156-1162 (citations pg. 1157, 1159).

<sup>530</sup> Karl Viëtor. “Goethes Gedicht auf Schillers Schädel.” In: *Geist und Form: Aufsätze zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte*. Bern: A. Francke AG Verlag. 1952. Pg. 194-233 (citation pg. 204).

<sup>531</sup> Günther Müller. “Goethe: Schillers Reliquien.” In: *Die deutsche Lyrik: Form und Geschichte*. Hsg. Benno von Wiese. Düsseldorf: August Basel Verlag. 1957. Pg. 279-289 (citation pg. 287).

While the sheer gravity of Schiller's loss – in a certain sense the end of classicism and the beginning of Goethe's late period – cannot be overlooked, Goethe's poem never once mentions Schiller by name, resolutely maintaining the skull's anonymity. The poem instead begins with the general situation of human loss, with death as the closure of life. Within the course of 34 lines, what begins as a poem resolutely within the literary tradition of *memento mori*, centered on the Baroque motif of *vanitas*, ends as a kind of pantheist hymn celebrating "Gott-Natur" (32), a compound formed, of course, through a compression of Spinoza's *deus sive natura*. As Wolfgang Martens has shown, the poem recycles "das motivische Requisitar alter christlicher Dichtungen."<sup>532</sup> What Martens does not ask in explicating this literary historical background, however, is why these literary motifs concentrate themselves exclusively within the poem's beginning. One has to pose the question here of what makes this generic transition possible: What enables the poem to cross generic borders without creating an impression of discontinuity, of thematic transgression? The poem's generic fluidity ultimately lies not in the thematic transition from *memento mori* to pantheist hymn, but in the mode of lyric utterance, in the immanent unfolding of a universalizing statement ("Was kann *der Mensch* im Leben mehr gewinnen," 31, emphasis mine) from the individuated intensity of a first-personal experience: "Im ersten Beinhaus war's wo *ich* beschaute" (1, emphasis mine). Max Kommerell is the only commentator to have given expression to this Janus-faced generic status when he categorized the poem in his *Gedanken über Gedichte* as both nature-philosophical and 'biographical': "Die Terzinen bei Betrachtung von Schillers Schädel sind ein naturphilosophisches Gedicht, gehören aber durch die Beziehung auf

---

<sup>532</sup> Wolfgang Martens. "Goethes Gedicht 'Bei Betrachtung von Schillers Schädel,' motivgeschichtlich gesehen." In: *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*. Vol. 12, 1957. pg. 275-295 (citation pg. 281).

Schiller und durch die in diesem Gedicht enthaltene Selbstdarstellung doch auch zu den Lebenslaufgedichten.”<sup>533</sup>

The key transitions the poem moves through become more apparent when one divides the text into distinct segments. Five such segments can be distinguished, taking a set of three lines as a strophe, which results in eleven strophes total. The first segment (strophes I - II) sets up the situation as one of recollective contemplation, i.e. as an interior monologue. While the first strophe of this segment is narrated in the preterit tense, the second switches back and forth between present and preterit tenses, emphasizing through this antithetical grammar the violent discrepancy between past life and present death: “Sie stehn in Reih’ geklemmt die sonst sich haßten” (4). The oscillation in tense also emphasizes a process of imaginatively bringing into presence the scene of the charnel house as well as a recollection of the recollection triggered by that scene. The second segment (strophes III – V) gains coherence as a self-standing unit due to a change in the mode of lyric address: whereas the first segment was descriptive, an account of the speaker’s contemplative situation and of how the “derbe Knochen” (5) lie scattered about, the second segment may be termed apostrophic. The speaker’s exclamation “Entrenkte Schulterblätter!” (7) in the third strophe is followed by a third-personal reference to the bones as “sie” (7), only to give way in the fourth strophe to a proper, second-personal address as “Ihr Müden” (10). Unlike most cases of apostrophe, which are dyadic, the poem here triangulates the act of address between speaker, the bones, and a third-personal “niemand” (8, 13) or “man” (11). The third segment (strophes VI – VII) is characterized by a reflection on the pragmatics of lyric utterance as conducted in the previous segment. Each strophe within the preceding second segment begins by emphasizing the *inability* of an anonymous third party to address the bones as anything more than dusty remains:

---

<sup>533</sup> Max Kommerell. *Gedanken über Gedichte*. 3. Auflage. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt a.M. 1956. Pg. 182.

Entrenkte Schulterblätter! was sie trugen  
Fragt *niemand* mehr... (7-8)<sup>534</sup>

Ihr Müden also lagt vergebens nieder,  
Nicht Ruh im Grabe ließ *man* euch... (10-11)<sup>535</sup>

Und *niemand* kann die dürre Schale lieben, (13)<sup>536</sup>

In other words, the speaker's address to the bones depends on addressing them in terms of what an anonymous third party cannot ask of them. This implicit condition for the possibility of apostrophe in the second segment becomes an explicit object of reflection in the third segment, where the speaker draws a distinction between the "Menge" (17) and himself qua "Adepten" (15). This reflection on the pragmatics of lyric address allows the speaker as initiated 'adept' to become subject to a subjunctive revivification, "Als ob ein Lebensquell dem Tod entspränge," (21), that will have to be interpreted in full later. The fourth segment (strophes VIII – X) gains its coherence as a unit from the idiosyncratic linguistic character of its lines, which take the form of paratactic exclamations (e.g., "Wie mich geheimisvoll die Form entzückte!" (22), "... erhalten!" (23), "Geheim Gefäß! " (26)). Finally, the poem's fifth segment (strophe XI) consists of four lines that break the chain of *Terzinen* through their *Kreuzreim abab*. The poem repeats two of the words that here rhyme, "offenbare" (32) and "bewahre" (34), which previously occurred at the threshold between the second and third segments, mediated by the particle "Doch" (15) on lines 14 ("bewahrte") and 16 ("offenbarte"). These are the only rhyme words that repeat, thus forming a kind of meta-rhyme uniting the middle and the end of the poem, a clue to its closural strategy.

To summarize the results of this segmentation, the poem consists of five sections that alternate in a rhythm of two to three, three to two, strophes (Diagram 9):

---

<sup>534</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>535</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>536</sup> Emphasis mine.

Segment	Title	Strophes	Verbal Character	Activity of Lyric I
1.	Betrachtung	I – II	descriptive	Beschauen; Gedenken
2.	Anrede	III – V	apostrophic	Ansprechen
3.	Reflexion	VI - VII	pragmatic	Gewahren
4.	Formerschließung	VIII - X	paratactic, exclamatory	Anschauen
5.	Lehrspruch	XI	epigrammatic, didactic	Denken

The nouns listed in the table's last column have largely been extracted from the poem itself, and we might return to the first strophe to get a sense of the poem's unity as a self-identical process, the ending of which is latent within its beginning, the beginning of which immanently unfolds onward into its ending. Well known is the chiasmus with which the poem ends (*das Feste ... Geist / das Geisterzeugte ... fest*), but the first strophe also contains a latent chiasmus:

Im ernsten Beinhaus war's wo *ich* *beschau*te  
Wie Schädel Schädeln angeordnet paßten;  
Die alte Zeit *gedacht* *ich*, die ergraute. (1-3)<sup>537</sup>

Across the axis of a semicolon, the only one in the whole poem, the speaker's speech stages itself as the coincidence of two activities: visual inspection and remembrance. The semicolon also separates space (the "Beinhaus") and time ("Die alte Zeit"), allowing the speaker to see in the scattered bones the traces of their erstwhile possessors' forgotten lives. The logic of the remainder here allows the speaker to recall an absent past with the aid of its present remnants. The verbs *beschauen* and *gedenken* already contain, in other words, connotations of *anschauen* and *denken*, as if the semicolon here separates what the poem sets out to think together as a unitary operation, as a "gegenständliches Denken," which Goethe also characterized in terms of a chiasmus, such

---

<sup>537</sup> Emphasis mine.

that “mein Anschauen selbst ein Denken, mein Denken ein Anschauen sei.”<sup>538</sup>

With regards to the poem’s beginning, Albrecht Schöne has noted the significance of Goethe’s second journey to Switzerland on 9 October 1799, during which he visited a charnel house containing the remains of soldiers who fought against each other during the Battle of Murten in the Burgundian Wars of 1474–1477, which ended in the creation of mass graves. In a letter to Charlotte von Stein, Goethe wrote: “Wir kamen tüchtig im Regen nach Murten ritten aufs Beinhaus und ich nahm ein Stückgen Hinterschädel von den Burgundern mit.”<sup>539</sup> This military background explains why the bones’ possessors “sonst sich haßten” (4), why “derbe Knochen die sich tödtlich schlugen [...] liegen kreuzweis zahm allhier zu rasten” (5-6). From “tödtlich” in the past to “zahm” in the present, the bones render death visible as the *neutralization* of the very difference between pro- and antagonist, as the rendering *indifferent* of relevant distinctions that once held sway in life. Death emerges at the poem’s beginning as the corrosive force of time’s indifference to human endeavor, to differences (here, political) that make a difference for human life. The speaker thus encounters a scene of leveled homogeneity, witnessing “Wie Schädel Schädeln angeordnet paßten” (2). If the poem sets out to think together *Beschauen* and *Gedenken* as a unitary operation of *gegenständliches Denken*, then it will have to overcome death itself.

While Schöne’s intertext dissociates the poem from its presumed connection to Schiller (never once named in the poem, which remains resolutely anonymous), it does not leave the orbit of biographical association. One could just as well have associated the word “Beinhaus” with a remark made in Goethe’s text “Zur Geschichte dieser Studien” (1820), which narrates his osteological discovery of the *Zwischenkieferknochen*: “Zehn Jahre waren verflossen und mehr, als meine Verbindung mit Schillern mich aus diesem wissenschaftlichem *Beinhaus* in den *freien*

---

<sup>538</sup> “Bedeutende Förderniß durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort.” In: *WA*. II. Abtheilung. 11. Bd. 1893. Pg. 58-64.

<sup>539</sup> Quoted in: Albrecht Schöne. *Schillers Schädel*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck. 1961. Pg. 56.

Garten des *Lebens* rief.”<sup>540</sup> Goethe goes on to describe how his literary collaboration with Schiller distanced him from the “Zeit an Staub und *Moder*.”<sup>541</sup> Goethe’s narrative on his osteological discoveries thus contains a kind of lexical palimpsest already exhibiting the main shift in the poem’s semantics from a vivid description of the grave associated with the words “Beinhaus” and “*Moder*” to a semantics associated with a liberating vitality, with the words “frei” (21, 29) and “Leben” (9, 21, 31):

Daß in des Raumes *Moderkält*’ und Enge  
 Ich *frei* und wärmefühlend mich erquickte,  
 als ob ein *Lebensquell* dem Tod entspränge. (20-1, emphasis mine)

A further level of meaning becomes visible as well, for in Lavater’s *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775–1778), which Goethe collaborated on before his distancing from Lavater, a passage on skulls remarks: “Man führe den gemeinsten Menschen zu einem Beinhaus, und mache ihn einigermaßen auf die Verschiedenheit der Schädel aufmerksam ... In kurzer Zeit wird er’s entweder selber finden, oder doch begreifen, wenn man es ihm sagt: ‚hier ist Schwäche — dort Stärke! — hier Eigensinn — dort Wankelmuth!’”<sup>542</sup> While the speaker only sees how “Schädel Schädeln angeordnet paßten“ (2) at the poem’s beginning – sees, that is, only the leveling neutralization of death – by the crucial fifteenth line he will be able to ‘read’ in this series of calcified remnants more than meets the eye of the “Menge” (17).

Multiple layers of intertextual resonance thus inhabit the word “Beinhaus” (1): the *militaristic* background of the Battle of Murten that demonstrates why the bones “sich tödtlich schlugen” (5) in life; a *scientific* experience of revivifying liberation out of a figurative

---

<sup>540</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. “Zur Geschichte dieser Studien.” In: *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977 (Erstdruck 1820). Pg. 165 (emphasis mine).

<sup>541</sup> Ibid. Pg. 165 (emphasis added).

<sup>542</sup> Johann Caspar Lavater. *Physiognomische Fragmente, zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniß und Menschenliebe*. Bd. 2. Leipzig. 1776. Pg. 150.

“wissenschaftlichem Beinhaus” due to the influence of Schiller as a collaborator; and a *physiognomic* legibility of psychological traits in manifold physical variations or “die Verschiedenheit der Schädel.” The word “Beinhaus” thus manifests a latent semantic density that unfolds and becomes explicit across the course of the poem, functioning to foreshadow and enable what may seem like an extraneous turn towards legibility in the line “Doch mir Adepten war die Schrift geschrieben” (15) as well as an unlikely revivification at the “Lebensquell” (20).

The entanglement of various semantic strata congealed within the word “Beinhaus” should dispel the impression that Goethe’s poem simply operates according to the logic of peripeteia, a sudden turn that allows the poem to cross a generic boundary in the line beginning “Doch” (15). Rather than the brute facticity of a dramatic turn in the interior monologue, the poem unfolds and renders explicit the latent semantic density present at the beginning in this “Beinhaus” (1) and in the chiasmic coincidence of sight and remembrance. This should not imply, of course, that the “Lebensquell” (20) simply refers to the discovery of Schiller’s skull, nor that the “Schrift” (15) is a physiognomic one indebted to Lavater. In order to understand the crucial turn that initiates the third segment (*Reflexion*) beyond such intertextual relations, it will be helpful to return to the second segment’s third and final case of triangulated address, which flows into the third segment as the first strophe in the poem that does not end with a period but spills onto the next line:

Und niemand kann die dürre Schale lieben,  
Welch herrlich edlen Kern sie auch bewahrte.  
Doch mir Adepten war die Schrift geschrieben  
Die heil’gen Sinn nicht jedem offenbarte,  
Als ich in Mitten solcher starren Menge  
Unschätzbar herrlich ein Gebild gewahrte, (13-18)

If the poem begins with a statement of its two constituent activities, visual contemplation and remembrance (*Beschauen; Gedenken*), it here renders explicit the condition for the separation of those activities, namely the distinction between the outer and the inner. As a merely empty,



hollowed exterior, “die dürre Schale” (13) may persist into the present, but it can merely point to, or index, an absent internality, a lost “Kern” (14) that eludes further specification. The distinction *Schale/Kern* thus implies a model of the relation between inner and outer in which both are mutually exclusive, independent terms: the internal is subject to the erosions of time, while the exterior may persist as its mute remnant, as an occasion for meditating on the transience of the mundane world in its exposure to irrevocable loss. In marking this distinction, however, the speaker simultaneously attributes it to “niemand” (13). The first-personal reflection on this third party initiated by the next segment (“Doch mir Adepten,” 15) allows the poem to redouble the distinction as one between “Schrift” (15) and “Sinn” (16) rather than *Schale* and *Kern*. Legibility (the distinction *Schrift/Sinn*) implies a counter-model of the relation between inner and outer in which the exteriority of writing first secures the revelatory disclosure of its internal sense rather than its potential for loss. The poem can only proceed to redouble the distinction, to replace one spatial model with another, however, because of a mediating third, a ‘pragmatic’ distinction between the “Adepten” (15) and the “Menge” (17), a term that summarily encompasses the former third party of “man” (11) and “niemand” (8, 13). The adept can transition from the first model, in which the inner and outer are mutually exclusive, to the second, co-implicative model only because he first distinguishes himself from the “Menge,” those incapable of taking a skull as anything other than the testimony of death.<sup>543</sup>

Having intensified its terms such that they are reciprocally dependent rather than mutually exclusive, the speaker now synthesizes them in the term *Gebild*: “Als ich in Mitten solcher starren

---

<sup>543</sup> The “Menge” can also be taken as referring to the “starren” (17) remains of life that surround the speaker, i.e., the scattered bones. Both readings (as summative third personal party and as bones) are possible given the precedent line: “Die heil’gen Sinn *nicht jedem* offenbarte” (16, emphasis added). My emphasis on the first option accords with Goethe’s other lyric usages of the term to establish an esoteric pragmatic situation. In this regard, one finds a stark lexical resonance in the use of “Menge” at the beginning of “Selige Sehnsucht:” “Sagt es *niemand*, nur den *Weisen*, / Weil die *Menge* gleich verhöhnet” (1-2, emphasis mine). Goethe’s *Beinhaus* poem similarly distinguishes between a “niemand” (13) incapable of loving “die dürre Schale” (13), the wise “Adepten” (15), and the “Menge” (17) against the background of which esoteric wisdom into nature’s workings is found.

Menge / Unschätzbar herrlich ein Gebild gewahrte” (17-8). Not only the visual connotation of the word *Gebild* marks the latter line’s synthetic achievement over the second spatial model of legibility. Rather, a synonymic chain of descriptors relates *Gebild* back to the absent internality that was an object of loss in the first model. The poem semantically reconfigures and thereby reclaims the entity of a “*herrlich* edlen Kern” (14, emphasis mine) in an activity of intuitive perception: “Unschätzbar *herrlich* ein Gebild gewahrte” (18, emphasis mine).

The acrobatic semantics of these six lines has been discussed in terms of the redoubling of a spatial distinction that makes synthesis possible. The redoubling can be specified as the recursive application of the distinguished onto the operation of distinguishing: *Schale/Kern* marks an ‘outward’ distinction of the inner and outer characterized by the possibility of mutual exclusion, while *Schrift/Sinn* marks an ‘inward’ distinction of the inner and outer characterized by the necessity of mutual implication. The recursive application of the distinguished to the act of distinction is accomplished through a pragmatic reflection: the re-entry of that which was observed by the speaker (i.e., two distinct models of the inner/outer relation) onto the plane of observation (i.e., two ‘vantage points’ from which to observe one and the same act of distinguishing: *Menge/Adepten*).<sup>544</sup> The logic operative behind these terminological shifts is not a mere testament to the poem’s conceptual complexity, but also a consequence of Goethe’s natural scientific thought. While the language of ‘redoubling’ and ‘distinction’ was mobilized above, the entire semantic procedure can be redescribed in the terms used by Goethe at the conclusion of his text *Polarität*:

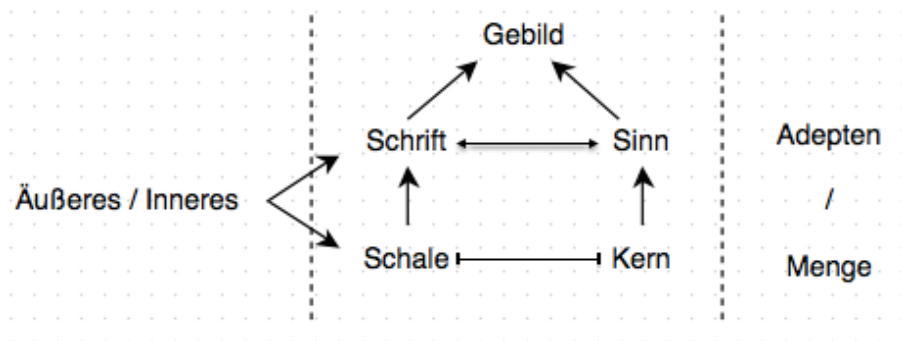
Was in der Erscheinung tritt, muß sich trennen, um nur zu erscheinen. Das Getrennte sucht sich wieder, und es kann sich wiederfinden und vereinigen; im niedern Sinne, indem es sich nur seinem Entgegengestellten vermischt, mit demselben zusammentritt, wobei die

---

<sup>544</sup> This terminology of distinction and operation is adapted from Niklas Luhmann and George Spencer Brown. Cf. Niklas Luhmann. “Die Paradoxie der Form.” In: *Kalkül der Form*. Hsg. Dirk Baecker. Frankfurt a.M. 1993. Pg. 197-212.

Erscheinung Null oder wenigstens gleichgültig wird. Die Vereinigung kann aber auch in höhern Sinn geschehen, indem das Getrennte sich zuerst steigert und durch die Verbindung der gesteigerten Seiten ein Drittes, Neues, Höheres, Unerwartetes hervorbringt.<sup>545</sup>

Goethe begins by highlighting a basic condition of phenomenal appearance: self-division or *Trennung* (one might choose to translate this ‘distinction’). Whereas the appearance of “die dürre Schale” simply indexed its absent “Kern,” thus a case of the opposing poles (inner/outer) merely ‘mixing’ “im niedern Sinne,” the redoubling of the distinction in terms of “Schrift” and “Sinn” marks a case of semantic *Steigerung*, allowing the polarized terms to reach synthesis in “ein Drittes, Neues, Höheres, Unerwartetes,” namely the sudden “Gebild” (8). A logical homology thus holds between nature’s processual phenomenal disclosure as Goethe describes it and the semantic process articulated by the poem. This semantic *Steigerung* can be summarized by the following diagram (Diagram 10):



The left-hand side denotes the basic spatial distinction redoubled in the course of the poem. The middle area denotes the *Steigerung* of a polarized model characterized by mutual exclusivity (*Schale/Kern*) to one characterized by mutual dependence (*Schrift/Sinn*), culminating in synthesis or “Verbindung der gesteigerten Seiten” in *Gebild*. The third, right-hand area denotes the pragmatic distinction that allows the poem, in the moment of reflection on the conditions of lyric

<sup>545</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. “Polarität.” In: *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977 (Erstdruck 1893, Vortrag gehalten 1805). Pg. 123.

address, to achieve the semantic *Steigerung*. The diagram makes visible where the natural scientific account and the poetic process diverge, for there is no talk in *Polarität* of *whom* might or might not be able to apprehend the “Lebensprinzip” of *Steigerung*. It will be worth dwelling on the fifteenth line that introduces this pragmatic distinction, what Kommerell aptly called “der esoterische Punkt: am Beispiel des Knochens, der den uneingeweihten Betrachter als Symbol der Vernichtung anwidert, die dauerhafte Arbeit der Natur einzusehen.”<sup>546</sup>

Not only the logic operative behind the semantic distinctions finds illumination when put in the context of Goethe’s natural scientific writings, but the words that constitute the distinctions themselves. The first spatial model (*Schale/Kern*) attributed by the poem to the “Menge” (17) is a clear reference to Goethe’s critique of Albrecht von Haller. In his programmatic poem “Allerdings. Dem Physiker” (1820), first printed in *Zur Morphologie*, Goethe writes

Natur hat weder Kern,  
noch Schale,  
Alles ist sie mit einem Male;  
Dich prüfe du nur allermeist,  
Ob du Kern oder Schale seist. (15-19)<sup>547</sup>

The ironic, playful invective begins with a citation from Haller’s “Die Falschheit menschlicher Tugenden” (1730):

Doch suche nur im Riß von künstlichen Figuren,  
Beim Licht der Ziffer-Kunst, der Wahrheit dunkle Spuren;  
Ins Innre der Natur dringt kein erschaffener Geist,  
Zu glücklich, wann sie noch die äußre Schale weist! (286-90)<sup>548</sup>

<sup>546</sup> Max Kommerell. *Gedanken über Gedichte*. 3. Auflage. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt a.M. 1956. Pg. 183.

<sup>547</sup> In the first printing in *Zur Morphologie*, Goethe introduces the poem as a commentary to his claim that “man solle ein Unerforschliches voraussetzen und zugeben, alsdann aber dem Forscher selbst keine Grenzlinie ziehen. [...] Möge nachstehendes heitere Reimstück in diesem Sinne aufgenommen und gedeutet werden” (1103). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. “Allerdings. Dem Physiker.” In: *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977 (Erstdruck 1820). Pg. 3. & *Kommentar*. In: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Gedichte: 1800-1830*. Hsg. Karl Eibl. Berlin: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag. Pg. 1103-4.

<sup>548</sup> Elsewhere in the same poem, Haller writes of the “Pöbel:” “Die Schale hält ihn auf, er kömmt nicht zu den Kernen; / Er kennet von der Welt, was außen sich bewegt, / Und nicht die innre Kraft, die heimlich alles regt” (100-3). Cf. Albrecht von Haller. *Gedichte*. Frauenfeld 1882. Pg. 61.

The ‘internality’ of nature, its divine and lawful truth, lies here beyond human cognitive capacities, which require artificial figures and “Ziffer-Kunst.”<sup>549</sup> Goethe does not simply invert Haller’s transcendentalization of “das Innere der Natur,” rendering it immanent and phenomenally accessible. More than mockery, the imperative “Dich prüfe du nur allermeist, / ob du Kern oder Schale seist” (18-19) advocates a reflexive involvement of the experimenter in the experiment as a condition of appearance.<sup>550</sup> This reflexive involvement of the perceiving subject as a phenomenal condition enabling the perceived phenomenon itself occurs in the *Beinhaus* poem as the activity of *Gewahren*: “Unschätzbar herrlich ein Gebild gewahrte” (18). That adverbial modifier “herrlich” before only qualified in an adjectival manner the absent and inaccessible internality: “Welch herrlich edlen Kern sie auch bewahrte” (14). In other words, the migration of the term “herrlich” marks a shift from an *entity* lost to the subject to an *activity* that discloses the object through the subject’s epistemo-perceptive participation.

The second spatial model (*Schrift/Sinn*) articulated by the poem is more difficult to situate. Most commentators pin the philosopheme of the Book of Nature onto the line “Doch mir Adepten

---

<sup>549</sup> My reading of these lines follows Pierre Hadot’s genealogy of the afterlives of Heraclitus’s claim “phusis kruptesthai philei,” translatable as “Nature loves to hide,” associated by Hadot with the *topos* of Isis or nature’s disclosive veil. A more recent commentary by Leif Weatherby situates Goethe’s debate with Haller in the metaphorology of the organ. Pierre Hadot. *The Veil of Isis. An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*. Trans. Michael Chase. Cambridge: Harvard UP. Pg. 247-261. & Leif Weatherby. “Das Innere der Natur und ihr Organ: von Albrecht von Haller zu Goethe.” In: *Goethe Yearbook*. Vol. 21. 2014. Pg. 191-217.

<sup>550</sup> One might recall Kant’s remark in the first critique that “Wenn die Klagen: Wir sehen *das Innere der Dinge* gar nicht ein, so viel bedeuten sollen, als: wir begreifen nicht durch den reinen Verstand, was die Dinge, die uns erscheinen, an sich sein mögen, so sind sie ganz unbillig und unvernünftig; [...] *Ins Innere der Natur dringt* Beobachtung und Zergliederung der Erscheinungen, und man kann nicht wissen, wie weit dieses mit der Zeit gehen werde. Jene transcendente Fragen aber, die über die Natur hinausgehen, würden wir bei allem dem doch niemals beantworten könne, wenn uns auch die ganze Natur aufgedeckt wäre” (B333, 392, emphasis added). Goethe doubly marked the margins of his copy of the first critique at the second sentence quoted above. Of course, Goethe means something very different from Kant; the citation is meant to convey a sense of the discursive field within which Goethe’s poem “Allerdings” participates. Cf. Immanuel Kant. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. 1998 (ursp. 1787). & Géza v. Molnár. *Goethes Kantstudien. Eine Zusammenstellung nach Eintragungen in seinen Handexemplaren der Kritik der reinen Vernunft und der Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger. 1994.

war die Schrift geschrieben” (15) and leave it at that.<sup>551</sup> Others have related it to Goethe’s remark, in a letter to Lavater from 14 November 1781, when he was studying anatomy in Jena under Justus Christian Loder, that “Zugleich behandle ich die Knochen als einen Text, woran sich alles Leben und alles Menschliche anhängen läßt” (207). An intertext more relevant to the *Beinhaus* poem, however, can be found in Goethe’s collection of natural scientific aphorisms:

Wenn ich ein zerstreutes Gerippe finde, so kann ich es zusammenlesen und aufstellen; denn hier spricht die ewige Vernunft durch ein Analogon zu mir, und wenn es das Riesenfaultier wäre.  
Was nicht mehr entsteht, können wir als entstehend nicht denken. Das Entstandene begreifen wir nicht.<sup>552</sup>

The scattered bones are legible in that they can be reconstructed into the intelligible whole that was once the organism’s skeletal structure. The unique temporality of the reconstruction is essential: while the “Riesenfaultier” or ground sloth is an extinct species, thus no longer observable, no longer “entsteht,” its bones can nonetheless be reconstructed, for “die ewige Vernunft” is not subject to the erosions of historical time. Rather, the bones ‘speak’ only if one conceives of them as more than “[d]as Entstandene,” that is, as *Entstehendes*. In other words, the bones do not mark an occasional historical event (the sloth emerged and then went extinct), but rather a natural lawfulness (*Gesetzmäßigkeit*) that remains legible in the “zerstreutes Gerippe.” This osteological ‘writing’ or *Knochenschrift* thus evinces a specifically analogic legibility indicative of the animal’s genesis vis-à-vis the responsive interplay between its normative archetype and its adaptation to its environment.<sup>553</sup>

---

<sup>551</sup> The best accounts of the *topos* are given by Ernst Robert Curtius, who begins with a remark on Goethe’s *Tropik*, and Hans Blumenberg, who devotes an entire chapter to Goethe’s engagement with the Book of Nature, focusing primarily on Goethe’s correspondence with Charlotte von Stein. Ernst Robert Curtius. *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter*. Tübingen & Basel: Francke Verlag. 1993 (first edition: 1948). Pg. 306-352. & Hans Blumenberg. *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 1986. Pg. 214-232.

<sup>552</sup> WA. II. Abtheilung. 11. Band. “Über die Naturwissenschaft im Allgemeinen, einzelne Betrachtungen und Aphroismen.” Pg. 137.

<sup>553</sup> As Steffen Schneider puts this, “Entstehung meint in diesem Zusammenhang das Wechselspiel von Typus und Umwelt, das sich immer und jederzeit in der Form der Analogie beobachten läßt. Der Begriff der Analogie ist für

The consequence for the *Beinhaus* poem is that the "heil'gen Sinn" (16) disclosed by the 'text' of the bones does not refer to some divinely transcendent meaning (as in Haller). If before the emergence of their latent legibility the bones of this "Beinhaus" were "zerstreut aus Lebensfugen" (9, emphasis mine) like the "zerstreutes Gerippe" of Goethe's aphorism, they are now 'collected' (*zusammengelesen*) and intuited in terms of the structural whole they together form, in terms of their genetic context, "Als ob ein *Lebensquell* dem Tod entspränge" (21, emphasis mine).<sup>554</sup> The speaker, however, does not merely have an epistemic experience, but also an invigorating one: "Daß in des Raumes Moderkält und Enge, / Ich frei und wärmefühlend mich erquickte" (19-20). To intuit nature's work even in the remainders it leaves behind allows the speaker to partake in the revitalizing freshness of nature's ongoing self-generation.

The *Beinhaus* poem's articulation of two spatial models of the relation between inner and outer has been related to Goethe's criticism of Albrecht von Haller (*Schale/Kern*) as well as Goethe's natural scientific aphorism on the 'legibility' of nature (*Schrift/Sinn*), specifically the legibility of animal bones as phenomenal manifestations of the laws according to which they were generated and according to which they hang together as a coherent skeletal structure in the animal's life. The logic operative behind the poem's redoubling of semantic distinctions has also been related to Goethe's concept of *Steigerung*, albeit with the important caveat that the poem achieves this intensified redoubling through the introduction of a third, mediating pragmatic

---

Goethes Biologie zentral, da diese nicht darauf abzielt, die Gegenwart aus der Vergangenheit zu erklären, sondern nach funktionalen Analogien sucht, nach gleichen und verschiedenen Umweltbedingungen, auf die die Lebewesen reagieren, die aber immer nur Veränderungen des identischen Urtypus darstellen" (136). Cf. Steffen Schneider. *Archivpoetik: Die Funktion des Wissens in Goethes 'Faust II.'* Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag. 2005.

<sup>554</sup> In this regard, one should not overhear the lexical resonances with Goethe's poem "Metamorphose der Tiere." While the *Beinhaus* poem speaks of a first-personal encounter with "zierlich thät'ge *Glieder*, / Die Hand, der Fuß zerstreut aus Lebensfugen" (8-9, emphasis mine), the morphological poem hymnically claims "Alle *Glieder* bilden sich aus nach ew'gen Gesetzen, / Und die seltenste Form *bewahrt im geheimen* das Urbild" (14-15, emphasis mine). The morphological poem's use of the verb *bewahren* allows the latent sense ("im geheimen") of the verb in the *Beinhaus* poem to become audible: "Und niemand kann die dürre Schale lieben, / Welch herrlich edlen Kern sie auch *bewahrte*" (13-14, emphasis added). This verb will end the poem, and we will have to return to it upon examining the conclusion.

distinction, an observation of its own observing position (*Adepten/Menge*). These explanatory excursions do not explain, however, why the *Beinhaus* poem in particular is so concerned with the conceptual problem of distinguishing spatiality in terms of the inner and the outer. An intertext can here help get a grip on the process that begins to unfold in this third segment. In another natural scientific aphorism, Goethe writes:

Alles was wir Erfinden, Entdecken im höheren Sinne nennen, ist die bedeutende Ausübung, Bethätigung eines originellen Wahrheitsgefühles, das, im Stillen längst ausgebildet, *unversehens mit Blitzesschnelle* zu einer fruchtbaren Erkenntniß führt. Es ist *eine aus dem Innern am Äußern sich entwickelnde Offenbarung*, die den Menschen seine Gottähnlichkeit vorahnen läßt.<sup>555</sup>

At the word “Doch” (15), the poem renders explicit “unversehens mit Blitzesschnelle” the “Lebensquell” (21) or natural lawfulness that remains ‘legible’ in the bones despite being “zerstreut aus Lebensfugen” (9). The osteological ‘writing’ or *Knochenschrift*, “Die heil’gen Sinn nicht jedem *offenbarte*” (16, emphasis mine), sets free “eine aus dem Innern *am Äußern sich entwickelnde Offenbarung*” (emphasis mine). Goethe’s qualifiers are remarkably precise. *Offenbaren*, the penultimate rhyme word of the poem, takes place as a *self*-developing process that emerges out of the inner not *into* the outer (*ins Äußere*), for that would render this revelation the disclosure of an internality through its externalization, its crossing of the border dividing inner/outer. Rather, the revelation takes place as a self-determining process emergent from the inner *onto* the outer (“am Äußern”), allowing ‘the internal’ to manifest itself on the ‘surface’ of phenomenal appearances as their conditioning ground.<sup>556</sup> In other words, an object’s ‘truth’ is revealed not in penetrating into its inner essence, but in conforming the mind’s faculties of

<sup>555</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. “Aphorismen.” In: *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977 (Erstdruck 1820). Pg. 33-44 (emphasis mine).

<sup>556</sup> With regards to this conditioning ground of phenomenal appearance, elsewhere called an *Idee*, Goethe will note that “Die Menschen sind durch die unendlichen Bedingungen des Erscheinens dergestalt obruiert, daß sie das Eine Urbedingende nicht *gewahren* können” (emphasis mine). It is thus no coincidence that the verb Goethe often used to designate a morphological intuition (*gewahren*) recurs as well in the *Beinhaus* poem: “Als ich in Mitten solcher starren Menge / Unschatzbar herrlich ein Gebild *gewahrte*” (17-18, emphasis mine).



apprehension to that its own objectival form. Whether invention or discovery, then, the sudden moment of “Erkenntniß” triggered by the activation of our “Wahrheitsgefühl[ ]” takes place in conformity to the form of the object being known in its truth. The rhymed verbs of the poem’s third segment – “bewahrte” (14), “offenbarte” (16), and “gewahrte” (18) – thus entangle otherwise distinct semantic layers, associating nature’s *self-revelation* (*Offenbarung*) with the speaker’s subjective activity of intuitive perception (*Gewahren*) and, furthermore, with the objectival preservation (*Bewahrung*) of a “Gebild,” of a normative archetype of natural generation.

The disclosive process of intuition here continues into the fourth segment, which consists of the next three strophes. Rather than stating the factual event of a revelatory perceptual intuition, the fourth segment allows the process to take place performatively at the level of poetic texture rather than semantic text (“am Äußern”). If the first segment was primarily descriptive in verbal character, the second apostrophic, and the third reflective, then the fourth is exclamatory and paratactic:

Wie mich geheimnißvoll die Form entzückte!  
Die gottgedachte Spur die sich erhalten!  
Ein Blick, der mich an jenes Meer entrückte  
Das fluthend strömt gesteigerte Gestalten. (22-25)

The first exclamation articulates a dyadic relation between “die Form” as active agent and the subject “mich” as its relational counterpart. The temporal reference of the preterit tense is to a past event undergone by the speaker. The second exclamation refers to a remainder or “Spur” of divine cognition that persists into the present. The temporal reference is here more complicated, for the “Spur” refers to the past even as it remains in the present. The third statement marks a resolution, shifting its punctuation from the ecstatic exclamation marks to a period. The speaker’s “Blick” gains independence and agency over its subject, dislocating him “an jenes Meer.” The temporal reference here overcomes the past of memory by entering the present tense: “strömt.”

The apparent redundancy of “fluthend strömt” is essential, for the participial adjective grants the generative activity of present ‘streaming’ an ongoing, future-oriented or protensive tendency. Even as the sea continues to ‘stream’ *Gestalten* into the future, these *Gestalten* are themselves already “geisteigerte,” thus referring to a past *Steigerung*. The three words “fluthend strömt gesteigerte” thus index all three temporal strata of future, present, and past at the same time, synchronizing temporality into one unitary activity of liquid generation. Moreover, the verb *strömen* here ceases to be intransitive and takes on a transitive object “Gestalten,” thus constituting its own object qua formative process.

Of importance to the paratactic character of the verses is the fact that their key nouns form a paradigm {Form, Spur, Gestalten} that might be summed up in the key term “Gebild” (18) from the preceding third segment. The syntagmatic unfolding of this paradigm, the objectival correlate of the speaker’s *Gewahren*, is not insignificant, however, for the singular *Form* culminates in plural *Gestalten*. The shift from singular to plural indicates the development of “die Form” (22) into a formative process troped as a liquid generativity that synchronizes distinct temporal strata. The “Meer” (24) the lines refer to can be considered an actualization of the “Lebensquell” (21, emphasis mine) that was only subjunctive before. A brief glance at Goethe’s use of the word *Meer* in *Faust II* only confirms the coherence of the poetic imagery deployed in the *Beinhaus* poem. As Proteus tells Homunkulus in the second act, “Im weiten *Meere* mußt du anbeginnen!” (8260, emphasis mine). Thales, the Neptunian philosopher, will also tell Homunculus, referring to the sea: “Da regst du dich nach ewigen Normen, / Durch tausend abertausend *Formen*, / Und bis zum Menschen hast du Zeit” (8324-6, emphasis mine). The sea is the source of these eternal norms of natural generation, of “abertausend Formen” or “geisteigerte Gestalten,” as the site and sight (“Blick,” 24) of nature’s lawful formative processes.

The second half of the fourth segment continues the complication of temporality initiated by the paratactic exclamations in the previous lines:

Geheim Gefäß! Orakelsprüche spendend,  
Wie bin ich werth dich in der Hand zu halten,  
Dich höchsten Schatz aus Moder fromm entwendend  
Und in die freie Luft, zu freiem Sinnen,  
Zum Sonnenlicht andächtig hin mich wendend. (26-30)

The use of present participial adjectives, amplified by the rhyme scheme, in “spendend,” “entwendend,” and “wendend” allows this last strophe to revoke the verb, avoiding an ascription of tense and thus of time. Arrested in the transitional moment of turning toward the sun (“wendend”) while wresting the skull from its moldering calcification (“entwendend”), the speaker’s final action is suspended above time itself. The rhyme enables this grammatical *Aufhebung* of time right before the poem’s fifth and final segment, constituting one of the poem’s closural strategies. In a sense, the ecstatic series of exclamations that initiated the fourth segment presented a threat to poetic closure due to their paratactic sequence, a force of continuation.

The rhyme scheme, which through the dynamic participial adjective forces the last strophe before the final segment to avoid a verb, thus gains a local closural function that allows the poem to overcome grammatically a threateningly paratactic temporality of succession. When the speaker asks “Wie bin ich werth dich in der Hand zu halten,” then, the present tense has here moved beyond the time of memory and gained a kind of eternal validity, morphed into the now of the poem itself.

Of note in the fourth segment is also the ‘refunctionalization’ of religious vocabulary. The speaker’s act of theft is qualified as pious, “fromm entwendend,” and the turn towards the sunlight is likewise qualified as “andächtig.” While the experience of vitalizing freedom was before subjunctive and merely subjective (“Ich *frei* und wärmefühlend mich erquickte, / *Als ob*

ein Lebensquell dem Tod entspränge,” 20-21, emphasis mine), it is here actualized as an objective property of the world in a repetitive apposition: “Und in die *freie* Luft, zu *freiem* Sinnen” (29, emphasis mine). Already in the poem’s *memento mori*-like beginning there occurred a turn upwards toward the sun, but that solar turn remained a gesture of deracination, disturbing the grave by dislodging its human remains into the light of day. The clearly negative valence of this first solar turn morphs into the positive “zum Sonnenlicht andächtig hin mich wendend” (28) of the fourth segment. While the turning of the bony remains upwards to the light of day was a figurative exile in the first half of the poem – “vertrieben / Seid ihr herauf zum lichten Tage wieder” (11-12) – the adept can now accomplish what the “Menge” cannot, can see in the material remainders of life the noetic traces of nature’s divine lawfulness, “die gottgedachte Spur.” This transforms the speaker’s turn towards the sunlight into an act of natural piety while maintaining a parallel connection to the earlier, negatively valued turn towards the sun. This may be considered the poem’s second closural strategy, functioning as a framing device whereby a first event, qualified as “vertrieben” (11), imaginatively transforms to recur as “andächtig” (30), nothing less than a heterodox act of reverence for the sun. This generates a resonance between the generically disparate beginning and end, a sense of thematic closure.

The fifth and final segment of the poem allows two further closural strategies to become visible. The lines move beyond the first-personal “ich” (27) to a universalizing “der Mensch” (31):

Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen,  
 Als daß sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare?  
 Wie sie das Feste läßt zu Geist verrinnen,  
 Wie sie das Geisterzeugte fest bewahre. (31-34)

The *Kreuzreim abab* brings the triadic chain of rhyme words to an end, but the rhyme also gains a local semantic function here, embedding a semantic dissonance between “gewinnen” and

“verinnen” within a phonic similitude. The poem states the rhyme between “offenbare” and “bewahre” in *Konjunktiv I*, as if this were reported speech, a self-citation of the previous occurrence of the rhyme pair in the middle of the poem: “Welch herrlich edlen Kern sie auch bewahrte” (14) and “Die heil’gen Sinn nicht jedem offenbarte” (16). As a self-citation, this repetition of a rhyme pair constitutes a meta-rhyme that parallels or ‘rhymes’ the middle of the poem and the end. No longer mediated by the *topos* of the Book of Nature, “Gott-Natur” reveals itself not just as the content (“heil’gen Sinn,” 16), but as the agent of revelation. The repetition of the verb *offenbaren* thus explicates the nature of “eine aus dem Innern am Äußern *sich* entwickelnde Offenbarung” (emphasis mine) that occurred in the poem’s past of enunciation.<sup>557</sup> In contrast, the verb *bewahren* undergoes an imaginative metamorphosis: whereas it before referred to the skull’s ability to house a “Kern” (14) subject to the erosions of time, thus indexing an absent internality, the verb now refers positively to nature’s active and continual preservation of “das Geisterzeugte.” In other words, the verb that culminated the poem’s meditation on *vanitas* before the line beginning “Doch” (15), uttered at the heights of despair, now recurs to describe a pantheistic consolation that concludes the entire poem as its last word. One could almost read the line from “Metamorphose der Tiere” in which the verb occurs as a commentary on the use of the verb in the *Beinhaus* poem: “Und die seltenste Form *bewahrt* im geheimen das Urbild” (15, emphasis mine). Already at the fourteenth line, the verb *bewahren* latently contains – “im geheimen” – its meaning in the poem’s last line. This third closural strategy of the meta-rhyme thus secures closure by generating a parallelism between the poem’s middle and its end as a retrospective self-citation and transformation of that middle.

If the conclusion repeats a rhyme pair in order to activate a latent meaning in the term

---

<sup>557</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. “Aphorismen.” In: *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977 (Erstdruck 1820). Pg. 33-44.

*bewahren* and thus explicate *offenbaren*, it simultaneously obscures this semantic procedure of transformation-in-iteration by introducing two novel terms: “das Feste” (33) and “das Geisterzeugte” (34). Like nature herself, perhaps, the poem conceals in the moment that it reveals; the enigmatic character of the lines has continually riddled critics. Albrecht Schöne reads “das Geisterzeugte” three ways: in relation to Gall’s doctrine of skull development, according to which the skull forms in response to precedent growth in brain tissue; in relation to Goethe’s morphology, such that all natural phenomena count as *geisterzeugt* to the extent that they are formed through eternal laws of formation (*Bildungsgesetze*); and finally in relation to the products of human culture, such as art or Schiller’s literary output, themselves *geisterzeugt* and protected (*bewahrt*) from decay in the sense that they outlive their creators.<sup>558</sup>

Schöne is less helpful with regards to the more difficult penultimate line. In this regard, Max Kommerell reads the concluding chiasmus as articulating a polarity: “So ist die Natur in den beiden polaren Bewegungen Tod und Leben erfaßt: das Leben verzehrt sich, indem es Geist wird, und der Geist erbaut sich eine körperliche Form, die beharrt.”<sup>559</sup> In his “Erläuterung zu dem aphoristischen Aufsatz ‘Die Natur’” (1828), written to Kanzler v. Müller on a text that was actually authored by the Zürich theologian Georg Christoph Tobler, Goethe writes the much-quoted statement that “die Materie nie ohne Geist, der Geist nie ohne Materie existiert und wirksam sein kann.”<sup>560</sup> Common to this statement and the last lines of the poem is not just the interdependence of mindedness and material nature, but the form of chiasmus that articulates this reciprocity.

One should not, however, let intertexts drown out the singularity of poetic expression

---

<sup>558</sup> Albrecht Schöne. *Schillers Schädel*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck. 1961. Pg. 73.

<sup>559</sup> Max Kommerell. *Gedanken über Gedichte*. 3. Auflage. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt a.M. 1956. Pg. 183

<sup>560</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. “Erläuterung zu dem aphoristischen Aufsatz ‘Die Natur.’” In: *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977 (Erstdruck 1833, datiert vom 24. Mai 1828). Pg. 32-33.

achieved in these last lines.<sup>561</sup> The conclusion of Goethe's poem should be read with a view to the poem's closural strategies, one of which was already isolated in this fifth segment (the meta-rhyme). In a different key, the didactic tone, epigrammatic concision, and chiasmic obscurity of these lines grant them a degree of suggestive condensation such that they sound like "Orakelsprüche" (26), the same that the "Geheim Gefäß" (26) was actively "spendend" (26) before the poem's final segment. Indeed, due to their highly abstract status as nominalizations ("das Feste," "das Geisterzeugte"), the words making up the poem's concluding chiasmus aid in generating this oracular tone. It is as if these final lines – referring, as they do, to "der Mensch" (31) – were not uttered by the speaker at all, but were rather spoken by the skull itself. This may be considered the poem's fourth closural strategy: a self-reflexive device that mediates addresser (poetic speaker) and addressee (skull) such that the source of lyric utterance in the fifth segment cannot be clearly localized.

The semantic migration of the descriptor *geheim* in the preceding fourth segment allows us to track how the poem generates this ambiguity as to the source of lyric enunciation at the conclusion. That descriptor first referred adverbially to the Form's activity on the speaker, its mysterious ability to displace him into an enraptured state of delight: "Wie mich *geheimnißvoll* die Form entzückte!" (22, emphasis mine). The descriptor then migrates to qualify the material skull itself, now an oracular, speaking skull: "*Geheim* Gefäß! Orakelsprüche spendend, / Wie bin

---

<sup>561</sup> Where hermeneutic problems of an intractable character are concerned, literary critical history repeats itself between national traditions. The enigmatic conclusion of Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn" states a chiasmus like that of Goethe's *Beinhaus* poem: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, —that is all, / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50). Keats's conclusion has irritated critics such as T.S. Eliot, who found the last lines a "blemish" unwarranted by what previously occurred in the poem. In his magisterial reading, Cleanth Brooks notes that "the 'Ode' itself differs from Keats's other odes by culminating in a statement – a statement even of some sententiousness in which the urn itself is made to say that beauty is truth" (151). Brooks resolves the interpretive issue of how to read the seemingly unwarranted last lines by setting a methodological constraint: "The very ambiguity of the statement 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' ought to warn us against insisting very much on the statement in isolation, and to drive us back to a consideration of the context in which the statement is set" (152-153). Cf. Cleanth Brooks. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. New York: Harcourt. 1947.

ich werth dich in der Hand zu halten” (26-27, emphasis mine). In other words, what first referred to the Form’s *activity* on the speaker now refers to the skull as *entity* held by the speaker. In a sense, the entity is now itself active, the skull now discloses itself as constituted, as animated, by its form, as if the skull, now a vessel, were overflowing with the generative liquid of “jenes Meer [...] Das fluthend strömt gesteigerte Gestalten” (24-25). The sense of “Geheim Gefäß” should not be taken then as referring to a typical vessel that would divide the inner and the outer like a container, but rather as a phenomenal surface that only partially reveals its conditioning and lawful ground. In other words, rather than an interior contained within an exterior vessel, the phenomenal exterior of the vessel is more than a mere exterior; it is itself “Geheim” and thus open to becoming *offen-bar*, to phenomenally dis-closing itself in its conditioning lawfulness.<sup>562</sup> The oracular pronouncements emitted by this speaking skull, no longer hollow, themselves both conceal and reveal like the mysterious source from which they emerge. This ambiguity, according to which the conclusion of the poem appears to be spoken by the skull itself as an entity-in-activity, accords with the interpretation of the poem’s meta-rhyme as the staging of an imaginative metamorphosis of the poem’s own *memento mori*-like middle.

We are now in a position to return to the poem’s enigmatic concluding chiasmus. Not a mere summary, the poem’s conclusion transforms that which occurred in the middle, shifts its status from that of a particular case to that of a universal law. What occurred in the middle was a process marked by the rhyme words *bewahrte – offenbarte – gewahrte*, i.e., a phenomenal revelation of the skull’s immanent form (“Gebild,” 18) dependent on the speaker’s activity of intuitive perception. The poem now reflects on that particular phenomenon in such a way that the case is raised to the status of the universal, of an *Urphänomen*. While Goethe’s natural scientific

---

<sup>562</sup> One might here recall Goethe’s notion of an *offenbares Geheimnis*: “Wem die Natur ihr offenbares Geheimnis zu enthüllen anfängt, der empfindet eine unwiderstehliche Sehnsucht nach ihrer würdigsten Auslegerin, der Kunst.” (180). Cf. WA I Abtheilung, 48. Band (1897) *Maximen und Reflexionen*.



writings abound with such *Urphänomene*, his *Beinhaus* poem grants us access to an *Urphänomen* of the human being: the human acknowledgment of mortality as the warp and woof of nature's (pro)creative life. The skull, taken as a physical remnant or "das Feste" (33), disclosed its immanent form as ideal conditioning ground of its material complexion, thereby triggering a visual liquefaction, a "verinnen" (33) into *Geist*, figured by the poem as a formative process that takes place in the "Meer / Das fluthend strömt gesteigerte Gestalten" (24-5). Similarly, "das Geisterzeugte" (34) or the skull's organic genesis and active role in the life of man, remained preserved, "bewahr[t]" (34), in the material complexion of the skull itself; a 'whole' or self-coherent genetic context remains 'legible' in the particularities of its ossified parts and end product (the skull).<sup>563</sup> The poem's concluding chiasmus thus specifies the revelation of "Gott-Natur" as a formal disclosure that reciprocally mediates natural and poetic polarities alike: formed end product and formative process, natural material entity and ideal activity of nature, intuited object (the speaking skull) and intuiting subject (the speaker), and even particular case (the poem's middle) and general law (the poem's end).

Perhaps the most important implication of poem's concluding chiasmus can be found in the way in which it references the poem's middle, with which it 'rhymes' itself. In that middle,

---

<sup>563</sup> I borrow the concept of a 'genetic context' or *genetischer Zusammenhang* from Cassirer (43). Cassirer's synthetic reconstruction emphasizes, among other things, the exact points of convergence and divergence between Goethe's scientific-intuitive methodology and those of the mathematical physical sciences: "Die Methode Goethes und die des Physikers sind beide genetisch: aber es handelt sich in dem einen Falle um eine descriptive, in dem andern um eine konstruktive Genese. Hier wird das Ganze einer Grösse aus hypothetischen Grössenelementen errechnet und aufgebaut; dort bleibt es als solches bestehen, um nur in seiner gesetzlichen Umbildung, in seinem Zusammenhang mit anderen anschaulichen Ganzheiten verfolgt zu werden. Der Weg führt nicht von der Erscheinung zu Bedingungen, die nur gedacht sind, selbst aber nicht mehr erscheinen können; sondern er geht von den abgeleiteten Phänomenen stetig bis zu einem Urphänomen zurück, vor dem sich Denken und Anschauen bescheiden, weil sie weitere Zerlegung seiner Vernichtung gleichkäme" (72). Like Cassirer, Wellbery places emphasis on the role of genesis, but relates it to Goethe's account of aesthetic apprehension: "Das Verstehen des Kunstwerks ist Nachvollzug seiner Genesis aus der Idee" (274). Cf. Ernst Cassirer. "Goethe und die mathematische Physik: Eine Erkenntnistheoretische Studie." In: *Idee und Gestalt: Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, Kleist*. Berlin: Bei Bruno Cassirer. 1921. Pg. 29-76. & David E. Wellbery. "Zur Methodologie des intuitiven Verstandes: Anmerkung zu Eckart Försters Goethelektüre." In: *Übergänge – diskursiv oder intuitiv? Essays zu Eckart Försters „Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie.“* Hsg. Johannes Haag and Markus Wild. Frankfurt a.M.: Klosterman. 2013. Pg. 259-274.

the paradigm of writing and legibility allowed the speaker to overcome the situation of *memento mori*, of the evacuation of meaning through the transience of time. In recalling its middle revelation, the poem's conclusion reflects on its own textual status as writing: "die Schrift [...] die heil'gen Sinn nicht jedem offenbarte" (15-16) is now reflectively transformed into the way in which "Gott-Natur" preserves sense by fixing it within the written letter ("Wie sie das Geisterzeugte fest bewahre," 34) and, reciprocally, allows the written letter to be read and even read aloud each time anew, bringing the letter's "Sinn" back to flowing life out of the fixture of the written word ("Wie sie das Feste läßt zu Geist verinnen," 33).<sup>564</sup> Poetics and the philosophy of nature here intertwine to overcome the situation of *memento mori* with which the poem began, sublating the transience of time with the circular reciprocity of a chiasmus about the dynamics of writing and reading, thereby transitioning from a Christian to a Spinozistic register of mythic figuration.

A.W. Schlegel claimed that the achievement of poetic closure in a *terza rima* poem will be most in accord with the normative idea of the rhyme scheme when the poem "nur durch einen freyen Akt, durch einen unbegreiflichen Sprung das Unendliche zur Einheit zusammenfassen kann."<sup>565</sup> We are now in a position to evaluate Schlegel's literary critical claim by attending to Goethe's poetic praxis. Rather than simply exemplifying Schlegel's formula for poetic closure, which emphasizes the need for an "unbegreiflichen Sprung," a kind of pure positing of a concluding cut that summarizes the whole within a part, Goethe instead allows four distinct closural strategies to converge at poem's end:

---

<sup>564</sup> One is here not far from the way in which Hölderlin brings his hymn "Patmos" to a similarly self-reflexive finale: "daß gepfleget werde / Der feste Buchstab, und Bestehendes gut / Gedeutet. Dem folgt deutscher Gesang" (224-226, pg. 172; emphasis mine). Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin. *Sämtliche Werke*. Stuttgarter Ausgabe. Ed. Friedrich Beißner. Bd. 2,1. 1951.

<sup>565</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel. *Vorlesungen über die romanische Poesie*. In: *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik. Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*. II/I. Hsg. Georg Braungart & Ernst Behler. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh. 2007. Pg. 153.

1. A grammatical strategy: The rhyme at the end of the fourth segment multiplies present participial adjectives (“spendend,” 26, “entwendend,” 28, “wendend, 30), such that the poem sublates a dangerously paratactic, successive temporality in favor of one characterized by self-transformative ongoing activity. This device is foreshadowed in the line “Das *fluthend strömt gesteigerte* Gestalten” (25, emphasis mine), whose middle three words synchronize the three temporal strata of future, present, and past in attributing them to one unitary activity of liquid generation, a formative process that itself transforms the intransitive verb *strömen* into a transitive flowing constitutive of solidified objectival forms themselves.
2. A framing strategy: The semiotic program executed by the poem consists in the axiological inversion of a gesture, that of turning upwards toward the sun, first valued negatively at the syntactically isolated word “vertrieben” (11), then valued positively at the word “andächtig” (30). The exile “herauf zum lichten Tage” (12) thus recurs under new imaginative conditions as a liberating turn “Zum Sonnenlicht” (30); the sacrilegious deracination of human remains from their proper resting place in the dark of the earth metamorphoses into an act of natural piety for the warmth of light and life.
3. A formal strategy: The repetition of a rhyme pair (“bewahrte,” 14, “offenbarte,” 16; “offenbare,” 32, “bewahre,” 34) constitutes a meta-rhyme that ‘rhymes’ the middle of the poem, wherein the semantic mediation of spatial polarities occurs, and the end of the poem. The meta-rhyme both explicates the nature of the *Offenbarung* as well as activates latent meanings in the term *Bewahrung*, transforming it into an ongoing activity of nature that preserves the products of spirit rather than exposing them to irrevocable loss. The conclusion’s use of *Konjunktiv I* also allows the meta-rhyme to be read as the poem’s own self-citation of the revelation that occurred in the middle of the poem at the poem’s own end, raising the status of that phenomenal disclosure from particular case to general law.
4. A self-reflexive strategy: The didactic tone, epigrammatic concision, universalizing tendency, and chiasmic obscurity of the poem’s concluding lines grant them a degree of suggestive condensation such that they sound like “Orakelsprüche,” (26), the same that the “Geheim Gefäß” (26) was actively “spendend” (26) before the poem’s fifth segment. The perceiving subject of the speaker and its objectival correlate, the skull, have here become so intertwined as to be rendered almost indistinguishable. This might be considered the final fruition of the morphological intuition described in the line “Unschätzbar herrlich ein Gebild gewährte” (18) – again, a reference at the end of the poem to its therewith ‘rhymed’ middle. The self-reflexivity of the poem’s conclusion lies furthermore in its thematization of its own textual status. Writing, or “die Schrift [...] die heil’gen Sinn nicht jedem offenbarte” (15-16), manages to preserve the spirit of sense by virtue of fixing it within the letter (“Wie sie das Geisterzeugte fest bewahre, 34) and in turn revivifies that sense by virtue of releasing it from the letter’s fixture into the flow of reading and interpretation: “Wie sie das Feste läßt zu Geist verrinnen” (33).

It will be worthwhile to step back from these closural strategies in order to observe their

confluence at the poem's conclusion. Having overcome a successive temporality in the course of the fourth segment (*Formerschließung*), the poem is in a position to re-turn to the sunlight in a positive, pious register. This allows the poem to conduct a transformative self-citation of its middle revelation at the end via a meta-rhyme that reactivates *bewahren* such that what once indexed loss and thus the transience of the mundane now designates a source of consolation in nature's self-propagating formative process of liquid generativity. This fifth segment (*Lehrspruch*) can be considered "Orakelsprüche" revealing how the skull, as a formed entity now actively disclosing its formative source, remains dependent on the speaker's activity of intuitive perception ("gewahren," 18). In this manner, the speaker and addressee, subject and object, are intertwined, as are the metaphors of nature's generativity with the reciprocity of letter and spirit (*Schrift/Sinn*) in the self-reflexively concluding chiasmus.

Common to all closural strategies is their exploitation of the semantic potential of the triadic rhyme scheme as well as their use of transformative repetition. One can generalize the poem's global or meta-closural strategy as one of self-manifesting latency. This retrospective dynamic of explication, of gradually unfolding the ending implicit in the beginning, explains why the poem is able to cross *prima facie* generic boundaries from *memento mori* to pantheistic hymn without creating a sense of discontinuity. Rather than following his Romantic peers in adopting *Terzinen* for the writing of prophetic poetry, then, Goethe replaces prophecy with latency, reconfiguring the rhyme scheme's ability for prospective anticipation (*aba* → *bcb*) into a manifestation of what was retrospectively latent from the beginning (*bcb* → *aba*). Above all, the formal device of the meta-rhyme poetically performs this temporal operation, securing poetic closure by enabling a self-reflexive conclusion on the poem's own textual status. The late Goethe thus ends this poem's meditation on death as the closure of human life by opening onto the

endlessly fecund, ceaselessly vitalizing self-generativity of nature, an open-ended process extending to written texts themselves: (*Ist fortzusetzen*).

The *Beinhaus* poem also allows us to isolate four structural components that are reconstellated in Faust's monologue in *Anmuthige Gegend*, his only other *terza rima* poem. First, as framing device or semiotic program, the axiological inversion of the solar turn shifts to the center of dramatic action in Faust's monologue. The second structural ingredient consists in the poetic staging of a formal disclosure, in both poems associated with the term *Entzücken*: "Wie mich geheimnisvoll die Form entzückte!" (*Beinhaus*, 22) & "Ihn [den Wassersturz] schau ich an mit wachsendem Entzücken!" (*Faust II*, 4717). Third, a subjective experience of rejuvenation is common to both poems (e.g., their lexical modifications of the term *Leben*). Fourth, the objectual correlate of that subjective experience consists in the imagery of a 'visual liquefaction' associated with an elemental source, either water in the *Beinhaus* poem ("jenes Meer," 24) or flame in *Faust II* ("ein Feuermeer," 4710). Fifth, both poems achieve poetic closure by adapting and ultimately transforming the strategy outlined by A.W. Schegel, ending in some of the most symbolically dense lines of German literature. Specifically, they secure closure through the formal device of the meta-rhyme. While the *Beinhaus* poem stages a triumphant turning upwards toward the sun, Faust's monologue stages a reconciled turning away from the sun. Both solar turns – both poems – thus form a diptych that renders visible aspects of the late Goethe's 'pagan' religiosity.

### **3. The Sense of a Beginning: The Disclosure of Faustian Desire in *Anmuthiger Gegend***

Moments before his blindness, Faust glimpses four female figures approaching his palace gates; only three depart. Aware of the encroaching *Sorge*, Faust exclaims: "Stünd ich, Natur! vor dir ein Mann allein / Da wär's der Mühe werth ein Mensch zu seyn" (V.11406-7). Faust expresses a desire for an immediate experience of nature, here figured as the addressee of an apostrophic

exclamation (“Natur!”) that thrusts her into the intimacy of the second person (“dir”). One of the paradoxes of the Scholar’s Tragedy was that Faust hoped to attain this immediacy through magical invocations and Mephistophelian procurement. An immediate experience of nature by definition excludes, however, such magical mediation. To approach nature via Mephistophelian means would seem only to push it further away. The use of the subjunctive in Faust’s exclamation confirms his comprehension of this double bind. The shift from “Mann” to “Mensch” signals, moreover, an erotic undertone to his statement: not just nature’s ‘immediacy,’ but standing before her as a solitary man would make being human worthwhile.

All the more puzzling, then, is the fact that Faust *did* stand alone before nature in that other episode of blinding: *Anmuthige Gegend*, a scene marked by Mephistopheles’s conspicuous absence. Did Faust simply forget his own rebirth? Is *Anmuthige Gegend* a kind of dramatic exception, as prologue to the second part not subject to the causal continuities of dramatic plot? These are the wrong questions to ask, for, as Max Kommerell has argued, *Faust II* does not operate according to such diachronic intelligibility: “Die Zeit als Element des dramatischen Geschehens muß von Goethe umgedacht worden sein. Der Zweite Faust spielt in einer symbolischen Zeit. Die Form fordert Aufeinanderfolge; eigentlich aber ist dieses Drama die räumliche Ausbreitung des Zugehörigen.”<sup>566</sup> Goethe himself hinted at the primacy of the paradigmatic over the syntagmatic in *Faust II* when he spoke of using the “Mittel” of “einander

---

<sup>566</sup> Kommerell proceeds to make the division of acts intelligible by developing the concept of *Daseinskreise*. In a sense, each act diachronically unfolds a synchronic idea that reaches multifarious expression in the various episodes and subplots of each act: Act I unfolds the existential sphere of sociability, of the mechanics of desire and monetary exchange in mediating that desire. Act II unfolds the existential sphere of man’s myth-forming phantasy in its syncretistic productive capacity and archaic ritual origins. Act III unfolds the existential sphere of the aesthetic, of the experience of beauty and its relation to canonical tradition. Act V presents a scene of old age and death as such. Kommerell interestingly does not extensively discuss Act IV, which seems intimately related to the sphere of the political. Max Kommerell. “Faust II. Zum Verständnis der Form.” In: *Geist und Buchstabe der Dichtung*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 2009 (erste Auflage: 1956). pg. 9-74. (here: 37).

abspiegelnde Gebilde.”<sup>567</sup> The primary action of *Anmuthige Gegend* under which all more specific events may be considered sub-actions is ‘rejuvenation.’ In this sense, a number of diachronically unrelated scenes at the level of causal plot become related at the paradigmatic substratum of the drama:

1. *Zueignung*: The mysterious dedication begins in the mode of repetition:

Ihr naht euch *wieder*, schwankende Gestalten!  
 Die *früh* sich *einst* dem trüben Blick gezeigt.  
 Versuch’ ich wohl euch *diesmal* fest zu halten?  
 Fühl’ ich mein Herz *noch* jenem Wahn geneigt?  
 Ihr drängt euch zu! *nun* gut, so mögt ihr walten,  
 Wie ihr aus Dunst und Nebel um mich steigt;  
 Mein Busen fühlt sich *jugendlich* erschüttert  
 Vom Zauberhauch der euren Zug unwittert. (1-8, emphasis added)

Almost every single line of the opening strophe emphasizes the iterative character of the recollection that follows as a kind of *mémoire involuntaire*: the first line designates the repetition (“wieder”), the second references the past (“früh,” “einst”), the third the present occurrence (“diesmal”), the fourth bridges past and present in a continuous “noch,” while the fifth grants the repetition deictic anchorage in “nun.” The poem’s temporal markers thus narrate the processual emergence of an imaginative remembrance, a kind of *Ergriffenheit* culminating in an experience of rejuvenation: “Mein Busen fühlt sich jugendlich erschüttert” (7). Rejuvenation thus takes place here as an imaginative state of recollection subject to repetition and not within the recollecting subject’s control.

2. *Glockenklang und Chorgesang*: Unlike the semi-anonymous author-figure who speaks the *Zueignung*, Faust himself, as dramatic character, experiences a rejuvenation upon hearing the Easter choir’s song right before his suicidal drinking of the poison: “Und doch, an

---

<sup>567</sup> “Da sich gar manches unserer Erfahrungen nicht rund aussprechen und direct mittheilen läßt, so habe ich seit langem das Mittel gewählt, durch einander abspiegelnde Gebilde den geheimen Sinn dem Aufmerkenden zu offenbaren.” Goethe an C.J.L. Iken, am 27.9.1827 in: FA II, 10, 546-49 (here: 548).

diesen Klang von *Jugend* auf gewöhnt, / Ruft er *auch jetzt* zurück mich in das Leben. [...] Dieß Lied verkündete der Jugend muntre Spiele, / Der Frühlingsfeyer freies Glück; / *Erinnrung* hält mich nun, mit *kindlichem* Gefühle, / Vom letzten ernsten Schritt zurück” (769-70, 780-82, emphasis added). Once again, an involuntary memory takes place as a repetition that brings back to imaginative presence a formerly lost affective state of youth. Unlike the general “schwankende Gestalten” (1) of the *Zueignung*, however, the particular trigger in the case of Faust at the end of *Nacht* is a musical one. Moreover, the restorative experience of being imaginatively brought back to one’s youth takes place as a profane resurrection to immanent life at Easter sunrise.<sup>568</sup>

3. *Hexenküche*: Unlike the rejuvenations triggered by memory, the rejuvenation at the witch’s kitchen is achieved through magical means. As Mephisto procures the magical potion from the witch, he asks for “Ein gutes Glas von dem bekannten *Saft*, / Doch muß ich euch um’s ält’ste bitten; / Die Jahre doppeln seine Kraft” (2519-21, emphasis added). The older the potion, the more potent for reversing Faust’s great age. Mephisto uses the same word that Faust used to refer to the poison in the vial upon his suicide attempt: “Hier ist ein *Saft*, der eilig trinken macht. / Mit brauner Flut erfüllt er deine Höhle” (735-6, emphasis added). Even the stage directions parallel the dramatic gesture of oral intake, the first before and the second after the rejuvenation triggered by the Easter song: *Er setzt die Schale an den Mund. (Nacht, emphasis added) & DIE HEXE, mit vielen Ceremonien, schenkt den Trank in eine Schale; wie sie Faust an den Mund bringt, entsteht eine leichte*

---

<sup>568</sup> Peter Michelsen relates this scene at the conclusion of *Nacht* to *Anmuthige Gegend*, spelling out a number of correspondences, but ignoring the larger paradigmatic connection to *Zueignung* and *Hexenküche* as well as the manner in which the paradigm of rejuvenation structurally changes from *Faust I* to *Faust II*. That structural change within the paradigm will be discussed below. Cf. Peter Michelsen. “Fausts Schlaf und Erwachen. Zur Eingangsszene von *Faust II* (‘Anmuthige Gegend’).” In: *Im Banne Fausts: Zwölf Faust-Studien*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann. 2000. Pg. 91-123.



*Flamme*. (*Hexenküche*, emphasis added). This gestural parallelism generates an equivalence between the diachronically unrelated scenes that can be designated ironic. Whereas in *Nacht* Faust attempted to leave behind the husk of his decrepit body and arise “Zu neuen Sphären reiner Thätigkeit” (705), to enter a sphere of pure intellectual activity, in *Hexenküche* he attempts to rejuvenate the aged body rather than abandon it. Like his attempted entry into a sphere of spiritual (*geistige*) purity, Faust’s attempt at erotic seduction will be doomed to fail, to be thrown back upon the vicissitudes of corporeal physicality as Gretchen, pregnant with child, suffers a fate unwittingly set up by Faust himself. *Hexenküche* therefore presents an ironic sub- and counter-model of rejuvenation, namely a physical rather than imaginative one triggered by magical means rather than through personal memory.

As prologue to *Faust II*, *Anmuthige Gegend* redefines the synchronic paradigm ‘rejuvenation’ that instantiates itself in the three scenes from *Faust I* just outlined. Rather than a rejuvenation triggered by an involuntary memory, the rejuvenation that initiates Part II is made possible by forgetting: “Dann badet ihn im Thau aus Lethe’s Flut” (4629).<sup>569</sup> This forgetting is not just an erasure of Faust’s *Reue* – not just, that is, a feature of Faust’s character psychology externalized for the sake of a dramatic *deus ex machina*. Rather, the forgetting implements a sublation of the moral sphere as such, the sphere of passionate subjects to whose actions the application of the

---

<sup>569</sup> The only commentator to have worked out the constitutive significance of forgetting for the poetics of Part II as a whole is Theodor W. Adorno: “Die Kraft des Lebens, als eine zum Weiterleben, wird dem Vergessen gleichgesetzt. Nur durchs Vergessen hindurch, nicht unverwandelt überlebt irgend etwas. Darum wird der Zweite Teil präludiert vom unruhigen Schlaf des Vergessens. [...] Hoffnung ist nicht die festgehaltene Erinnerung sondern die Wiederkunft des Vergessenen” (137-8). Adorno’s comment implies that Faust’s forgetting should not be seen as a simple case of naturally caused amnesia, not, that is, as a lack or deficiency of the recollective capacity, but rather as an intensified power of recollection. For a discussion of Adorno on forgetting in relation to Kommerell’s reading of *Faust II*, see Geulen (2003). Cf. Theodor W. Adorno. “Zur Schlußszene des Faust.” In: *Noten zur Literatur*. Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 11. Hsg. Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 2002. Pg. 129-138; Eva Geulen. “Aktualität im Übergang: Kunst und Moderne bei Max Kommerell.” In: *Max Kommerell: Leben – Werk – Aktualität*. Hsg. Walter Busch & Gerhart Pickerodt. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag. 2003. Pg. 34- 53.

predicates “good” or “bad” makes sense.<sup>570</sup> In other words, *Faust* the drama forgets with Faust the character the dramatic laws that governed the moralizing bourgeois world of the Gretchen Tragedy in Part I. In the opening lines of *Anmuthige Gegend*, Ariel hence emphasizes the indifference of the moral sphere: “Kleiner Elfen Geistergröße / Eilet wo sie helfen kann, / *Ob er heilig? ob er böse?* / Jammert sie der Unglücksman[n]” (4617-20, emphasis added). Besides being a pun on the violent, acquisitive fist (a connotation played on in *Studierzimmer II*), Faust’s name derives from a Germanization of the Latin *faustus*, meaning the fortunate one, he who is subject to the whims of fortune: “der Unglücksman[n].” Whether good or evil, Faust the unfortunate one will be lamented by this elfin choir regardless of his moral status.

If Part II resets the synchronic paradigm ‘rejuvenation’ from Part I, linking it to a trigger of forgetting rather than remembering, then that reconfigured paradigm will manifest itself diachronically more than once in Part II, for rejuvenation retains its iterative character. The revitalizing oblivion will recur at the very end of *Bergschluchten* as the culmination of Faust’s salvation in a kind of metamorphic molting into renewed life:

Vom edlen *Geisterchor* umgeben,  
 Wird sich der Neue kaum gewahr  
 Er ahnet kaum *das frische Leben*  
 So gleicht er schon der heiligen Schaar  
 Sieh! Wie er jedem Erdenbande  
 Der alten *Hülle* sich entraf[ft],  
 Und aus *ätherischem* Gewande  
 Hervortritt *erste Jugendkraft!*  
 Vergönne mir ihm zu belehren,

---

<sup>570</sup> This sublation of the moral sphere is what I take Goethe, in part, to have meant when he himself characterized the difference between Part I and Part II in terms of a shift from the sphere of the passionate “Individuum” to that of “Welt:” “Der erste Theil ist fast ganz subjectiv; es ist alles aus einem befangeneren, leidenschaftlicheren Individuum hervorgegangen, welches Halbdunkel den Menschen auch so wohl thun mag. Im zweiten Theil aber ist fast gar nichts Subjectives, es erscheint hier eine höhere, breitere, hellere, leidenschaftslosere Welt, und wer sich nicht etwas umgethan und einiges erlebt hat, wird nichts damit anzufangen wissen“ (cited in: Gaier 834). Goethe carefully avoids the word ‘objective,’ which would suggest that the difference was merely one of opposites rather than a sublation that encompasses that which is overcome. It is hence no surprise that the reader must have some subjective experience (“einiges erlebt”) in order to make sense of Part II, even though Part II is not subjective in its laws of representation. Cf. Ulrich Gaier. *Kommentar: Faust Dichtungen*. Stuttgart: Reclam. 2010.

Noch *blendet* ihm der neue Tag. (12084-91, emphasis added).

Present in both scenes is a choir of spirits (in *Anmuthige Gegend*, a GEISTER-KREIS according to the stage directions), the casting off of a protective enveloping shell (in *Anmuthige Gegend*: “Schlaf ist Schaale, wirf sie fort!” 4661), the ethereal environment (in *Anmuthige Gegend*: “Ätherische Dämmerung,” 4680), a moment of blinding at daybreak, and, above all, the recurrence of “frische Leben,” repeated in the first line of Faust’s monologue upon awakening as “frisch lebendig” (4679). The mirroring between *Anmuthige Gegend* and the near-penultimate passage of *Bergschluchten*, spoken by *eine Büßerin, sonst Gretchen genannt*, could not be clearer, establishing both scenes as prologue and epilogue in a kind of restorative frame for the entirety of Part II.<sup>571</sup>

Moreover, syntagmatic ‘manifestation’ of the paradigmatic model of rejuvenation in Part II crucially interlaces two otherwise distinct modes of temporality: at the level of dramatic plot, the linear temporality of a character in a given place at a certain time (i.e., Faust, weary upon a grassy bed, shattered by the preceding loss of Gretchen) and, at the level of poetic figuration, the cyclical temporality of nature in its diurnal rhythmic alternation. This is important because Faust’s *Erlösungsbedürftigkeit* presents an intractable problem at the level of plot: How could Faust, or any character, for that matter, go on after such events? If the linear temporality of plot as a causal order generates this dramatic problem, then Goethe solves it by tying the requisite event (‘redemption’) to the non-linear, cyclical temporality of nature. From the point of view of plot, a sunrise or sunset is utterly banal, for it happens everyday and thus does not constitute a narratively relevant event that follows from what preceded. Depending on the way in which a text

---

<sup>571</sup> Albrecht Schöne discusses this correspondence in his reading of *Anmuthige Gegend*, but does not relate the paradigm of rejuvenation in *Faust II* to the paradigm governed by personal memory in *Faust I*. Cf. Albrecht Schöne. “‘Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben.’ (Goethe, Faust II. Vers 4679-4727).” In: *Bilderwelten: Vom farbigen Abglanz der Natur*. Hsg. Norbert Elsner. Göttingen: Wallstein. 2007. S. 9-26.

may poetically figure the sunrise, however, such a narrative non-event can take on mythic proportions of relevance for the plot. An event at the level of *poetic figuration* (the earth's awakening at sunrise in *Anmuthige Gegend*) thus coincides with an event at the level of *dramatic plot* (Faust awakens after the Gretchen Tragedy), such that Faust awakens, as it were, together with nature in its entirety at dawn. In other words, Faust's rejuvenation partakes in nature's *creatio continua*, such that natural rejuvenation here occupies the structural position that moral redemption would have held in another play by another author. The poem that is Faust's monologue itself names the simultaneity of linear and cyclical temporalities in the compound "Wechsel-Dauer" (4722).

We are now in a position to take a closer look at this scene of rejuvenation through the agency of nature, a far cry from the scenes of rejuvenation tied to personal memory in Part I, devoting attention in particular to the use of *terza rima*. Faust does not simply awaken "vor dir [Natur] ein Mann allein" (11406, emphasis added), not *before* or standing over against nature, but in a kind of erotic ensconcement characterized by the preposition *um*. The only references to Faust as speaker coincide with the occurrence of the encompassing "um" (4683, 4694):

4679 Des Lebens Pulse schlagen frisch lebendig,  
 4680 Ätherische Dämmerung milde zu begrüßen;  
 4681 Du, Erde, warst auch diese Nacht beständig  
 4682 Und athmest neu erquickt zu meinen Füßen,  
 4683 Beginnest schon mit Lust mich zu umgeben,  
 4684 Du regst und rührst ein kräftiges Beschließen,  
 4685 Zum höchsten Dasein immerfort zu streben. ---  
 4686 In Dämmerchein liegt schon die Welt erschlossen,  
 4687 Der Wald ertönt von tausendstimmigem Leben,  
 4688 Thal aus, Thal ein ist Nebelstreif ergossen,  
 4689 Doch senkt sich Himmelsklarheit in die Tiefen,  
 4690 Und Zweig' und Äste, frisch erquickt, entsprossen  
 4691 Dem duft'gen Abgrund wo versenkt sie schliefen;  
 4692 Auch Farb' an Farbe klärt sich los vom Grunde,  
 4693 Wo Blum' und Blatt von Zitterperle triefen,  
 4694 Ein Paradies wird um mich her die Runde.

The semantic redundancy of *Leben* and *lebendig* characterizes the first line, and this redundancy introduces a pattern that will wind its way through the monologue's first typographically isolated section.<sup>572</sup> An intralinear pattern of semantically redundant synonymic pairs functions to foreground the metrical over the semantic. The earth in its entirety begins pulsating as the verse repeatedly occupies the first four metrical positions of a line with synonymic terms: "Du **regst** und **rührst**" (4684), "Thal aus, Thal ein" (4688), "Und **Zweig**' und **Äste**" (4690), "Auch **Farb**' an **Farbe**" (4692), "Wo **Blum**' und **Blatt**" (4693). As if to underline the redundancy of these terms, the poem fortifies their synonymy with a recurrent consonance that privileges phonic similitude at metrically stressed positions over semantic meaning. These lines begin in a kind of echo of the first, placing the earth's rhythmic cyclicity, "Des Lebens Pulse," into the foreground. More than just a clever way of filling in required metrical slots, however, the opening synonymic pairs also emphasize the overarching natural process underway, namely the emergence of visibility, of visually articulate distinction, whether between colors or vegetal outgrowths. Synonyms never merely repeat the same semantic token or 'meaning' in new lexical guise, but linguistically function to articulate – to render visible verbally – such fine-grained distinctions or 'shades' of meaning.

The poem figures the emergence of visibility as more than visual, that is, as a multisensorial event, through a second, interlinear pattern of repetitive variation at the morphemic level. While the first line varied a genitive noun into an adverb (*des Lebens – lebendig*), the following lines play on the transposable character of prefixes:

In Dämmerchein liegt schon die Welt **erschlossen**,  
 Der Wald **ertönt** von tausendstimmigem Leben,  
 Thal aus, Thal ein ist Nebelstreif **ergossen**, (4686-4688, emphasis added)

---

<sup>572</sup> One might recall the other occurrence of this redundancy in *Des Epimenides Erwachen*, spoken by *Hoffnung*: "Das Leben selbst ist nur durch mich lebendig." Cf. *Goethes Werke*. Hamburger Ausgabe. Bd. 5. Hamburg. 1948. Pg. 386.

The variations on *er-* emphasize the processual character of nature's awakening, the sensual dynamism that unites a phenomenal disclosure of the world in a *visually* luminous twilight, an *acoustic* resonance of voices, and a *tactile* secretion of moist fog into the inlets of the valleys.

This pattern of repetitive morphemic variation continues in the following lines:

Doch *senkt* sich Himmelsklarheit in die Tiefen,  
Und Zweig' und Äste, frisch erquickt, entsprossen  
Dem duft'gen **Abgrund** wo *versenkt* sie schliefen;  
Auch Farb' an Farbe klärt sich los vom **Grunde**,  
Wo Blum' und Blatt von Zitterperle triefen, (4689-4694, emphasis added)

Light appears here as a weighty material principle, not just as a passive condition of visibility, but as a conditioning agent whose admixture with the dark “Tiefen” brings forth the colored world. As sunlight sinks (“senkt”) into the depths of the ground, branches and boughs arise, sprouting forth from the recess of an aromatic abyss where they lie plunged (“versenkt”). A single counterpoised motion of sinking (*senkt, versenkt*) hence causes both distinct sub-movements, the falling sunlight and the rising vegetal growth, and this is designated in a morphemic variation (with and without *ver-*). At the same time, this morphemic variation is interwoven with another, for the sunlight was metonymically referred to as “Himmelsklarheit,” which morphemically varies as color begins to “klärt sich los vom Grunde,” to enter visible distinction as multiple colors. Colors here literally clarify themselves, unlock themselves from their undifferentiated ground. The third variation allows the “duft'gen Abgrund” where the vegetation lies dormant to morph into the “Grunde” from which the colors begin to distinguish themselves. Stepping back from these details, the picture that emerges is one of nature seen in its dynamic aspect. The counterpoised motion of sinking-as-rising wedges the sunlight and darkened earth in the world's entry into visibility, into colored articulation, which takes place in the disentanglement of the earth's stratified levels.

A third pattern that can be designated ‘metonymic’ allows the global movement of the section to become clear. The adverbial descriptor “frisch lebendig” in the monologue’s first line metonymically repeats in a movement of visually zooming in:

Des Lebens Pulse schlagen *frisch lebendig*, (4679)

Und athmest *neu erquickt* zu meinen Füßen, (4682)

Und Zweig' und Äste, *frisch erquickt*, entsprossen (4690)

The metonymic chain established by the migrating descriptor parallels the pulses of life, life as such in its abstract and binary rhythm, “Du, Erde” (4681) as a specific addressee at Faust’s feet, and finally particular vegetal outgrowths. As a whole, then, this first section poetically enacts a movement of specification and particularization tied to the emergence of visibility.

Three linguistic patterns in the first strophe of Faust’s monologue have been outlined thus far: the intralinear, line-opening semantically redundant synonymic pairs, the interlinear morphemic variations, and the metonymic chain of adverbial descriptors. The first pattern functions to foreground the metrical over the semantic (i.e., the synonymic pairs are rhythmically pulsating at the cost of being semantically redundant). The second figures nature in its multisensorial, processual dynamism, while the third enacts an anti-panoptic descriptive movement of specification through a lingering contemplation of the particular. These three interwoven patterns all depend on repetition, however, for the execution of their figural functions. As a force of poetic continuation, such pattern-constitutive repetition threatens to prevent the opening strophe from concluding. There is a sense in which the description of branches and boughs, colors and hues, leaves and petals could go on *ad infinitum*. In order to offset these forces of continuation, the strophe constructs a triad of interlocking verses that secure the resolute concluding break of the strophe’s last line: “Ein Paradies wird *um* mich her die Runde” (4694,

emphasis added). The strophe states at its very middle line: “Im Dämmerchein liegt *schon* die Welt erschlossen” (4686, emphasis added). This twilight’s progressive brightening in the course of the first section will reveal that world to be a quasi-Edenic paradise at the aforementioned last line. Importantly, this paradise diverges from its Biblical counterpart, for the beginning of the poem emphasized that the earth encompasses Faust in a kind of erotic ambience: “Beginnest *schon* mit Lust mich zu *umgeben*” (4683, emphasis added). This line stitches together the only other “um” at the last line of the section, referring to paradise, with the only other “schon,” referring to the world’s phenomenal disclosure in twilight. The line that begins with “Beginnest” thus foreshadows the strophe’s eventual conclusion, the ultimate revelation of the “Welt” (4686) as “Paradies” (4694), but simultaneously qualifies that paradise as erotic, as embracing Faust within its revitalizing momentum.

If the first section zoomed in downwards in order to witness the earth’s erotic entanglement as the sunlight sinks into her dark, aromatic recesses, the second initiates a more synoptic view upwards. The opening exclamation, a past perfect “Hinaufgeschaut!”, states the completed act of having looked up without ascribing it to a subject. This presently enunciated past action initiates a complication of temporality that recurs within almost every line of the second section:

4695 Hinaufgeschaut! --- Der Berge Gipfelriesen  
 4696 Verkünden *schon* die feierlichste Stunde,  
 4697 Sie dürfen *früh* des ewigen Lichts genießen  
 4698 Das *später* sich zu uns hernieder wendet.  
 4699 *Jetzt* zu der Alpe grüngesenkten Wiesen  
 4700 Wird neuer Glanz und Deutlichkeit gesendet,  
 4701 Und stufenweis herab ist es gelungen; ---  
 4702 Sie tritt hervor! --- und, leider *schon* geblendet,  
 4703 Kehre ich mich weg, vom Augenschmerz durchdrungen. (emphasis added)

As vertical mediators between the sun and the landscape, these mythic “Gipfelriesen” announce



“already” a temporal duration: “die feierlichste Stunde” (4696). The subsequent three lines track the passing of this duration through a sequence of temporal markers: the sunlight shall first reach the mountain peaks “früh” (4697), then humans “später” (4698), and finally arrives “Jetzt” (1699) to the sunken green meadows. But the poem *also* specifies this temporal duration as an atemporal eternity: “Sie dürfen früh des *ewigen* Lichts genießen” (4697, emphasis added). How can the temporal descent of the atemporal sunlight occur in the first place? A clue for solving this apparent paradox can be found in a line that Ulrich Gaier leaves unremarked in his commentary, an oversight all the more glaring for that line ends in a dash that exacerbates the line break: “Und *stufenweis herab* ist es gelungen; --- ” (4701, emphasis added). This gradual vertical descent of the eternal light into temporality accords with the Plotinian notion of a *systema emanativum* or doctrine of emanation.<sup>573</sup> Rolf Christian Zimmermann has demonstrated the importance such hermetic ideas had for the early Goethe’s developing thought. As Zimmermann defines the *systema emanativum*, “Auch die Zeit, nicht anders als das Leben, muß ja aus einer vorgängigen Ewigkeit emanieren.”<sup>574</sup> In his poem “Parabase,” Goethe hence speaks of “das *ewig* Eine, / Das sich vielfach offenbart” (5-6, emphasis added). *Anmuthige Gegend*, of course, does not represent a

---

<sup>573</sup> Goethe himself used the phrase “systema emanativum” in his *Ephemerides* of 1770, one of the few examples of Goethe’s Latin prose. The notebook, written at the age of twenty-one, contains a comment on Johann Albert Fabricius’s *Bibliotheca Latina* (1697). Fabricius was a German philologist and bibliographer of antiquity whose work was well known at the time. Goethe’s Latin remark reads as follows in English translation: “To discuss God apart from Nature is both difficult and perilous; it is as if we separated the soul from the body. We know the soul only through the medium of the body [animam non nisi mediante corpore], and God only through Nature. Hence the absurdity, as it appears to me, of accusing those of absurdity who philosophically have united God with the world. For everything which exists necessarily pertains to the essence of God, because God is the one Being whose existence includes all things. Nor does the Holy Scripture contradict this, although we differently interpret its dogmas each according to his views. All antiquity thought in the same way; an unanimity which to me has great significance. To me the judgment of so many men speaks highly for the rationality of the doctrine of emanation [systema emanativum]; though I am of no sect, and grieve much that Spinoza should have coupled this pure doctrine with his detestable errors” (cited in Lewes 101). At the time, the young Goethe still had a relatively superficial understanding of Spinoza, filtered through Pierre Bayle’s lexicon *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697). Translation by: George Henry Lewes. *Life of J.W. von Goethe*. Ed. Nathan Haskell Dole. Vol. 1. New York: Bigelow, Brown & Co. 1902. Original in: *WA*. I. Abtheilung. 37. Band. (1896). Pg. 91.

<sup>574</sup> Rolf Christian Zimmermann. *Das Weltbild des jungen Goethe: Studien zur hermetischen Tradition des deutschen 18. Jahrhunderts*. Bd. 2. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag. 1979. Pg. 127.

crude translation of a Neoplatonic philosopheme into poetic language, nor does Goethe simply adopt the conceptual baggage that attends Plotinus's metaphors of the sunlight.<sup>575</sup>

In order to get clear on the relevance of the *systema emanativum* for *Anmuthige Gegend's* figuration of dawn as the entry of an eternal light into temporal duration, an excursus on Goethe's relation to Plotinus in order.<sup>576</sup> As impetus and end of speculative reflection, the One (*to hen*) unfolds itself downward into the material world – 'emanates' – such that the world forms an intelligible divine order, a cosmos. Immanent to the human being is a sense of this divine origin of intelligibility (*nous*), such that the path of thought leads one back up to the One as source of emanation. Goethe diverges from Plotinus's metaphysics of the One, however, in rejecting the implication of ontological deficiency that attends the lower strata to which the One vertically emanates, i.e., the natural world. In other words, for Goethe nature, as the basis of phenomenal manifestation, and mindedness (*Geist*), as that which manifests itself as intelligible in nature, interpenetrate one another. There is a correlate correspondence and divergence from Plotinus in the aesthetic realm. In the aesthetic realm, Plotinus thought of the idea of the beautiful as ontologically more real than the beautiful granted phenomenal contour, i.e. the artwork. Goethe comments on this ontological hierarchy in his aphorisms *Aus Makariens Archiv* from *Wilhelm*

---

<sup>575</sup> There was a veritable Plotinus revival in eighteenth-century Germany at the time. Working in large part from Ficino's Renaissance Latin translation of the 1480s, Friedrich Creuzer had translated Plotinus's *Enneade* II.8 "Von der Natur, von der Betrachtung und von dem Einen" into German as early as 1805. Creuzer frequently promoted the affinity between transcendental idealist philosophy and Plotinus's brand of Neoplatonism. His translations continued in 1814 (*Enneade* I.6, "Über das Schöne") and culminated in the critical edition of the complete *Enneaden* in 1835. Johann Gottlieb Fichte's son wrote his dissertation on Plotinus (*De philosophie novae Platonicae origine*, Berlin 1818), while Hegel granted Plotinus a systematic position in his history of philosophy. Even Novalis remarked, in a letter to Friedrich Schlegel, that he "erschrock beinah über seine [Plotins] Ähnlichkeit mit Fichte und Kant" (cited in Beierwaltes 87). For a detailed history of this revival focusing on Novalis, Goethe, Schelling, & Hegel, see Werner Beierwaltes. *Platonismus und Idealismus*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 1972. Esp. pg. 83-144.

<sup>576</sup> The discussion was aided by Werner Keller's reading of Goethe's 'Plotinus poem,' placed in the introduction to the *Entwurf einer Farbenlehre*, "Wär' nicht das Auge sonnenhaft." Keller remarks: "'Innere Form' bezeichnet demnach jene Bildungskraft, die die Gestaltwerdung in Natur und Kunst bewirkt und sich als immanente geistige Strukturierung dem jeweiligen ästhetischen Material mittheilt" (451). Cf. Werner Keller. "Variationen zum Thema: 'Wär' nicht das Auge sonnenhaft ...'" In: *Prägnanter Moment: Studien zur deutschen Literatur der Aufklärung und Klassik*. Hsg. Peter-André Alt, Alexander Košenina, Hartmut Reinhardt und Wolfgang Riedel. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann. Pg. 439-512.

*Meisters Wanderjahre* (1829), also collected in *Maximen und Reflexionen*. In Goethe's own translation, Plotinus claimed:

Denn indem die Form, in die Materie hervorschreitend, schon ausgedehnt wird, so wird sie *schwächer* als jene, welche in Einem verharret. Denn was in sich eine Entfernung erduldet, tritt von sich selbst weg: Stärke von Stärke, Wärme von Wärme, Kraft von Kraft; so auch Schönheit von Schönheit. *Daher muß das Wirkende trefflicher sein als das Gewirkte.* (emphasis added)<sup>577</sup>

Goethe proceeds explicitly to invert the primacy of “das Wirkende” over “das Gewirkte:”

Wir Menschen sind auf Ausdehnung und Bewegung angewiesen; diese beiden allgemeinen Formen sind es, in welchen sich alle übrigen Formen, besonders die sinnlichen, offenbaren. Eine geistige Form wird aber keineswegs verkürzt, wenn sie in der Erscheinung hervortritt, vorausgesetzt, daß ihr Hervortreten *eine wahre Zeugung*, eine wahre Fortpflanzung sei. *Das Gezeugte ist nicht geringer als das Zeugende*; ja, es ist der Vortheil lebendiger Zeugung, *daß das Gezeugte vortrefflicher sein kann als das Zeugende.* (emphasis added)<sup>578</sup>

The extension of the body and its movement (“Ausdehnung und Bewegung”) form the inescapable anthropological coordinates within which any relation to the world becomes possible. “Bewegung” in particular constitutes our synthetic experience of space and time as phenomenal conditions of the world's disclosure. Due to the necessity of space and time as conditions of phenomenal givenness, Goethe brings down to earth the transcendent sphere within which the One as source of intelligibility dwells, embedding it as “geistige Form” within nature. Despite this ‘immanentization,’ Goethe preserves a distinction or incongruity between the ideational form as normative principle of natural genesis and the natural phenomena thereby ‘formed’ or structured as immanently intelligible to human beings.<sup>579</sup>

The strangeness of Goethe's remark should not be read over, however, for the doubled conceptual move of immanentization and preservation of incongruity generates a host of

<sup>577</sup> *WA*. I. Abtheilung. 48. Band. (1897). Pg. 198.

<sup>578</sup> *WA*. I. Abtheilung. 48. Band. (1897). Pg. 199.

<sup>579</sup> This account largely follows: David Wellbery. “Form und Idee. Skizze eines Begriffsfeldes um 1800.” In: *Morphologie und Moderne. Goethes ‘anschauliches Denken’ in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften seit 1800*. Ed. Jonas Maatsch. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014. Pg. 17-42.

problems. Goethe's elliptical, even aphoristic remark conducts the majority of its argumentative work implicitly in its terminological substitution: Goethe replaces the term for emanation, *Wirkung*, with the word *Zeugung*. A conceptual inversion follows from that lexical substitution: *das Gezeugte* can be more ontologically 'real,' "vortrefflicher," than *das Zeugende*. Goethe claims that the emergence of an ideational form in phenomenal appearance, i.e. the phenomenal manifestation of a structuring normative archetype that renders natural phenomena intelligible in their genetic context, does not imply the form's 'dilution' or ontological deficiency ("verkürzt") so long as that form's manifestation remains "eine wahre Zeugung." In what sense can a *Zeugung* be said to be *wahr* in the first place? We are obviously not dealing here with linguistic propositions that are or are not the case, but with a quasi-metaphysical account of the intelligibility of *the source* of nature's intelligibility. One is reminded of the natural scientific aphorism brought in relation to Goethe's *Beinhaus* poem, wherein Goethe claimed that all intellectual discovery *and* invention find their basis in the "Bethätigung eines originellen Wahrheitsgefühles, das, im Stillen längst ausgebildet, unversehens mit Blitzesschnelle zu einer fruchtbaren Erkenntniß führt. Es ist eine aus dem Innern am Äußern sich entwickelnde Offenbarung" (emphasis added).<sup>580</sup> Like the notion of a "wahre Zeugung," the thought of a "fruchtbare Erkenntnis" or fecund cognition points to a procreative, erotic dimension of Goethe's natural scientific and aesthetic epistemology.

In exploring this erotic dimension, we might turn to an intertext that evinces a number of semantic affinities with Goethe's critique of Plotinus (the centrality of *Zeugung*) and his account of a fecund cognition (the relation between the inner and the outer). In the fifth issue of *Über Kunst und Alterthum* (1825), Goethe reviewed the philosopher Ernst Stiedenroth's *Psychologie*

---

<sup>580</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. "Aphorismen." In: *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977 (Erstdruck 1820). Pg. 33.

zur Erklärung der Seelenerscheinungen (1824). Goethe appreciated Stiedenroth's efforts:

Alle Wirkung des Äußern auf's Innere trägt er [Stiedenroth] unvergleichlich vor, und wir sehen die Welt nochmals nach und nach in uns entstehen. Aber mit der Gegenwirkung des Innern nach außen gelingt es ihm nicht eben so. Der Entelechie, die nichts aufnimmt, ohne sich's durch eigene Zuthat anzueignen, läßt er nicht Gerechtigkeit widerfahren, und mit dem Genie will es auf diesem Weg gar nicht fort; und wenn er das Ideal aus der Erfahrung abzuleiten denkt und sagt: *das Kind idealisirt nicht*, so mag man antworten: das Kind zeugt nicht: denn zum Gewährwerden des Ideellen gehört auch eine Pubertät. Doch genug, er bleibt uns ein werther Gesell und Gefährte und soll nicht von unserer Seite kommen. (Italicized emphasis in original; underlined emphasis added)<sup>581</sup>

Stiedenroth attempts to give an empirical account of the origin of psychological states, hence concerning himself with the “Wirkung des Äußern auf's Innere.” A brief excerpt from the passage referred to by Goethe should suffice to make Stiedenroth's empiricist framework evident:

Es bleibt übrig das Idealisiren der Bilder. Das Kind idealisirt noch nicht, denn aus Nichts wird nichts. Es müssen erst Data gegeben werden. Diese Data werden zum Theil begleitet von Gefühlen. So die ästhetischen Data, so die sittlichen. Dadurch entsteht ein Verlangen nach ähnlichen Wahrnehmungen und um so mehr je stärker das Gefühl gewesen ist, je lebhafter also der Eindruck war und auf die Fassung zurückwirkte.<sup>582</sup>

For Stiedenroth, the imagination emerges through a recursive psychological process in which external impressions or ‘data’ imprint themselves upon our psychic disposition alongside internal affective states triggered by that imprint. The psyche demands “ähnlichen Wahrnehmungen” (joint impressions/feelings) and gradually attains such a reservoir of “Gefühle” that it calls up past experiential data in receiving a new impression. In calling up the whole affective reservoir at the behest of a newly received “Eindruck,” a sense of imaginative phantasy or “das Idealisiren der Bilder” emerges from an utterly empirical receptive state. The child for Stiedenroth still remains in a *tabula rasa*-like state and therefore cannot ‘idealize,’ for “aus Nichts wird nichts.” While Goethe appreciates the carefulness with which Stiedenroth attempts to derive internal states from

---

<sup>581</sup> Cf. *WA*. I. Abtheilung. 41. Band: Zweite Abtheilung (1903). *Über Kunst und Alterthum. Mittheilungen im vierten bis sechsten Bande*. 1823-1832. Einzelnes [II.] Pg. 159-60.

<sup>582</sup> Ernst Stiedenroth. *Psychologie zur Erklärung der Seelenerscheinungen*. Bd. 1. Berlin: von Ferdinand Dümmler. 1824. Pg. 180

a recursive psychic receptivity for external “Data,” he finds that Stiedenroth does injustice to the “Entelechie, die nichts aufnimmt, ohne sich’s durch eigene Zuthat anzueignen.” For Aristotle *entelecheia* denoted the teleological (rather than efficient) causality specific to the organism, the way in which organisms carry within themselves the purpose of their living activity. The life of the organism is nothing other than the self-actualization of this immanent purpose. Goethe invokes this teleological end in order to highlight the reciprocity of mutual conditioning that attends all relations between the psychic interiority of the self and the impressions made upon it by the empirical world. To take up an empirical impression is thus not a passive reception, but involves an actively productive, ‘ideal’ moment (“durch *eigene Zuthat anzueignen*”). At this point it will be worthwhile to recall the two conceptual moves enacted by Goethe in his critique of the overly ideal Plotinus, for Goethe repeats those very moves in his critique of the overly empirical Stiedenroth: an *inversion* of the ontological hierarchy of the ideal over the phenomenal and a *substitution* of *Wirkung* with *Zeugung*. Where Stiedenroth writes “*das Kind idealisirt nicht*” (Goethe’s emphasis), Goethe writes “*das Kind zeugt nicht.*” As before, the intuitive apprehension of the ideal, of a “geistige Form” or principle of intelligibility interpenetrating the sensuous matter that is thus rendered intelligible, contains an essentially erotic moment: “denn zum Gewährwerden des Ideellen gehört auch eine Pubertät.”

Aphoristic and condensed as it is, Goethe’s remark begs for further elucidation. Goethe only used the rather technical Latinate *Pubertät* (as opposed to *Geschlechtsreife*) a handful of times in his oeuvre. In a late conversation from March 11, 1828, Eckermann asks Goethe about “einige hochstehende deutsche Männer [...], denen im hohen Alter die nöthige Energie und jugendliche Beweglichkeit zum Betriebe der bedeutendsten und mannigfaltigsten Geschäfte doch

keineswegs zu fehlen scheine.“<sup>583</sup> Goethe’s reply warrants extensive quotation, for it clarifies the conceptual nexus that relates *Pubertät* to *Entelechie* and further to a fecund cognition, to a true procreation, and thus to the erotic dimension of Goethe’s morphological epistemology:

„Solche Männer und ihresgleichen,“ erwiderte Goethe, „sind geniale Naturen, mit denen es eine eigene Bewandtniß hat; sie erleben *eine wiederholte Pubertät*, während andere Leute nur einmal jung sind. / Jede *Entelechie* nämlich ist *ein Stück Ewigkeit*, und die paar Jahre, die sie mit dem irdischen Körper verbunden ist, machen sie nicht alt. Ist diese Entelechie geringer Art, so wird sie während ihrer körperlichen Verdüsterung wenig Herrschaft ausüben, vielmehr wird der Körper vorherrschen, und wie er altert, wird sie ihn nicht halten und hindern. Ist aber die Entelechie mächtiger Art, wie es bei allen genialen Naturen der Fall ist, so wird sie bei ihrer belebenden Durchdringung des Körpers nicht allein auf dessen Organisation kräftigend und veredelnd einwirken, sondern sie wird auch, bei ihrer *geistigen* Übermacht, ihr *Vorrecht einer ewigen Jugend* fortwährend geltend zu machen suchen. Daher kommt es denn, daß wir bei vorzüglich begabten Menschen auch während ihres Alters immer noch frische Epochen besonderer *Productivität* wahrnehmen; es scheint bei ihnen immer einmal wieder *eine temporäre Verjüngung* einzutreten, und das ist es, was ich *eine wiederholte Pubertät* nennen möchte. / Aber jung ist jung, und wie mächtig auch eine Entelechie sich erweise, sie wird doch über das Körperliche nie ganz Herr werden, und es ist ein gewaltiger Unterschied, ob sie an ihm einen Alliierten oder einen Gegner findet. (Emphasis added)<sup>584</sup>

As this passage makes clear, Goethe theorized his own productivity in old age, not simply in the mode of self-mythologization, but as part of a broader anthropological account of man’s capacity to create and act in the world. Puberty is not just a corporeal state of transition into sexual adulthood. Rather, Goethe conceives of puberty as a kind of human entelechy, a spiritual force that animates the youthful body towards its immanent purpose of erotic and intellectual maturation. As self-actualization of the teleological purpose native to the human being rather than a transitional before/after state, puberty is subject to repetition, to iterative re-enactment even at old age should one belong to such “genialen Naturen.” Above all, Goethe associates such repetitive puberty with the human capacity for actions the effects of which live on past the mortal lives of their actors – with, one might say, the *living* deed, the (pro-)creative act that takes on a

---

<sup>583</sup> *WA. Anhang: Gespräche: 1827-1828* 6. Band. (1890) 1828, 11. März. Mit Eckermann. S. 289-90.

<sup>584</sup> *WA. Anhang: Gespräche: 1827-1828*. 6. Band. (1890) 1828, 11. März. Mit Eckermann. Pg. 280-1.

life of its own:

Denn was ist Genie anders als jene productive Kraft, wodurch Thaten entstehen, die vor Gott und der Natur *sich zeigen können*, und die eben deswegen Folge haben und von Dauer sind? Alle Werke Mozarts sind dieser Art; es liegt in ihnen *eine zeugende Kraft*, die von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht fortwirkt und sobald nicht erschöpft und verzehrt sein dürfte. [...] es ist alles gleich und kommt bloß darauf an, ob der Gedanke, das Aperçu, die That *lebendig* sei und *fortzuleben* vermöge.<sup>585</sup>

The pubescent artist's productive force brings deeds and thoughts into the world that "*sich zeigen können*" (emphasis added), that themselves attain the objectivity and independence of phenomena belonging to the world itself, not simply their creators. Not just Mozart, but Mozart's "Werke" possess "eine zeugende Kraft" that "fortwirkt," a creative ability to shape lives and history that persists through generational change as the inner life of those musical works. Goethe hence applies the predicate "lebendig" to Mozart's "That" of composing music, for that (pro-)creative act is able "fortzuleben." In the aesthetic realm, this may be considered one aspect of the *wahre Fortpflanzung* that Goethe spoke of when describing how an ideational form enters phenomenal appearance in his critique of Plotinus.

We can now return to Goethe's critique of Stiedenroth and flesh out the conceptual nexus that there tied puberty to entelechy. In ignoring the "Gegenwirkung des Innern nach außen" or the *productive* moment of world apprehension, Stiedenroth ignored the entelechy that attends all intuitive perception. The child cannot 'idealize' because it is incapable of *Zeugung*, which means that the child has not yet reached that stage of corporeal and intellectual maturation in which it actualizes its own immanent purpose even in the *act* of being receptive to the world. In other words, the child cannot 'idealize' not because it is a kind of blank slate in need of empirical impressions or sense data, but because "zum Gewährwerden des Ideellen gehört auch eine Pubertät," conceived as an erotically productive self-actualization of man's immanent purpose in

---

<sup>585</sup> Ibid. Pg. 274-6. Emphasis added.



the act of his intellectual and sensuous openness to the world.<sup>586</sup>

Goethe's idiosyncratic formulations, his central thought of a *fruchtbare Erkenntnis* or *wahre Zeugung*, begin to make sense when seen in the context of the human being's erotico-intellectual entelechy, an animating force which one may tap into more than once in life. It is not, as Plotinus thought, *in spite* of space and time, of sensuous phenomenality, that we are able to render nature intelligible through the spark of *nous*, of the transcendent One, still present within us. Rather, it is *precisely because* of space and time, as transcendental conditions of phenomenal disclosure, that we are able to render anything in nature intelligible in the first place. There is a recognizably Kantian background here, but Goethe conceives of space and time, "Ausdehnung und Bewegung," as he puts it, not just as transcendental, but as anthropological conditions rooted in our specifically human mode of embodiment.<sup>587</sup> It is for this reason that Goethe, in his 1828 conversation with Eckermann, focuses so intently on the body's obligation to age, on its ability to be struck by a pubescent state once more. This human mode of embodiment can be said to be open to two continuous poles of *Formerschließung*, one more receptive, the other more productive. The bodily equipment of the human sensorium, its ability to apprehend intuitively the "geistige Form" in nature's phenomenal appearances, constitutes the more 'receptive' moment, e.g. a natural scientist intuiting through the unmediated eye the admixture of light and darkness through a turbid medium as a principle of optics.<sup>588</sup> The more 'productive' moment consists in man's pubescent capacity to tap into that erotic source of creative productivity able to generate living deeds the effects and works of which live on (*fortleben*) beyond their creator's mortal lives, e.g. the artist's capacity to bring a "geistige Form" into the phenomenal concretion of an artwork

---

<sup>586</sup> *WA*. I. Abtheilung. 41. Band: Zweite Abtheilung (1903). *Über Kunst und Alterthum. Mittheilungen im vierten bis sechsten Bande*. 1823-1832. Einzelnes [II.] Pg. 159-60.

<sup>587</sup> *WA*. I. Abtheilung. 48. Band. (1897). Fragment on Plotinus. Pg. 199.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid*.

that possesses a life of its own. As opposing poles on a continuum, however, these two modes of scientific contemplation and aesthetic action do not form an opposition.

This excursus into Goethe's critique of Plotinus has traversed a number of texts in tracing out the salience of Goethe's interlinked thoughts of a true procreation, a fecund cognition, and a puberty or erotico-intellectual entelechy necessary for the intuitive perception of the ideal, even for the creation of art. With this background in mind, we can finally return to Faust. What Goethe called a "temporäre Verjüngung," allowing the aged spirit to attain the erotically productive vitality of youth once more, sheds light on *Anmuthige Gegend*, which was found to instantiate the paradigm 'rejuvenation' in *Faust II*.<sup>589</sup> Faust, in other words, continually undergoes such a "wiederholte Pubertät," from the *Hexenküche* on to his encounters with Helen of Troy.<sup>590</sup> Of course, observing this pattern of recurrent rejuvenation is one matter; explaining *why* it should recur is another. Above all, the conceptual nexus associating regenerative puberty with entelechy allows us to see Faustian desire as more than the mere wish for a partner such as Gretchen or for works that outlast one, even more than a fatalistically acquisitive, self-destructive need for experience as such, for the mere sake of having experienced. Faust instead undergoes a recurrent puberty in order for the drama to unfold a vision of Faustian desire as human entelechy, as the tragic realization of an anthropologically defining potential. The moment when this process begins to unfold in *Anmuthige Gegend* is at the line in which Faust has resolved once more "Zum höchsten Dasein *immerfort* zu streben. –" (4685, emphasis added), a line marked by its ending dash. The temporal qualifier "immerfort" captures the sense that Faust, as human being, must *always* continue to be in the state of processually striving *forth* after the highest mode of existence possible. The tragic character of human entelechy would seem to imply that man is distinguished

---

<sup>589</sup> *WA*. Anhang: *Gespräche: 1827-1828*. 6. Band. (1890) 1828, 11. März. Mit Eckermann. Pg. 280-1.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid*.

as a being animated and directed precisely by his immanent desire to exceed the limitations of the human, that to *be* human means to flee from this mode of being in striving after its transcendent overcoming “[z]um höchsten Dasein.”

Such general remarks do not, of course, yield much interpretive profit until put through the exertion of reading. In order to sketch out the frame for that close reading of the second strophe, the question that arises at this juncture concerns Faust’s *Streben*. What specifically does Faust desire when he turns upward to see and strive after the sun? It was noted that the emanation of the “ewige[s] Licht” (4696) into the temporal duration of “die feierlichste Stunde” (4696) was resonant with the Plotinian notion of a *systema emanativum* that proceeds “stufenweis herab” (4701). The detour conducted above allows us to re-state this allusion more precisely. Not a Neoplatonic figuration of the transcendent One, the sunlight of Faust’s monologue represents the animating procreative force that awakens the slumbering earth into her erotic vitality and initiates the emergence of visibility, bringing the world itself into articulate and thus intelligible disclosure: “Jetzt zu der Alpe grüngesenkten Wiesen / Wird neuer Glanz und Deutlichkeit *gespendet*” (4699-700, emphasis added). The sunlight of the day is this *Spende*, this donation of splendor and clarity that sets free phenomenal appearance as such. If the sunlight acts as *das Zeugende*, then Faust, in attempting to look directly at the sun, strives to apprehend the agent and source of his own rejuvenation, for it was that same sunlight which awakened the earth, the earth in turn which stimulated a “kräftiges Beschließen” (4684) to strive once more after the death of Gretchen. Faust, in other words, must renounce a phantasy of *self*-rejuvenation, of auto-generation (*Selbstzeugung*). As an iteratively manifested paradigm in Part I, rejuvenation took place as a recollective process outside of one’s control (*Zueignung*, *Ostergesang*) or at the hands of a magic witch, a feminine principle foreclosed even to Mephisto (*Hexenküche*). Common to all

of these figurations of rejuvenation is the fact that Faust cannot rejuvenate himself through an act of sheer willing. Similarly, the rejuvenating oblivion of *Anmuthige Gegend* takes place through the agency of nature in its *creatio continua*, but, unlike Part I, Faust will here attempt to usurp that restorative source. In the course of his monologue, Faust ultimately learns “daß das Gezeugte vortrefflicher sein kann als das Zeugende,” will turn instead towards the rainbow conceived (*gezeugt*) through the interplay of sunlight and waterfall.<sup>591</sup> Faust renounces, then, within the frame of a greater recognition that does not merely ‘settle’ for the rainbow, but first recognizes its *Vortrefflichkeit* over the sun: “Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben” (4727).

More than a clever allegoresis of concepts ties Goethe’s critique of Plotinus to *Anmuthige Gegend*, however, for a lexical affinity becomes manifest upon closer inspection. The moment of Faust’s blinding in his monologue reads:

Sie tritt hervor! – und leider schon geblendet,  
Kehr’ ich mich weg, vom Augenschmerz durchdrungen. (4702-3, emphasis added)

Each of these words bears directly on Goethe’s larger philosophical concern with formal disclosure (*Formerschließung*) in the aesthetic and natural scientific realms. Goethe uses the same verb of stepping forth (*hervortreten*) to characterize the event of phenomenal emergence in his critique of Plotinus: “Eine geistige Form wird aber keineswegs verkürzt, wenn sie in der Erscheinung hervortritt, vorausgesetzt, daß ihr *Hervortreten* eine wahre Zeugung, eine wahre Fortpflanzung sei” (emphasis added).<sup>592</sup> An even tighter occurrence of the lexical affinity associating sunlight’s *Hervortreten* at dawn with the phenomenal disclosure of an ideational form occurs in the fifth book of *Über Kunst und Alterthum* (1826), this time in direct association with natural scientific investigation. Goethe claims: “Es ist mir in den Wissenschaften gegangen wie einem, der früh aufsteht, in der Dämmerung die Morgenröte, sodann aber die Sonne ungeduldig

---

<sup>591</sup> *WA*. I. Abtheilung. 48. Band. (1897). Pg. 199.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid*.

erwartet und doch, wie sie *hervortritt, geblendet* wird” (emphasis added).<sup>593</sup> Why should the sunlight blind both Goethe as natural scientist and Faust as striving subject?

We can begin to approach this question by unfolding the resonances that echo within the word that designates Faust’s blinding: “Augenschmerz.” The Brothers Grimm dictionary only includes usages of this word by Goethe, and the ordinary character of the compound may lead one to read it as simply stating an empirical ocular pain. The word, however, forms a *tristegomenon* in Goethe’s poetic oeuvre, only occurring twice in *Faust II* and once in the poem “Typus.”<sup>594</sup>

Es ist nichts in der Haut,  
Was nicht im Knochen ist.  
Vor schlechtem Gebilde jedem graut,  
Das ein Augenschmerz ihm ist.

Was freut denn jeden? Blühen zu sehn,  
Das von innen schon gut gestaltet;  
Außen mag's in Glätte, mag in Farben gehn:  
Es ist ihm schon voran gewaltet.<sup>595</sup>

This poem thematically ties together Goethe’s only two *terza rima* texts, Faust’s dramatic monologue in *Anmuthige Gegend* and the interior monologue addressed to a skull purportedly belonging to Schiller. That latter poem was found in Section II to enact performatively a *Formerschließung*, a revelation of nature’s lawful generativity that immanently unfolds itself in phenomenal disclosure from the material remnant of the skull. Goethe elsewhere refers to this

---

<sup>593</sup> *WA*. I. Abtheilung. 42. Band. Zweite Abtheilung (1907). *Maximen und Reflexionen über Kunst und Ethik*. Aus *Kunst und Alterthum*. Einzelnes (III.).

<sup>594</sup> In the section “Der Inhalt bevorwortet” of *Zur Morphologie*, Goethe will relate: “Ich hatte mich indessen ganz der Knochenlehre gewidmet; [...] Hiebei fühlte ich bald die Nothwendigkeit, einen *Typus* aufzustellen, an welchem alle Säugetiere nach Übereinstimmung und Verschiedenheit zu prüfen wären, und wie ich früher die Urpflanze aufgesucht, so trachtete ich nunmehr das Urtier zu finden, das heißt denn doch zuletzt: den Begriff, die Idee des Tiers” (54-55, emphasis added). Cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam 1977.

<sup>595</sup> Cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Gedichte 1800-1830*. Hsg. Karl Eibl. Berlin: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag. Pg. 515.

formal disclosure as “eine aus dem Innern am Äußern sich entwickelnde Offenbarung.”<sup>596</sup> The poem “Typus,” referring to the normative archetype of vertebrate animal life, continues this line of thought in its opening counterfactual claim that there is nothing in the exterior phenomenal appearance of the animal (“Haut”) that is not already in its invisible interior (“Knochen”). In other words, the animal’s biological organization is based on an inner norm that immanently governs its external, individual shaping. The second strophe unpacks this notion of a formally governing inner norm through the figure of “Blühen sehen” (5), the experience of witnessing a blossoming, a moment of becoming in a genetic context. Blossoming represents that dehiscent emergence of what was immanently formed within, “von innen schon gut gestaltet” (6, emphasis added). Given this self-manifestation of an inherent form, the phenomenal character of that self-manifestation is in a sense pre-determined yet open to variation: “Außen *mag’s* in Glätte, *mag* in Farben gehn: / Es ist ihm *schon voran* gewaltet” (7-8, emphasis added). The rhymed verbs *Gestalten* and *Gewalten* are held apart by a semicolon in this second strophe, the immanent *Gestalt* tied to that which necessarily blossoms, the externalizing *Gewalt* tied to the resultant “Glätte” or “Farben.” These external traits connote the smoothness of bone such as a skull and the color of a flower blooming in daylight. The poem’s punctuation differentiates the activities of *Gestalten* and *Gewalten* by respectively ascribing them to the realms of immanent essence and external accident (“mag’s [...] mag,” 7), to that which necessarily is (even as potential before it has come to be visible in full bloom) and that which may come to be, but need not (such as variant external traits idiosyncratic to the individual life-form). Even if Goethe’s semicolon functions to conceptually differentiate the activities of immanent *Gestalten* and manifest *Gewalten*, the poem’s doubled parallelism secures their ultimate unity-in-differentiation. Not just the phonetic parallelism of the rhyme allows the

---

<sup>596</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. “Aphorismen.” In: *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977 (Erstdruck 1820). S. 33.

activities to capture two sides of one process, but the repetition of the temporal qualifier “schon” in each of the respective lines where the verbs occur consummates their unity. The genetic law of the flower or skull’s eidetic *Gestalten* is ‘immanent’ in the sense that it governs its own ‘external’ unfolding, its own *Gewalten* or material genesis in phenomenal time. The repetition of “schon” beside the rhyme words establishes the temporal self-identity of this process as the unfolding of one normative idea, i.e. the organism’s “Typus.”

We can now return to the crucial lines that have been skipped, for the poem only explicates this process of formal disclosure in answer to the question “Was freut denn jeden?” (5). That question was posed in response to the lines: “Vor schlechtem Gebilde jedem graut, / Das ein Augenschmerz ihm ist” (3-4). This misshapen formation or *schlechtes Gebilde* leads to the same “unsäglichen Augenschmerz” (8746) that the sight of Phorkyas, *das Häßliche*, beside the beauty of Helen inflicted upon the Greek chorus in Act III of *Faust II*. The ocular pain that constitutes the “trauriges Mißgeschick” (8745) of mortals, as the chorus in *Faust II* put it, can now be specified as more than the aesthetic sight of the ugly, as *any* misshapen formation as such, those *schlechte Gebilde* that are the very opposite of “Blühen” (5).<sup>597</sup> This blossoming was found to constitute the dehiscent self-unfolding of an immanent form (*Gestalt*) that governs its own genetic development from the bone onto the skin, from the seed into its colored bloom. No such *Sich-Herausbilden der eigenen Form* governs the “schlechte[s] Gebilde” (3). Rather than being governed by an animating principle of its *own* organic genesis (that is, by a normative type), the misshapen formation remains a derivative construct, for no inherent lawfulness governs its phenomenal appearances.

---

<sup>597</sup> Helen’s first description of Phorkyas emphasizes his status as a misshapen formation, a “schlechte[s] Gebilde” (3) in the words of the poem “Typus.” She figures Phorkyas as a kind of aborted birth that immediately returns to the primordial darkness of the womb, a “Blühen” (5) gone wrong: “Was ich gesehen sollt ihr selbst mit Augen sehn, / Wenn ihr *Gebilde* nicht die alte Nacht sogleich / Zurück geschlungen in ihrer Tiefe *Wunderschoos*.” (8663-5, emphasis added)

We are finally in a position to understand Faust's blinding upon looking at the sun, "vom Augenschmerz durchdrungen" (4703). As *tris legomenon* in Goethe's poetic oeuvre, "Augenschmerz" denotes the injury of man's aesthetic capacity for the intuitive apprehension of the 'blossoming' (or *Sich-Herausbilden*) of form into phenomenal disclosure. But why should the sun, surely no *schlechtes Gebilde*, suffuse Faust with such ocular pain? The cause of this "Augenschmerz" lies not in the nature of sunlight, not in the medium of man's sense of sight, but rather in the nature of Faust's specific act of sight, in the nature of Faustian desire. The sun was found to represent nature's animating procreative principle, *das Zeugende*. Faust's turning upward to see the sun represents a striving to bypass all organic formations, to look past the vegetation blossoming about him in favor of apprehending the source that enables that blossoming. In other words, Faust's desire articulates a kind of ontological hierarchy: the flowering vegetation "frisch erquickt, entsprossen" (4690) is not enough; only gazing upon the source of visibility itself, upon the source of procreative life will do. As the detour into Goethe's critique of Plotinus made clear, Goethe rejects such a postulate of phenomenal nature's ontological deficiency with regards to its procreative principle. Not sunlight as such, then, but Faust's desire to be the agent of his own rejuvenation, to reach an animating source that he takes to be *exterior* to nature rather than *immanent* in it, causes his "Augenschmerz."

We can now turn to Faust's own interpretation of his painful blinding. In the monologue's third strophe, Faust articulates a self-understanding of his own desire:

4704 So ist es also, wenn ein sehnend Hoffen  
 4705 Dem höchsten Wunsch sich traulich zugerungen,  
 4706 Erfüllungspforten findet flügeloffen;  
 4707 Nun aber bricht aus jenen ewigen Gründen  
 4708 Ein Flammen-Übermaß, wir stehn betroffen;  
 4709 Des Lebens Fackel wollten wir entzünden,  
 4710 Ein Feuermeer umschlingt uns, welch ein Feuer!  
 4711 Ist's Lieb'? Ist's Haß? die glühend uns umwinden,



4712 Mit Schmerz- und Freuden wechselnd ungeheuer,  
4713 So daß wir wieder nach der Erde blicken,  
4714 Zu bergen uns in jugendlichstem Schleier.

An emphasis on temporal simultaneity, on the instantaneously coincident character of the sun's shining and Faust's blinding, ends the previous strophe, the dash functioning as a kind of atemporal connector: "Sie tritt hervor! --- und, leider *schon* geblendet" (4702, emphasis added). This is significant because of the second strophe's precedent emphasis on temporal duration ("früh [...] später [...] jetzt," 4696-99). Given this instant transformation of temporal succession into simultaneity, Faust can only interpret his own "Augenschmerz" (4703) through a retrospective narrativization of the occurrence into successive stages: *Hoffen, Wunsch, Erfüllung-, Nun ... -Übermaß*. A desire is posited, then the possibility of that desire's fulfillment is within reach, and finally fulfillment is suddenly foreclosed by an experience of being overpowered by an excessive elemental force. The poetic texture of this narrative succession is delicately structured. The line in the first strophe that designated Faust's renewed striving, the setting again into motion of his human entelechy "Zum *höchsten* Dasein immerfort zu streben. ---" (4685, emphasis added), transformatively repeats, exposed in the aftermath of its enactment as a specifically human desire: "Dem *höchsten* Wunsch sich traulich zugerungen." The superlative shifts from the goal of Faust's striving to the act of striving itself, now figured as a *Wunsch*. Such human desire becomes literally superlative, 'carried beyond' the bounds of the human.

The word "flügeloffen" characterizes the doors or 'wings' of satisfaction's gate gaping open, rendering fulfillment possible. The poem allows a consonantal drift performatively to saturate that possibility with a sense of premature gratification. The consonantal cluster *ff* shared by the rhyme pair "Hoffen" and "flügeloffen" leaks backwards across the line that would designate desire's potential fulfillment: "Erfüllungspforten **findet flügeloffen**." A voiceless

labiodental fricative, <f > is phonologically articulated by a constriction of airflow through the narrow channel of the oral cavity. This stream of air then reaches the site of articulation between lower lip and upper teeth to cause the sonic turbulence that is the consonant, itself a phonologically embodied figure of passageway outward through the “Erfüllungspforten” of lip and teeth. In the first part of Act III, the stage directions will go out of their way to tell us that Helen, *welche die Thürflügel offen gelassen hat* (emphasis added), inadvertently allows Phorkyas to emerge from the dark passageway like an ugly aborted creature, one eyed and toothed, extruding its way out of the birth canal. Similarly, a sudden elemental force breaks out of the gateway doors in Faust’s case, preventing the gratification of passage: “Nun aber bricht aus jenen ewigen Gründen / Ein Flammen-Übermaß, wir stehn betroffen” (4707-8, emphasis added). These “ewigen Gründen” form the hidden source behind the gateway doors of the “ewige[s] Licht” (4697) that the “Gipfelriesen” (4695) are allowed to enjoy (“genießen,” 4695) at the break of dawn. The consonant of gratification <f >, now carried by the third and last rhyme word “betroffen,” is captured within the same line by the “Flammen-Übermaß” that will prevent gratification. The consonant continues to migrate from this elemental excess to the “Fackel” (4709), returning the phonological gesture (*Lautgebärde*) to desire, only to oscillate back to the state of thwarted fulfillment in “Feuermeer ... Feuer” (4710).

Faust’s interpretation of his own desire takes place in a universalizing mode, for he now speaks as a member of humanity: “Des Lebens Fackel wollten *wir* entzünden, / Ein Feuermeer umschlingt *uns*, Welch ein Feuer!” (4709-10, emphasis added). In his *Maximen und Reflexionen über Literatur und Ethik*, specifically in the section *Aus Kunst und Alterthum*, Goethe remarks: “Das Wahre ist eine Fackel, aber eine ungeheure; deßwegen suchen wir alle nur blinzend so daran

vorbei zu kommen, in Furcht sogar, uns zu verbrennen.”<sup>598</sup> Not only the iconographic recurrence of the torch ties this passage to the more Promethean torch of life in *Anmuthige Gegend*, but the universalizing diction attributing an encounter with the torch to mankind (“wir alle,” “uns”). While in Faust’s monologue igniting the torch poetically figures the fulfillment of man’s innate desire (“wollten”), only to be overpowered by a “Feuermeer,” in Goethe’s remark the torch itself overpowers with its excessive, burning flames. Faust’s monologue hence bifurcates the earlier figuration of the torch, dissociating the torch from its fiery element. Not a simplistic symbol of the truth, the torch is “eine ungeheure;” a potential for excessive overpowering belongs to desire to know the truth, just as Faust experiences “Schmerz- und Freuden wechselnd *ungeheuer*” (4712, emphasis added) upon trying to know the truth of his own desire. In other words, the torch of Goethe’s remark does not represent the truth as such, is not a kind of epistemological allegory, but rather conveys the truth of the human *desire to know* in its capacity for self-incineration, for self-thwarting in attempting to overcome its own human limitations. Faust’s retrospective interpretation of his blinding articulates such *knowledge of desire*, an understanding of precisely this truth concerning human desire’s capacity to burn itself up. Specifically, Faust wishes to light the human torch at the source of light itself, at the sun qua embodiment of *das Zeugende*, thus desiring to replace the sun as the source of his own rejuvenation in phantasy of auto-generation (*Selbstzeugung*).<sup>599</sup>

---

<sup>598</sup> *WA*. I. Abtheilung: 42. Band: zweite Abtheilung (1907). Pg. 137.

<sup>599</sup> This line of argument is further supported by a deeper consideration of the monologue’s ancient philosophical undercurrents. In a kind of counterpoint to the (anti-)Plotinian allusions to the eternal light emanating downward into temporal duration in the second strophe, the third strophe’s torch constitutes a well-known Lucretian allusion. At Goethe’s frequent urging, Karl Ludwig von Knebel produced the first German translation of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*. In the second book of Knebel’s 1821 translation, Goethe would have read a passage about nature’s continuous self-regeneration that makes use of the imagery of the torch: “Dränget sich dieses hervor zu neuer Jugend und Blüte, / Bleibt nicht dauernd auch da. So wird die Summe des Ganzen / Immer wieder erneuert, so borgt man das Leben von andern. / Ein Volk steigt empor, ein anderes sinket danieder; / Die jetzt lebende Welt ist nicht in kurzem dieselbe: / So wie die Läufer der Bahn nimmt einer *die Fackel des Lebens* [vitai lampada] von andern“ (V. 74-79, pg. 41, emphasis added). Rather than taking the torch of life from another, i.e. regenerating alongside nature, Faust would

Importantly, “Des Lebens Fackel” (4709) can only be fully understood within the immanent poetic movement in which it takes place. In the first strophe, *Leben* designated a revitalizing momentum that erotically encompassed Faust within the life of earth in its continual regeneration, allowing him to partake of “Des Lebens Pulse” (4679): of the earth awakening, the forest resounding with “tausendstimmigem Leben” (4687), even his own heart beating and lungs breathing. In the third strophe, by contrast, Faust’s voice no longer resounds with those of the forest, for a specifically *human* life in its desire to overcome nature’s agency and encompass the source of its own rejuvenation is at issue. The affective chaos that results from Faust’s thwarted desire thus inverts the central pattern that poetically enacted nature’s vital rhythm in the first strophe, i.e. the intralinear, line-opening synonymic pairs.

Ein **Feuermeer** umschlingt uns, welch ein Feuer!  
 Ist's **Lieb**'? Ist's **Haß**? die glühend uns *umwinden*,  
 Mit **Schmerz-** und **Freuden** wechselnd ungeheuer” (4710-12, emphasis added).

While the preposition *um* characterized the erotic ambience within which the earth embraced Faust in the first strophe (“Beginnest schon mit Lust mich zu umgeben,” 4683, “Ein Paradies wird um mich her die Runde,” 4694), the same preposition now characterizes the price paid for his erotic transgression, a violent encompassing by the element of flame. Not synonymic, but antonymic, ‘horrific’ alternation introduces the lines following Faust’s erotic transgression, like the pattern in the first strophe filling in the first four metrical slots (ictus bolded above). Faust will thus turn his gaze back to the earth of the first strophe, “So daß wir wieder nach der Erde blicken” (4713), but he does so as a subject speaking on behalf of humanity (“wir”). The (re)turn to the earth represents more than resignation, however, for it allows Faust as representative human “Zu bergen uns in *jugendlichstem* Schleier” (4114, emphasis added). The resonance of superlatives in

---

rather light the torch at the source itself, rejuvenate himself through his own agency. Cf. T. Lucretius Carus. *Von der Natur der Dinge*. Uebersetzt von Karl Ludwig von Knebel. 2. Auflage. Leipzig: bei Georg Joachim Göschen. 1832. (1. Auflage: 1821).

the third strophe is instructive. Faust returns to the proximate source of rejuvenation, to the earth in its protectively ambient “jugendlichstem Schleier,” having failed to fulfill his “höchsten Wunsch” (4705) of overtaking the ultimate source in apprehending the sun.<sup>600</sup>

In sum, then, the third strophe articulates Faust’s interpretation of his blinding, his self-understanding qua representative human being of his own desire to transcend the limits of the human in rejuvenating himself through his own agency. The audible tone of resignation that ends that strophe will be revoked in the fourth, for Faust’s self-understanding does not remain the poem’s last word on the nature of Faustian desire as human entelechy. While the third strophe began in the summative “So ist es also” (4704), the fourth ‘resets’ Faust’s self-interpretation with a second resolute “So:”

4715 So bleibe denn die Sonne mir im Rücken!  
4716 Der Wassersturz, das Felsenriff durchbrausend,  
4717 Ihn schau' ich an mit wachsendem Entzücken.  
4718 Von Sturz zu Sturzen wälzt er jetzt in tausend  
4719 Dann abertausend Strömen sich ergießend,  
4720 Hoch in die Lüfte Schaum an Schäume sausend.  
4721 Allein wie herrlich diesem Sturm ersprießend,  
4722 Wölbt sich des bunten Bogens Wechsel-Dauer,  
4723 Bald rein gezeichnet, bald in Luft zerfließend,  
4724 Umher verbreitend duftig kühle Schauer.  
4725 *Der* spiegelt ab das menschliche Bestreben.  
4726 Ihm sinne nach und du begreifst genauer:  
4727 Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben.

The present participial adjective saturates the verse: “durchbrausend,” “wachsendem,” “ergießend,” “sausend,” “ersprießend,” “zerfließend,” “verbreitend.” Grammatically hovering between verb and adjective, between ongoing activity and static property of the waterfall, these words poetically enact “Wechsel-Dauer” (4722). The triadic rhyme scheme is responsible for

---

<sup>600</sup> One might recall here that Faust will be left with a “Schleier” once more in the second part of the tragedy, namely after the vanishing of Helen. As the stage directions tell us, *Sie* [Helena] *umarmt Faust, das Körperliche verschwindet, Kleid und Schleier bleiben ihm in den Armen*. More than a remnant, the veil recurs in the poem “Zueignung,” where Goethe speaks of a veil “Aus Morgenduft gewebt und Sonnenklarheit, / Der Dichtung Schleier aus der Hand der Wahrheit” (95-6).

propagating many of these participial adjectives: *durchbrausend*—*tausend*—*sausend* forms a rhyme trio immediately woven into a second, *ergießend*—*ersprießend*—*zerfließend*. The verbs here constitute a synonymic chain comparable to the synonymic pairs that opened lines in the first strophe, which was also concerned with depicting nature in its dynamic aspect. Moreover, this grammatical pattern closely resembles the penultimate strophe of Goethe’s *Beinhaus* poem, which prepared closure through a rhyme trio of present participial adjectives: “Orakelsprüche spendend” (26), “aus Moder fromm entwendend” (28), “andächtig hin mich wendend” (30). In that poem, however, the grammatical form allowed the rhyme to evade an outright verb, avoiding an ascription of tense and thus of time. In other words, this type of adjective gained a local closural function in the *Beinhaus* poem, while in the case of Faust’s monologue it accrues an opposite momentum, becoming a force of continuation.

That the participial adjective has this effect can be seen in the prevalence of symptomatic semantic redundancies. Not unlike the first strophe’s “Farb’ an Farbe” (4692) or “Blum’ und Blatt” (4693), the fourth strophe speaks of “Sturz zu Sturzen” (4718), “tausend / Dann abertausend” (4718-19), “Schaum an Schäume” (4720), and so forth. The strophe offsets this force of continuation by preparing an intralinear caesura that allows the poem to conclude in its symbolically saturated last three lines, like those of the *Beinhaus* poem a kind of *Lehrspruch* the closure of which the poem must first performatively secure:

**W**ölbt sich des **b**unten **B**ogens **W**echsel-Dauer,  
**B**ald rein gezeichnet, **b**ald in Luft zerfließend,  
 Umher verbreitend duftig kühle Schauer. (4722-4, emphasis added)

The compound “Wechsel-Dauer” designates the temporality of the rainbow, the persistence of which through time as a static formation of colors (*Dauer*) depends on the waterfall’s violent rush onward in time (*Wechsel*). The alliteration **w-b-b-w** grants the line a symmetry, as if the line itself

articulated a kind of consonantal arch from **w** to **w** at bottom, from **b** to **b** at top. This intralinear alliterative symmetry repeats in the preceding line with the repetition of “bald,” but also makes possible a mirroring caesura (“,”) that allows the autonomously *self*-arching rainbow to be seen in its dual constituent moments of past articulation (“gezeichnet”) and future disarticulation (“zerfließend”). In other words, the parallelism generated by the repetition of an adverb of temporal succession across the caesura (“Bald... , bald...”) allows the past and future to achieve a simultaneity-in-succession.<sup>601</sup> The verse performatively models this complex temporal configuration, allowing it to free the participial adjective from the triadic rhyme (e.g., “zerfließend,” 4723), which would only generate more participial adjectives, thereby preventing the poem from ending. Instead, the poem displaces the participial adjective to the middle of the line: “Umher verbreitend duftig kühle Schauer” (4724, emphasis added). The adverbial modifier “duftig kühle” may be considered the final term in a metonymic chain tying it back to “frisch erquicket” (4690), “neu erquicket” (4682), and “frisch lebendig” (4679) in the first strophe. The preposition *um* that characterized the earth’s erotic ambience about Faust likewise recurs here in “Umher” (4724).

The only other present participial adjective that is not a rhyme word (i.e., not at the end of a line but within it) occurs with reference to Faust’s inner state as he sees the waterfall: “Ihn schau ich an mit wachsendem Entzücken” (4717). Faust’s *Anschauung* makes use of the same word used by Goethe’s *Beinhaus* poem to describe the affective state of intuiting the phenomenal disclosure of a form: “Wie mich geheimnißvoll die Form entzückte!” (22). Moreover, Faust’s

---

<sup>601</sup> One might recall here the emphasis on the rainbow’s temporality as a self-propagating phenomenon in Goethe’s dairy entries made upon his visit to the Rheinfall von Schaffhausen in September 1797: “Gewalt der Sturzes. [sic] Unerschöpfbarkeit als wie ein Unnachlassen der Kraft. Zerstörung, Bleiben, Dauern, Bewegung, unmittelbare Ruhe nach dem Fall. [...] Der Regenbogen erschien in seiner größten Schönheit; er stand mit seinem ruhigen Fuß in dem ungeheuern Gischt und Schaum, der, indem er ihn gewaltsam zu zerstören droht, ihn jeden Augenblick neu hervorbringen muß” (145-6). Cf. *WA*. III. Abtheilung: 2. Band. 1790-1800. (1888)

“wachsendem Entzücken” organically ‘grows’ within him. The earth’s *Wachstum* from the first strophe, which spurred his “kräftiges Beschließen” (4684) to strive once more, now takes place internally rather than being brought about by an external natural agent. Such organic growth inwardly reflected by intuition allows Faust to apprehend the form of his own desire, of his *Streben*, in an external phenomenon:

Der spiegelt ab das menschliche Bestreben.  
Ihm sinne nach und du begreifst genauer:  
Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben. (4725-27)

Elements of the fourth strophe’s verse, such as the dynamism generated by the present participial adjective, the semantic redundancy of modified synonymic terms, and the recurrence of organic growth as inwardly reflected, have been related to the monologue’s first strophe. More than these stylistic devices recur in new arrangement and key, however. The words “Bestreben” and “Leben” conclude the monologue in an act of poetic freedom, as A.W. Schlegel claimed, cutting the triadic chain of *Terzinen* in a rhymed couplet that formally secures poetic closure. Moreover, the lexical pair “Bestreben” (4725) and “Leben” (4727) constitutes the only set of rhyme words that occur more than once in the poem, namely at the first strophe:

Du regst und rührst ein kräftiges Beschließen,  
Zum höchsten Dasein immerfort zu *streben*. ---  
In Dämmerchein liegt schon die Welt erschlossen,  
Der Wald ertönt von tausendstimmigem *Leben*, (4684-87, emphasis added)

Whereas the rhymed words were kept apart by a dash at the beginning, the poem at the end thinks together striving, the form of Faustian desire, as nothing less than constitutive of human life itself. The poem hence achieves closure through the same formal device used by the *Beinhaus* poem: the meta-rhyme (in Faust’s monologue: *streben-x-Leben* --- *Bestreben-x-Leben*; in the *Beinhaus* poem: *bewahrte-x-offenbarte* --- *offenbare-x-bewahre*). If the first strophe still included Faust within the resonant voices of the forest, still erotically encompassed him in the revitalizing



momentum of “Des Lebens Pulse” (4679), the third strophe sets Faust apart due to his specifically human desire to be at the source of his own rejuvenation, to be at the procreative source of life itself: “Des Lebens Fackel wollten wir entzünden” (4709). Through a meta-rhyme, the fourth and final occurrence of the poem’s central term *Leben* restores human life to the orbit of the natural, allowing Faust to see in the rainbow a phenomenal disclosure of the form of his own desire revealed to be “das *menschliche* Bestreben” (4725, emphasis added) itself.

The focus on the meta-rhyme of *Leben* and (*Be-*)*Streben* allows us to overcome a common reading of *Anmuthige Gegend* that takes Faust to strive after a ‘direct knowledge’ of ‘the divine’ (crudely equated with the eternal sunlight). Unable to ‘know’ the divine ‘directly,’ Faust must settle for or come to appreciate ‘mediated knowledge’ of the divine in the symbol of the rainbow. If, however, *Anmuthige Gegend* simply culminated in the didactic lesson that immediate knowledge of the divine is impossible, and that man must resign himself to mediated knowledge, then it would be utterly banal, the poetic cloaking of an epistemological platitude. This hermeneutic error originates in the critical reception of a passage written a year before *Anmuthige Gegend*, namely the opening paragraph of Goethe’s *Versuch einer Witterungslehre* (1825):

Das Wahre, mit dem Göttlichen identisch, läßt sich niemals von uns *direct erkennen*, wir *schauen* es nur im *Abglanz*, im Beispiel, Symbol, in einzelnen und verwandten Erscheinungen; wir werden es gewahr als *unbegreifliches Leben* und können dem *Wunsch* nicht entsagen, es *dennoch* zu begreifen. / Dieses gilt von allen Phänomenen der faßlichen Welt, wir aber wollen diesmal nur von der schwer zu fassenden Witterungslehre sprechen. (emphasis added)<sup>602</sup>

Albrecht Schöne, for example, sees the passage “als Kommentar zur letzten Zeile des Faust-Monologs,” isolating “Abglanz” as “erstes Stichwort” and “Leben” as “das zweite Stichwort.”<sup>603</sup>

---

<sup>602</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Versuch einer Witterungslehre*. (1825). In: *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977. Pg. 237-8.

<sup>603</sup> Albrecht Schöne. “‘Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben.’ (Goethe, Faust II. Vers 4679-4727).” In: *Bilderwelten: Vom farbigen Abglanz der Natur*. Hsg. Norbert Elsner. Göttingen: Wallstein. 2007. Pg. 19.

Schöne reads over, however, the disanalogy between this quote, in prose, and the last lines of Faust's monologue, in heavily shaped poetic verse. Faust's penultimate line articulates an imperative that aims at an increased exactitude of conceptual comprehension ("Ihm sinne nach und du *begreifst genauer*," 4726, emphasis added), while the opening paragraph of *Witterungslehre* emphasizes the ultimately non-conceptual status of life "als unbegreifliches Leben." Rather than quickly equating the rainbow's "Abglanz" with a symbol of "[d]as Wahre, mit dem Göttlichen identisch" and subsequently taking Faust's gazing on the sun as a case of attempting to "direct erkennen," one should work out exactly how to construe the correspondence between the passages. Only an approach that actually reads the *Witterungslehre* paragraph will allow the specificity of Goethe's expression of poetic thought in *Anmuthige Gegend* to come to appearance. In that paragraph, Goethe does not juxtapose "direct erkennen" with *indirect erkennen*, but with "schauen," with an intuitive apprehension. Similarly, while Goethe does equate truth with the divine, he does not proceed to add a third term, "unbegreifliches Leben," to that equation; a semicolon distinguishes two separate, yet interlinked thoughts the connection of which must be worked out. In the second half of that sentence, Goethe juxtaposes the verb *gewahrwerden* ("wir werden es gewahr als unbegreifliches Leben...") with a *desire*: "... und können dem Wunsch nicht entsagen, es dennoch zu begreifen." One might consider the term "Wunsch" here to be the crucial *drittes Stichwort* overlooked by Schöne, for it was just that desire to conceive of and grasp the source of life itself that Faust could not renounce ("entsagen") in the third strophe: "So ist es also [...] Dem höchsten *Wunsch* sich traulich zugerungen" (4704-5, emphasis added). If the third strophe concerned itself with Faust's self-interpretation as representative of humanity, with Faust's desire to know why he was blinded, the fourth and final strophe allows Faust to intuit the knowledge of his own desire. Not simply an epistemological

allegory of the need to renounce a claim for direct knowledge in place of mediated knowledge (what, then, would be known? ‘the divine?’), *Anmuthige Gegend* concerns itself with Faust’s intuitive apprehension of the form of his own desire as human entelechy, as a *Gesetzmäßigkeit* of human life.

In order to understand fully how the rainbow phenomenally discloses the form of Faustian desire qua human entelechy, we will have to spell out the second synchronic paradigm syntagmatically instantiated in *Anmuthige Gegend* alongside the paradigm ‘rejuvenation.’ The following scenes may be considered *antwortende Spiegelbilder* that participate in this second paradigm of ‘striving desire’:

1. *Nacht (Erdgeistszene)*: The poetic texture of Faust’s interpretive narrativization of his blinding in the third strophe makes heavy use of the imagery of flame. The “Flammen-Übermaß” (4708) that overwhelms him recalls the compound that occurs in his earlier challenge to the *Erdgeist* in *Nacht*: “Soll ich dir, Flammenbildung, weichen?” (499). As the stage directions tell us, *der Geist erscheint in der Flamme*. The *Erdgeist* replies: “In Lebensfluthen, im Thatensturm / Wall’ ich auf und ab, / Webe hin und her! / Geburt und Grab, / Ein ewiges Meer, / Ein wechselnd Weben, / Ein *glühend* Leben” (501-507, emphasis added). The adjective “glühend” will recur in the third strophe of Faust monologue: “Ist’s Lieb? Ist’s Haß? die *glühend* uns umwinden” (4711, emphasis added). Beyond these lexical resonances, the monotone, even mechanical, metrical emphases of the *Erdgeist*’s speech (“Wall’ ich *auf* und *ab*, / Webe *hin* und *her*”) proceed to bring antonymic pairs together (“Geburt und Grab”) onto a plane of equivalence outside of Faust’s comprehension. Such metrically emphasized antonymic pairs similarly characterize Faust’s affective confusion in the same third strophe of his

monologue: “Ist’s *Lieb*? Ist’s *Haß*?” Just as Faust turns away from the sun in *Anmuthige Gegend* (“So bleibe denn die Sonne mir im Rücken!” 4715), his failure to command the *Erdegeist* will bring him to the brink of suicide, when he proclaims a similar turn: “Ja, kehre nur der holden Erdensonne / Entschlossen deinen Rücken zu!” (709-710).

2. *Vor dem Thor*: In conversation with Wagner, Faust vividly expresses an erotic phantasy of communing with the sinking sun. In particular, the rhyme central to *Anmuthige Gegend* (*Leben/Streben*) recurs in the context of the day’s phenomenal dissipation:

Betrachte wie, in Abendsonne-Glut,  
Die grünumgebnen Hütten schimmern.  
Sie rückt und weicht, der Tag ist überlebt,  
Dort eilt sie hin und fördert neues *Leben*.  
O! daß kein Flügel mich vom Boden hebt,  
Ihr nach und immer nach zu *streben*.  
Ich sah’ *im ewigen* Abendstrahl  
Die stille Welt zu meinen Füßen, [...]  
Doch scheint *die Göttin* endlich wegzusinken;  
Allein der neue Trieb erwacht,  
*Ich eile fort ihr ew’ges Licht zu trinken*,  
Vor mir den Tag, und hinter mir die Nacht,  
Den Himmel über mir und unter mir die Wellen.  
*Ein schöner Traum*, indessen sie entweicht. (1070-89)

On the one hand, Faust’s phantasy takes on imaginative contour as the usurpation and subsequent occupation of the sun’s position. To be “im ewigen Abendstrahl” constitutes a phantasy of occupying an Archimedean point from which to apprehend nature in its spatiotemporal totality: the day spatially “[v]or mir,” the night “hinter mir,” the sky “über mir” and the sea’s waves “unter mir.” On the other hand, however, Faust’s imaginative usurpation to achieve “den göttergleichen Lauf” (1080) also figures the sun as a feminine principle, as “die Göttin.” An erotic

phantasy of oral gratification ensues in which Faust drinks in the ‘eternal,’ life-animating warmth that flows forth from the sinking sun: “Ich eile fort *ihr ew’ges Licht* zu trinken.” Faust’s phantasy intertwines both of these figurative registers of erotic oral intake from a feminine source and a competitive masculine attempt at usurpation. Faust hence envies the “Gipfelriesen” (4695) of *Anmuthige Gegend’s* second strophe, for “Sie dürfen früh des *ewigen Lichts* genießen” (4697, emphasis added).

3. *Wald und Höhle*: This is a particularly dense scene which deserves to be read closely, but an undeniable lexical resonance ties Faust’s tragic recognition in this scene to his experience of the rainbow: “Bin ich der Flüchtling nicht? der Unbehau’tete? / Der Unmensch ohne Zweck und Ruh? / Der *wie ein Wassersturz von Fels zu Felsen braus’tete*, / Begierig wüthend nach dem Abgrund zu” (3348-50, emphasis added). In *Anmuthige Gegend*, Faust will look upon an actual waterfall: “Der *Wassersturz*, das *Felsenriff durchbrausend*, / Ihn schau’ ich an mit wachsendem Entzücken” (4716-17, emphasis added). Not “[b]egierig wüthend,” but with “wachsendem Entzücken” does Faust look upon an “Abglanz” in Part II rather than an “Abgrund.” That ‘abyss’ was the water’s overflowing destruction of Gretchen’s little hut, itself a poetic correlate of Philemon and Baucis’s hut in the final act of *Faust II*. In *Wald und Höhle*, in other words, Faust’s self-figuration as a natural catastrophe functions to express his coming to tragic self-knowledge. He looks on upon the abyss of his own desire in its destructive, ineluctable tragic course, “wie ein Wassersturz.”

The paradigm of *antwortende Spiegelbilder* designated ‘striving desire’ in *Faust I* evinces careful

syntagmatic structuring.<sup>604</sup> The fiery encounter with the *Erdgeist* and subsequent suicidal turn away from earthly immanence in *Nacht* represents a scene of Faustian desire as immediately experienced. The subsequent “schöner Traum” (1089) of erotic oral union with a femininely figured liquid source of life, the goddess of the sun, as well as her usurpation and the occupation of her animating position represents a scene of Faustian desire not as immediately lived, but as imaginatively phantasized. In *Wald und Höhle*, Faust then proceeds to figure the inexorably destructive course of his own desire in terms of a natural phenomenon not subject to human agency, a wild waterfall that in *Anmuthige Gegend* will gain duration and constancy (*Stetigkeit*) in making possible the rainbow. *Wald und Höhle* thus represents Faustian desire as poetically mediated, as object of self-reflection and tragic recognition. *Anmuthige Gegend* can thus be said to represent a summative figuration of Faustian desire: not as immediately experienced (*Erdgeistszene*), imaginatively phantasized (*Vor dem Thor*), or mediately reflected upon and recognized (*Wald und Höhle*), but as intuited in its lawful universality: “Der spiegelt ab das menschliche Bestreben” (4725). The paradigm ‘striving desire’ that syntagmatically unfolds across the four isolated scenes of *Faust I* thus constitutes a series of progressively intensified reflections on Faustian desire. *Anmuthige Gegend* reconfigures the first figuration of Faustian desire as the urphenomenal disclosure of the law operative in the phenomenal case that was the encounter with the *Erdgeist*; it reconfigures the second figuration as a blinding actualization of the merely potential, subjunctive phantasy of erotically overtaking the sun; it reconfigures the third as a reflection of Faust’s reflection on tragic self-knowledge through the universalizing

---

<sup>604</sup> Peter Matussek discusses these three scenes, each containing monologues by Faust, in terms of chronologically locatable imaginations of nature, calling the *Erdgeistszene* an expressive, *Wald und Höhle* a sympathetic, *Osterspaziergang* a harmonic, and Faust’s last monologue in Act V of *Faust II* a constructivist *Naturbild*. Matussek strangely leaves *Anmuthige Gegend* uncommented, though the imagination of nature certainly differs in that scene from the others he isolates. Cf. Peter Matussek. “Formen der Verzeitlichung. Der Wandel des Faustschen Naturbildes und seine historischen Hintergründe.” In: *Goethe und die Verzeitlichung der Natur*. Hsg. Peter Matussek. München: Verlag C.H. Beck. 1998. Pg. 202-232.

disclosure of the form of his own desire as human entelechy.

Just as the paradigm ‘rejuvenation’ from *Faust I* undergoes structural change when instantiated in *Anmuthige Gegend*, associated with forgetting and nature’s agency rather than personal memory and a musical or other trigger, so the paradigmatic series ‘striving desire’ from *Faust I* undergoes structural change in *Faust II*. In particular, Faust’s striving after Helen of Troy instantiates a number of recrudescant solar figurations that tie Helen’s beauty back to Faust’s experience of the blinding sun. Echoing his “Augenschmerz” (4703), Faust will first set eyes on Helen in Act I and ask “Hab’ ich noch Augen?” (6487). In his first poem, Lynceus will similarly figure Helen’s beauty as a blinding radiance, but also as an erotic source of oral nourishment, like the early Faust in *Vor dem Thor*:

Aug’ und Brust ihr zugewendet  
Sog ich an den milden Glanz,  
Diese Schönheit, wie sie blendet,  
Blendete mich Armen ganz. (9238-1).

Echoing *Zueignung* as well as *Anmuthige Gegend*, the Greek chorus of maidens in the first scene of Act III will call Helen “Die Gestalt aller Gestalten / Welche die Sonne jemals beschien” (8907-8). They state this right before Helen sinks in *Ohnmacht*. When Helen arises, Phorkyas uses the same verb Goethe associated with an ideational form’s emergence into phenomenality (*hervortreten*) to describe her awakening:

Tritt hervor aus flüchtigen Wolken hohe Sonne dieses Tags,  
Die verschleiert schon entzückte, blendend nun im Glanze herrscht.  
Wie die Welt sich dir entfaltet schaust du selbst mit holdem Blick.  
Schelten sie mich auch für häßlich, kenn’ ich doch das Schöne wohl (8909-12).

While the chorus figured Helen as the form of all forms, the most primordial *Urgestalt* that the sun has ever shone upon, Phorkyas figures her as the sun itself. Just as Lynceus enjoyed a “milden Glanz” (9239) that nonetheless “blendet” (9240), Phorkyas speaks of Helen as a solar principle of

blinding splendor: “blended nun im Glanze herrscht.” Moreover, the world unfolds itself *to* Helen as its animating *Urgestalt*: “Wie die Welt sich dir entfaltet...” These quotations link Helen as embodiment of beauty back to the sun of *Anmuthige Gegend*, which donated “Glanz und Deutlichkeit” (4700) to the landscape, the gift or donation (*Spende*) of making phenomenal appearance possible. Faust will achieve an ecstatic, yet ultimately fleeting, experience of communion with this principle of beauty, with Helen as the blinding, erotically nourishing *Glanz*. Faust’s monologue in *Anmuthige Gegend* thereby foreshadows Helen’s disappearance, for in that monologue Faust will have to turn away from the sun’s “Glanz” (4700) in order to intuit the “farbigen Abglanz” (4727) animated by the interplay of radiant sun and destructively generative waterfall. Unlike the tragic reflection on Faustian desire conducted in *Wald und Höhle*, however, *Anmuthige Gegend* does not end in mere resignation, in a bleak recognition of the destructive, inexorable course of that desire. Rather, as a kind of second-order reflection, *Anmuthige Gegend* also demonstrates that only such desire makes communion with beauty, even if momentary, possible for man in the first place.

#### **4. On Colored Hues & Bony Remains: A Poetic Diptych of the Late Goethe’s Religiosity**

Goethe’s last noted remark on *Terzinen* comes from an oft-quoted conversation held on September 29, 1823 on the subject of the now forgotten Eduard Schenk’s *terza rima* poem *Canova’s Tod*, written in Venice and published in 1822. Almost exactly three years before writing the *Beinhaus* poem, Goethe claims that “Terzinen müssen immer einen großen, reichen Stoff zur Unterlage haben, wenn sie gefallen sollen.”<sup>605</sup> With regards to the *Beinhaus* poem of September 25/26, 1826, Karl Eibl notes: “Terzinen gebraucht Goethe sonst nur noch am Anfang von *Faust II*.

---

<sup>605</sup> *WA*. Anhang: *Gespräche*: 4. Band. 1819-1823. (1889). Von: September 19, 1823. Mit: v. Müller, Meyer, Riemer, und Christoph Friedrich Ludwig Schultz. Pg. 281.



Inhaltlich ist jedoch kaum eine Brücke zu finden.”<sup>606</sup> As different as the *Beinhaus* poem may seem from Faust’s monologue, Goethe chose a unitary “großen, reichen Stoff” to serve as the “Unterlage” or conceptual lattice for his only two poems in Dante’s rhyme scheme: the phenomenal disclosure of an ideational form (*Formerschließung*). This eidetic-phenomenal process takes place in the *Beinhaus* poem as the revelation of nature in its ongoing generativity qua lawfully formative force that resists and outlasts the apparent transience of the mundane world. In Faust’s monologue, this process takes place as the disclosure of the form of Faustian desire as a defining potential, an immanent purpose or ‘entelechy’ that directs and animates human life as distinctly human. What distinguishes both of these poems from Goethe’s more nature-philosophical poems, such as “Vermächtnis,” is the way in which both begin in the individuated intensity of a first personal experience, whether a dramatic monologue in the case of Faust or an interior monologue in the case of the *Beinhaus* poem, only to unfold into a universalizing register.

Taken as a kind of poetic diptych, both poems shed light on Goethe’s uniquely modern sort of pagan spirituality. Eleven days before his death on March 11, 1832, Goethe converses on the subject of religion and expresses doubt about the historical verity of the Gospels. This does not prevent him, however, from recognizing a higher moral truth that reaches expression in the scriptures:

Dennoch halte ich die Evangelien alle vier für durchaus ächt; denn es ist in ihnen der Abglanz einer Hoheit wirksam, die von der Person Christi ausging und die so göttlicher Art, wie nur je auf Erden das Göttliche erschienen ist. Fragt man mich, ob es in meiner Natur sei, ihm anbetende Ehrfurcht zu erweisen, so sage ich: Durchaus! Ich beuge mich vor ihm, als der göttlichen *Offenbarung des höchsten Principis der Sittlichkeit*. Fragt man mich, ob es in meiner Natur sei, *die Sonne zu verehren*, so sage ich abermals: Durchaus! Denn sie ist gleichfalls eine *Offenbarung des Höchsten*, und zwar die mächtigste, die uns

---

<sup>606</sup> Karl Eibl. *Kommentar*. In: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Gedichte: 1800-1830*. Hsg. Karl Eibl. Berlin: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag. S. 1201.

Erdenkindern wahrzunehmen vergönnt ist. Ich anbe in ihr das Licht und *die zeugende Kraft Gottes*, wodurch allein wir leben, weben und sind, und alle Pflanzen und Thiere mit uns. Fragt man mich aber, ob ich geneigt sei mich vor einem Daumenknochen des Apostels Petri oder Pauli zu bücken, so sage ich: Verschont mich und bleibt mir mit euern Absurditäten vom Leibe! (emphasis added)<sup>607</sup>

Christ does not represent the incarnation of God in human flesh, but the phenomenal revelation of the highest ethical principle (*Sittlichkeit*). Unlike Christ, however, the sun does not phenomenally reveal a highest principle (“Offenbarung des höchsten Princips”), but constitutes a revelation of the highest itself, an “Offenbarung des Höchsten.” Faust’s resolution “[z]um höchsten Dasein immerfort zu streben” (4685), the “höchsten Wunsch” (4705) of the human being, resonantly unfolded as the attempt to overtake the sun, literally and philosophically *das Höchste*. The reading of Faust’s monologue found the sun to represent the source of procreative life that awakens the earth, rejuvenates Faust, and sets free phenomenal appearance as such in its *Spende* of “Glanz und Deutlichkeit” (4700). In other words, the sun was found to represent *das Zeugende*, and Goethe’s remark to Eckermann confirms this reading, for Goethe worships in the sun “die zeugende Kraft Gottes, wodurch wir alle leben, weben und sind.”

This Eckermann intertext allows the process of formal disclosure on view in both of Goethe’s *terza rima* poems to become legible as a religious experience. We are now in a position to ask why this content immanently necessitates the poetic form of *terza rima*. Goethe’s most explicit engagement with Dante can be found in a short essay written on September 9, 1826, the exact same month when he wrote the *Beinhaus* poem and likely the same year in which Faust’s monologue was finished. Goethe emphasizes that the reader of Dante’s poetry must keep in mind

daß gerade zu seiner [Dantes] Zeit, wo auch Giotto lebte, die bildende Kunst in ihrer natürlichen Kraft wieder hervortrat. Dieser sinnlich-bildlich bedeutend wirkende Genius beherrschte auch ihn. Er faßte die Gegenstände so *deutlich* in's Auge seiner Einbildungskraft, daß er sie *scharf umrissen* wiedergeben konnte; deßhalb wir denn das Abstruseste und Seltsamste gleichsam nach der Natur gezeichnet vor uns sehen. Wie ihn

---

<sup>607</sup> *WA*. Anhang: *Gespräche: 1831-1832*. 8. Band (1890). 1832, 11. März. Mit Eckermann. Pg. 145-151. (here: 148).

denn auch *der dritte Reim* selten oder niemals genirt, sondern auf eine oder andere Weise seinen Zweck ausführen und seine Gestalten *umgränzen* hilft. (emphasis added)<sup>608</sup>

The painterly imagination of Giotto does not display figures in an iconographically allegorizing or symbolically reductive *Sinnbild* enslaved to the pictorial depiction of scriptural contents. Rather, Giotto, who introduced a more ‘naturalistic’ style that prepared the way for the Italian Renaissance, is a “sinnlich-bildlich bedeutend wirkende Genius.” Goethe’s series of qualifiers capture the imaginative complexity that reaches aesthetic expression in the works of both poet and painter: the act of meaning takes shape as a movement of significance (“...bedeutend...”) that synthesizes the conceptual (e.g. scriptural) content and the sensuous (e.g. stylistic) vehicle (“sinnlich-bildlich...”) into a coherent effect (“...wirkende”) in which both artistic producer and aesthetic recipient may participate. This visual imagination (“in’s Auge seiner Einbildungskraft”) common to poetry and painting achieves such a synthetic effect through *Deutlichkeit*. Dante, like Giotto, can hence depict his contents “scharf umrissen,” such that the abstruse historical particularities that sustain Dante’s poem, e.g. the many speeches on warring Florentine political factions dizzying in their local detail, gain more than historically relative significance, for they are “nach der Natur gezeichnet vor uns.” Relevant for our attempt to comprehend the immanent necessity of *terza rima* for Goethe’s depiction of formal disclosure as a religious experience of intuiting human life in its constitutive lawfulness is Goethe’s emphasis on the functional role played by “der dritte Reim.” This rhyme scheme never irritates or “genirt” Dante, but instead “auf eine oder andere Weise seinen Zweck ausführen und seine Gestalten umgränzen hilft,” helping Dante achieve the clarity of imaginative contour necessary to elevate his poetry beyond historically documentary significance. Goethe proceeds to criticize Dante’s depiction of hell, which, with its concentric organization into distinct circles, “gibt gleich den Begriff eines

---

<sup>608</sup> *WA*. I. Abtheilung: 42. Band: Zweite Abtheilung (1907). Pg. 70-75 (here: pg. 70).

Amphitheaters, das [...] uns immer als etwas künstlerisch Beschränktes vor die Einbildungskraft sich hinstellt.”<sup>609</sup> While Goethe “das Ganze nicht rühmen [will],” he feels himself “zur Verehrung genötigt” insofar as “den seltsamen Reichthum der einzelnen Localitäten überrascht.”<sup>610</sup> Goethe admires Dante’s painterly manner of poetically breaking down a scene into a strict and clear sequence of local details (the “strengsten und deutlichsten Ausführung der Scenerie, die uns Schritt vor Schritt die Aussicht benimmt”).<sup>611</sup>

Concerned as they are with the emergence of visibility at dawn and with the visual contemplation of bony remains, Goethe’s own *terza rima* poems achieve an unparalleled clarity of imaginative contour, and, like Dante, his use of the triadic rhyme scheme plays a central role in generating this effect. Unlike Dante (or Streckfuß’s translation), however, Goethe’s own use of the rhyme does not remain engrossed in the peculiar richness of local scenographic detail. Rather, Goethe’s use of *terza rima* manages to move from such descriptive details (e.g., in the first and last strophes of Faust’s monologue, or in the beginning depiction of the bones in the charnel house) into a general, universalizing register that *does* afford an ultimate prospect. In particular, what reaches imaginative contour through Goethe’s use of the rhyme is not a spatial scene at all, but a temporal one: the self-propagating process that has been referred to as a formal disclosure. One can see this in the rhymed prevalence of verbs, for Goethe’s *Terzinen* might be said to constitute a chain of interlocking activities. In the *Beinhaus* poem 76% of all rhyme words are verbs referring to the speaker, the bones, and eventually to “die Form” (32) and “Gott-Natur” (32). Similarly, in Faust’s monologue 57% of all rhyme words are verbs, the vast majority referring to nature’s own activity and the rest (especially in the third strophe) to Faust’s.

Goethe’s technical use of the triadic chain of *Terzinen* thus consists in bringing a series of

---

<sup>609</sup> Ibid. Pg. 71.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid. Pg. 71.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid. Pg. 71.

interconnected activities into imaginative contour as a self-identical process of form disclosure. This use not only explains the remarkable poetic economy of his two *Terzinengedichte*, but also gives an account of why this rhyme scheme in particular is especially suited to depicting the processual disclosure of a form. Tieck, Schelling, and A.W. Schlegel emphasized that *Terzinen* are more than a rhyme scheme, that they reconfigure the temporality of the poem and the phenomenology of its reading experience. Moreover, the rhyme for the German Romantics enacts a self-generative movement of prophetic progression. As the reading of Goethe's *Beinhaus* poem made clear, Goethe rejects this prophetic model with one of self-manifesting latency in which the end of the poem is already implicit, latent, from the beginning. Unlike the *Beinhaus* poem, however, no such model of poetic temporality as a self-manifesting latency was found in Faust's monologue, but the closural strategy of that dramatic poem still makes use of the formal device of the meta-rhyme and the solar turn in order to secure closure.

A final clue to the common basis shared by both of Goethe's triadically rhymed poems may be found in a marginal observation that Goethe wrote down in a notebook that accompanied his botanical studies. Goethe remarks that "Metamorphose im höhern Sinn durch Nehmen und Geben, Gewinnen und Verlieren hat schon *Dante* trefflich geschildert" (emphasis in original).<sup>612</sup> Unlike Ovid, Dante was a poet of human metamorphosis "im höhern Sinn," for he depicted men and women in the transcendent consequences entailed by their earthly life. Working out that logic of sin and blessing, Dante's poem stages human loss and gain on the cosmic scale of the afterlife. Not poetically dependent on some doctrinal vision of an afterlife that exists as an ontologically distinct elsewhere, Goethe's two *terza rima* poems depict human metamorphosis differently. What greater loss could be imagined than to stand in the midst of death's testimony in a charnel

---

<sup>612</sup> *WA*. II. Antheilung: 13. Band (1904). Nachträge zu Band 6 bis 12. *Botanische Einzelheiten: Dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert Angehöriges. Aus Notizbüchern.* (~1831) Pg. 176.

house, than to have caused the destruction of one's own beloved and witnessed her irreversible fate? What greater gain could be imagined than, standing among such human bones or having awakened after such a tragedy, to experience a revitalizing revelation of the source of life itself? The poetic diptych formed by Goethe's two *terza rima* texts portrays such "Nehmen und Geben, Gewinnen und Verlieren" in its portraits of human beings coming to know "die zeugende Kraft Gottes, wodurch wir alle leben, weben und sind."<sup>613</sup>

---

<sup>613</sup> *WA. Gespräche: 1831-1832*. 1832, 11. März. Mit Eckermann. Pg. 148.

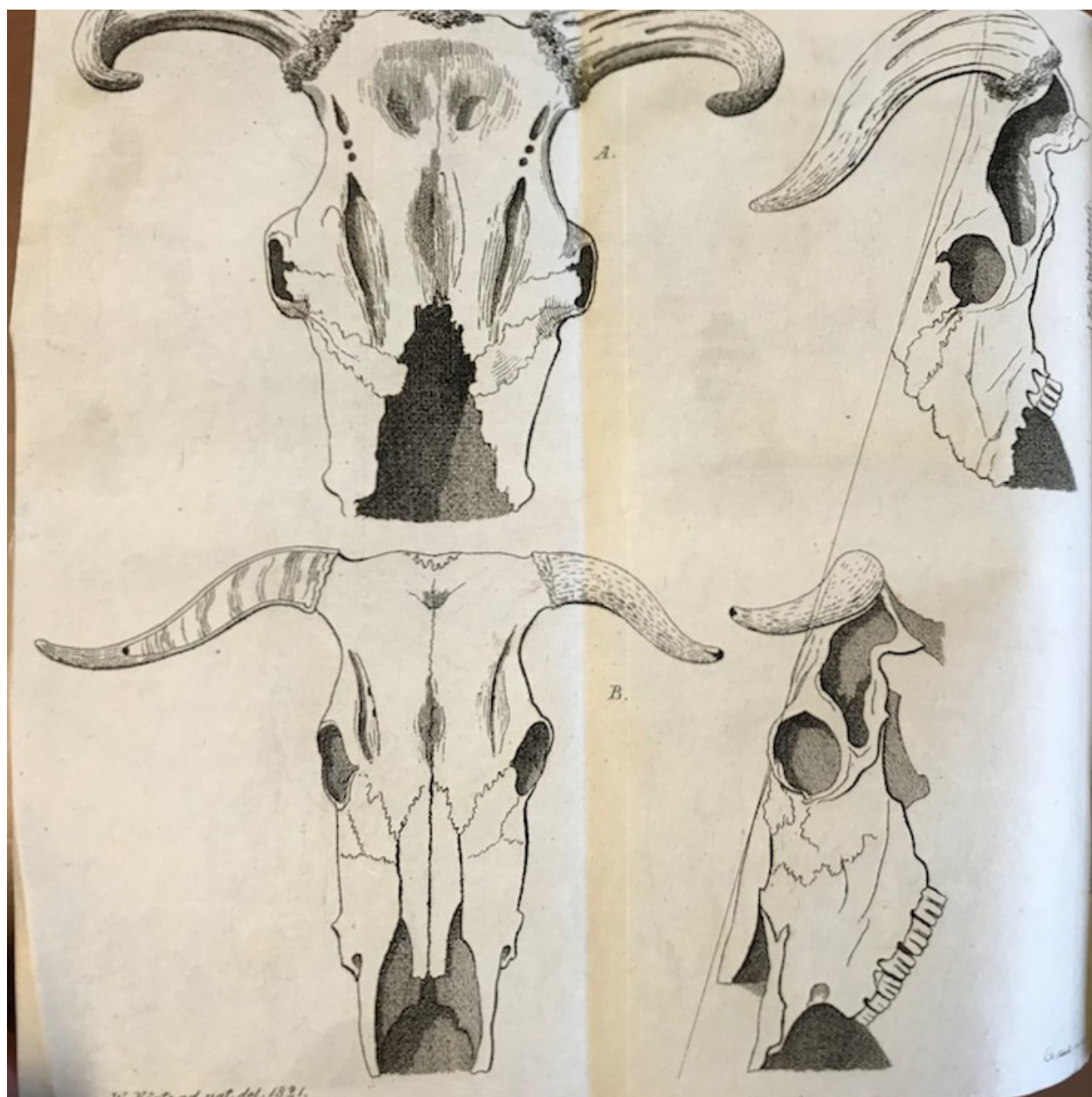
## Appendix of Images

Figure 1. Top: profile of the Ethiopian pig's skull; middle: profile of *S. Babyrussa* skull; lowest: profile of *Pecari* skull. Moving downwards, one can observe the gradual descent and subordination of the eye to a hypothetical brain.



SOURCE: Eduard Joseph d'Alton & Christian Heinrich Pander. *Vergleichende Osteologie: Die Skelete der Pachydermata abgebildet, beschrieben und verglichen*. Bonn: bei Eduard Weber. 1821. Pg. 43.

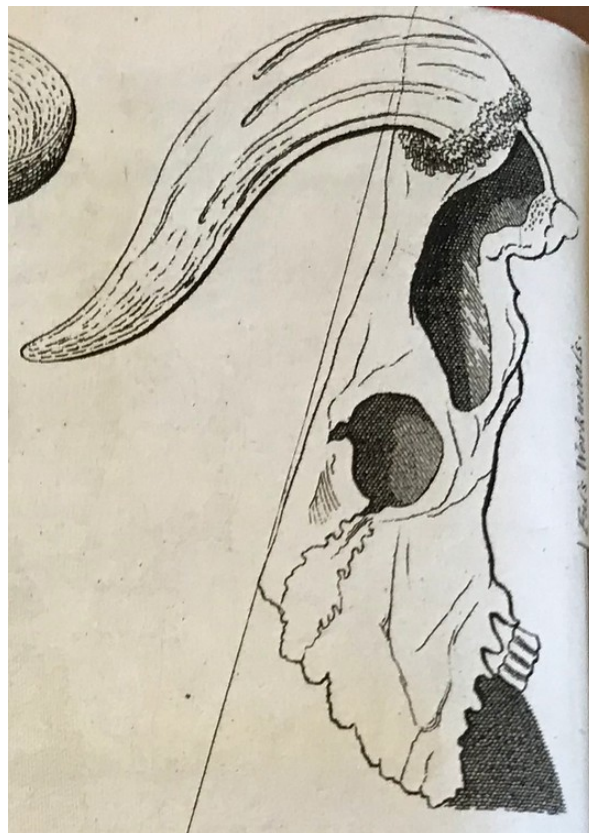
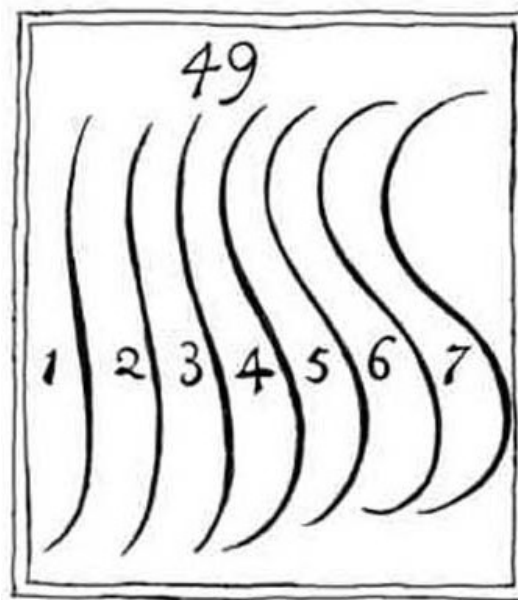
Figure 2. Top: Frontal and profile views of the prehistoric bull. Bottom: Frontal and profile views of the domesticated bull.



SOURCE: Wilhelm Körte. "Urtier-Schädel nebst einer Abbildung." *Archiv für die neuesten Entdeckungen aus der Urwelt*. Vol. 3, No. 2. 1821. Pg. 326-331; insert.



Figure 3. Above: Serpentine lines of beauty. Below: Detail of the prehistoric bull's profile with horns along a diagrammatic straight line.



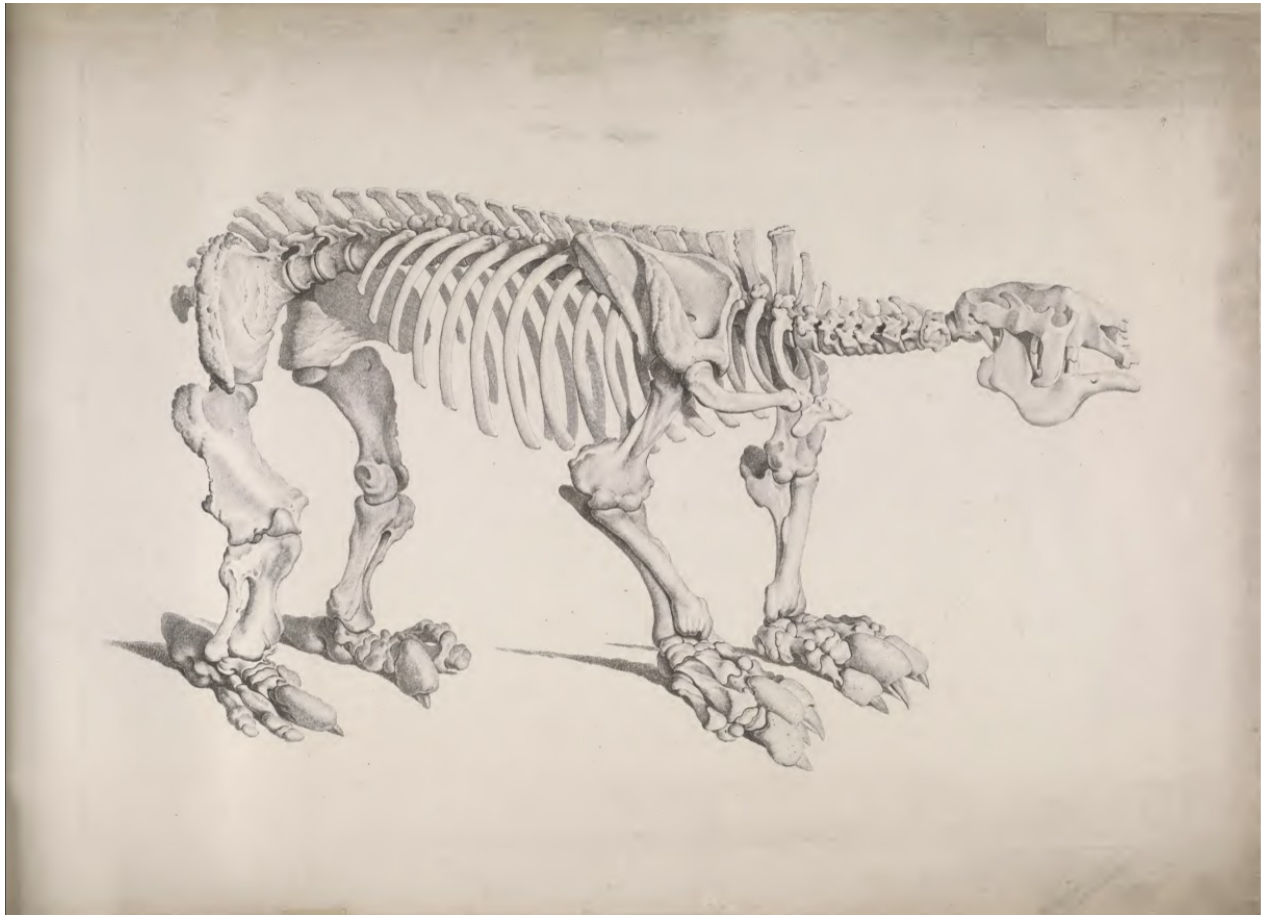
SOURCE: William Hogarth. *The Analysis of Beauty: Written with a View of fixing the fluctuating Ideas of Taste*. London: W. Strahan. 1753. Illustration 49; Wilhelm Körte. "Urstier-Schädel nebst einer Abbildung." 1821. Insert.

Figure 4. Left: A drawing of a horse's head based on the Elgin marble brought to England from the east pediment of the Parthenon, originally drawing the chariot of Selene. Right: A drawing of a horse's head based on one of the horses in the Triumphal Quadriga on the façade of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice. Top right corner: Detail of the Venetian horse's ear and the Elgin horse's eye.



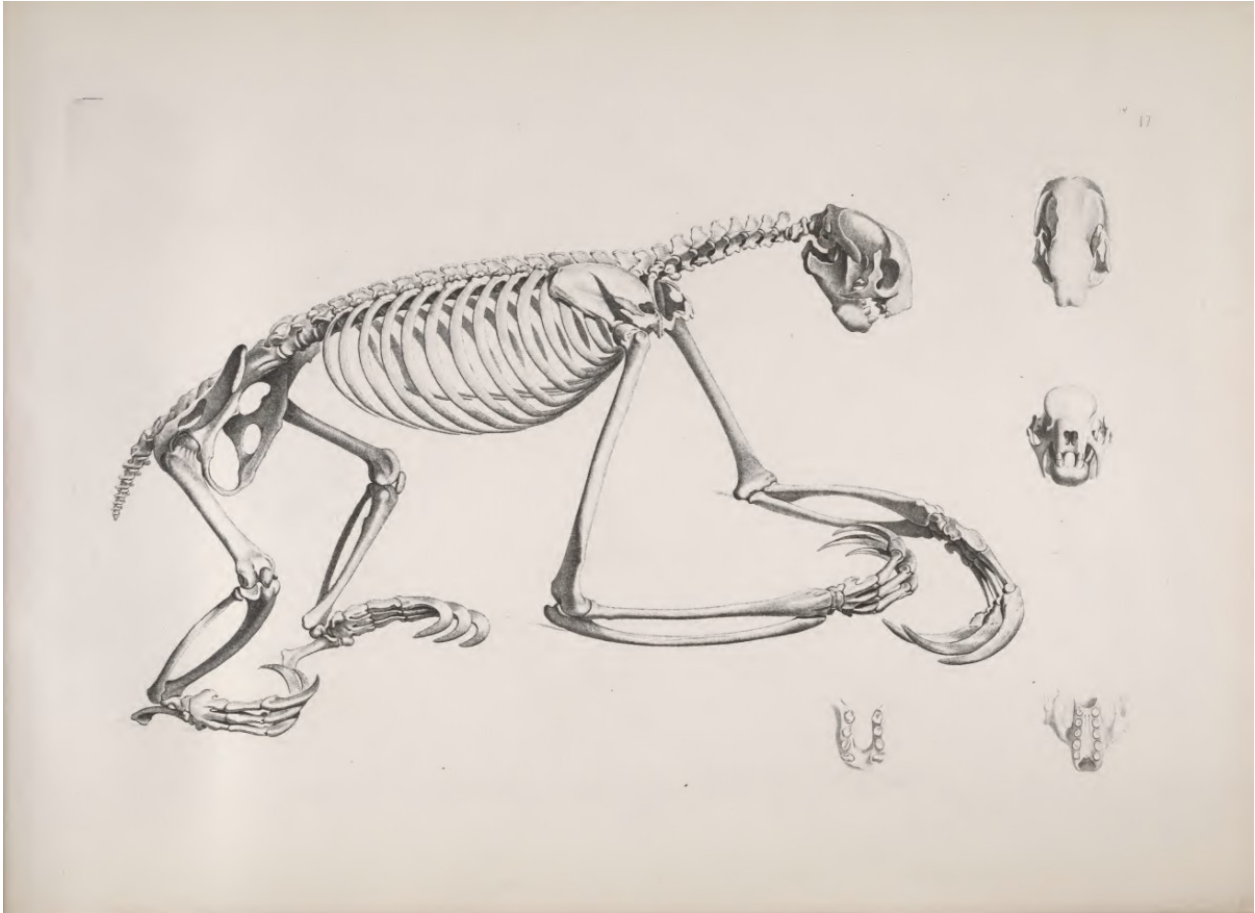
SOURCE: Robert Haydon. "On the Comparison between the Venetian Horse's Head, said to be by Lysippus, and the Horse's Head from the Parthenon, in the Elgin Collection." *Annals of the Fine Arts*. Vol. III, No. 9. 1818. Insert.

Figure 5. Skeleton of the giant prehistoric sloth (*Riesenfaulthier*) seen in profile.



SOURCE: Eduard d'Alton & Christian Pander. *Das Riesen-Faulthier. Bradypus Giganteus, abgebildet, beschrieben und mit den verwandten Geschlechtern verglichen*. Bonn: Bei Eduard Weber. 1821. Pg. 25.

Figure 6. Skeleton of *Bradypus tridactylus* or the three-toed sloth (*Ai*) seen in in profile.



SOURCE: d'Alton & Pander. *Das Riesen-Faulthier*. Pg. 35.

Figure 7. Skeleton of the *Unau* sloth seen in profile.



SOURCE: d'Alton & Pander. *Das Riesen-Faulthier*. Pg. 37.

Figure 8. "Mädchen in Haustracht und Pelz mit Besen. Doppelmaske."



Figure 9. "Advokat mit Pulcinellen."



Figure 10. The introduction to Comenius's *Orbis pictus*.

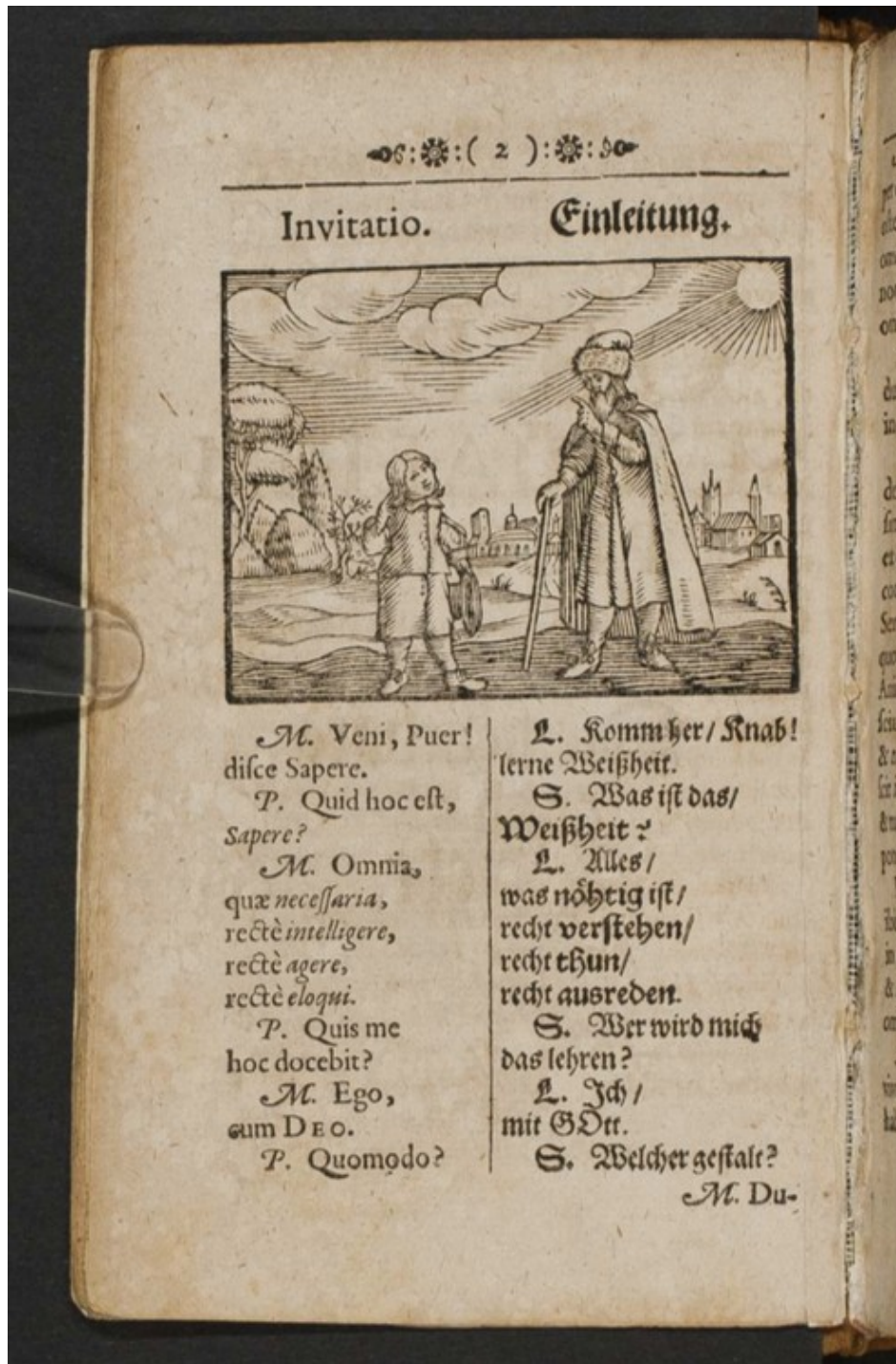




Figure 11. The encyclopedic illustration of “Herrschaft” with facing verbal explanation in Comenius’s *Orbis pictus*.

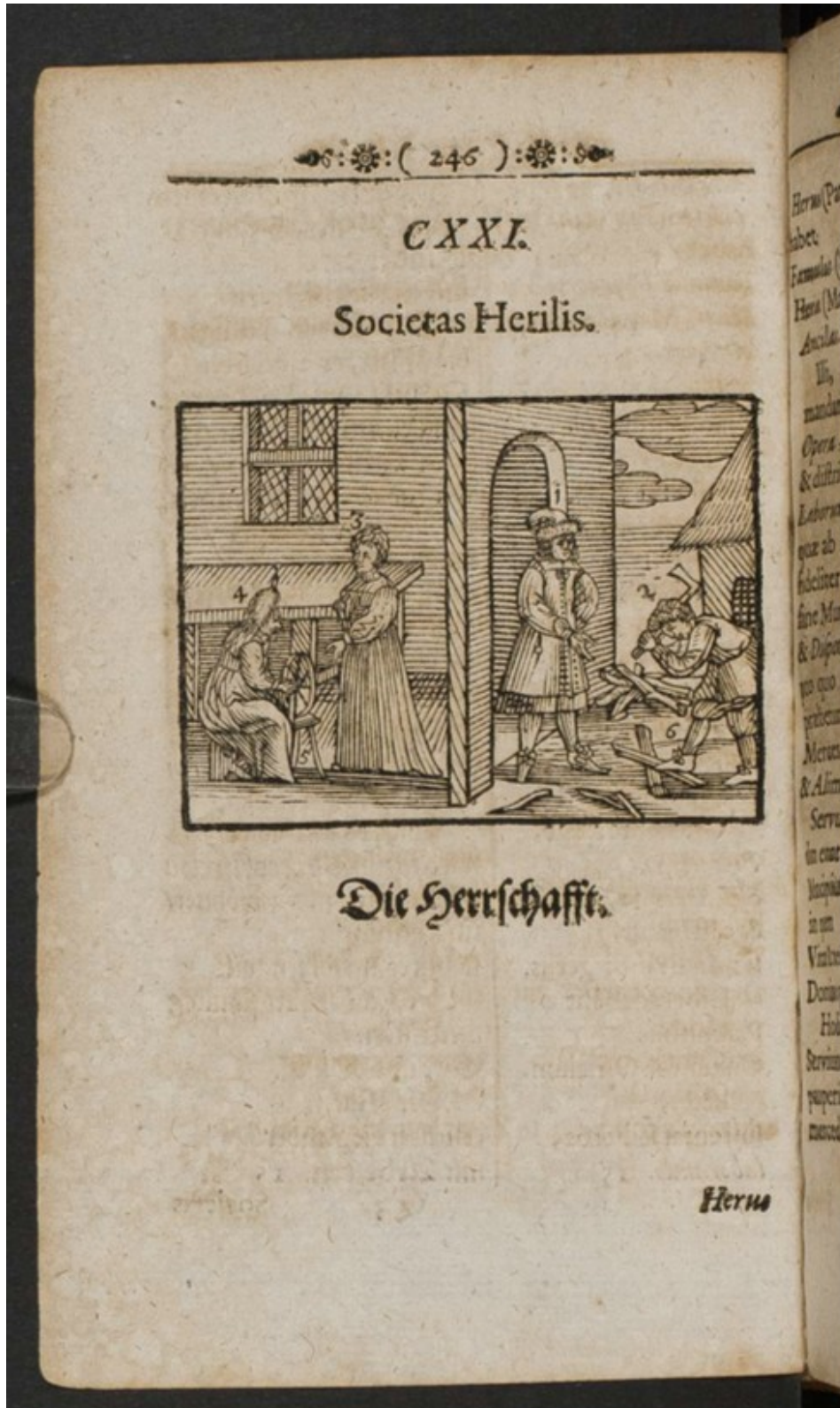


Figure 11 (cont.). The encyclopedic illustration of “Herrschaft:” verbal explanation in Comenius’s *Orbis pictus* on recto.

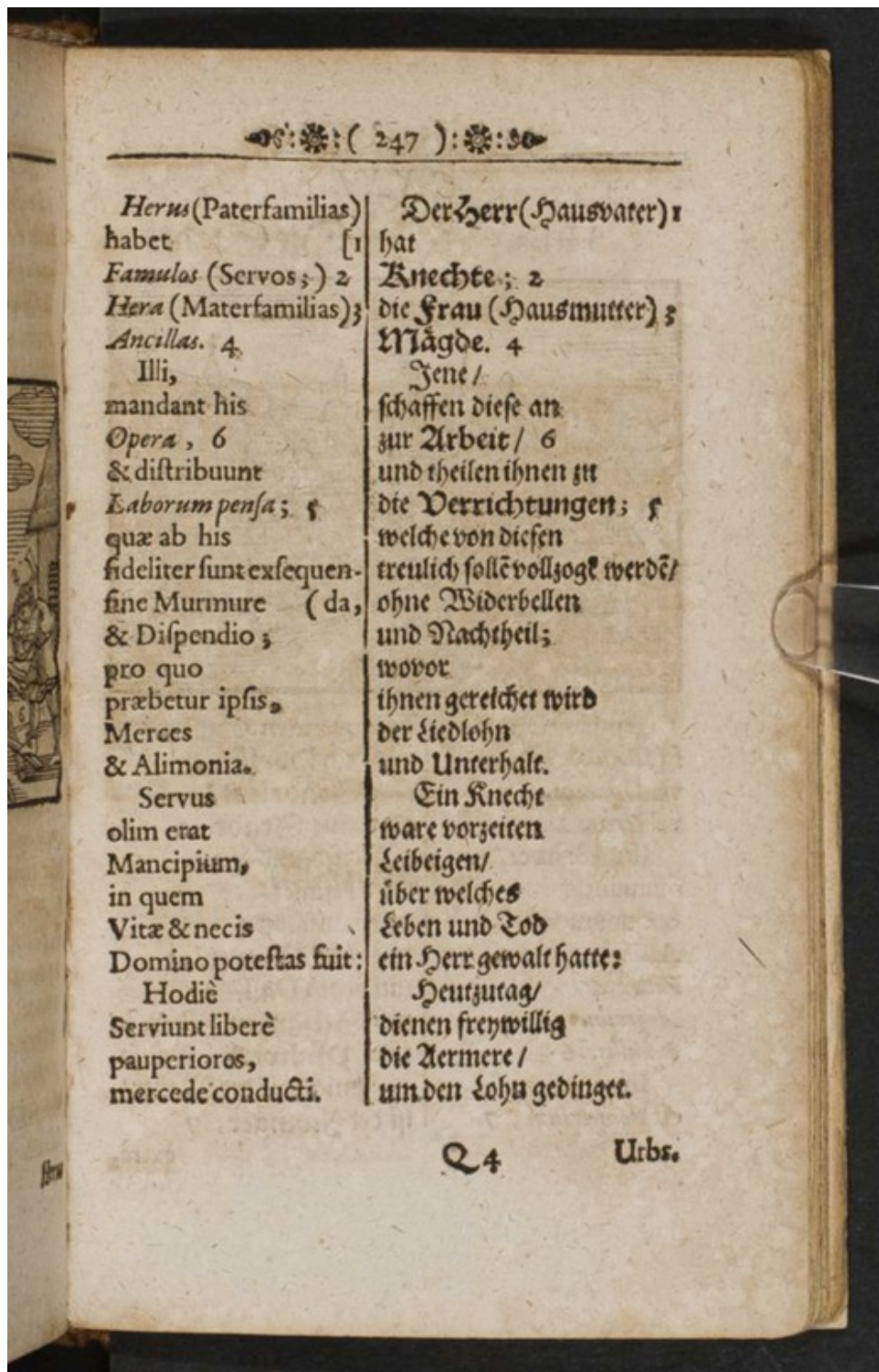
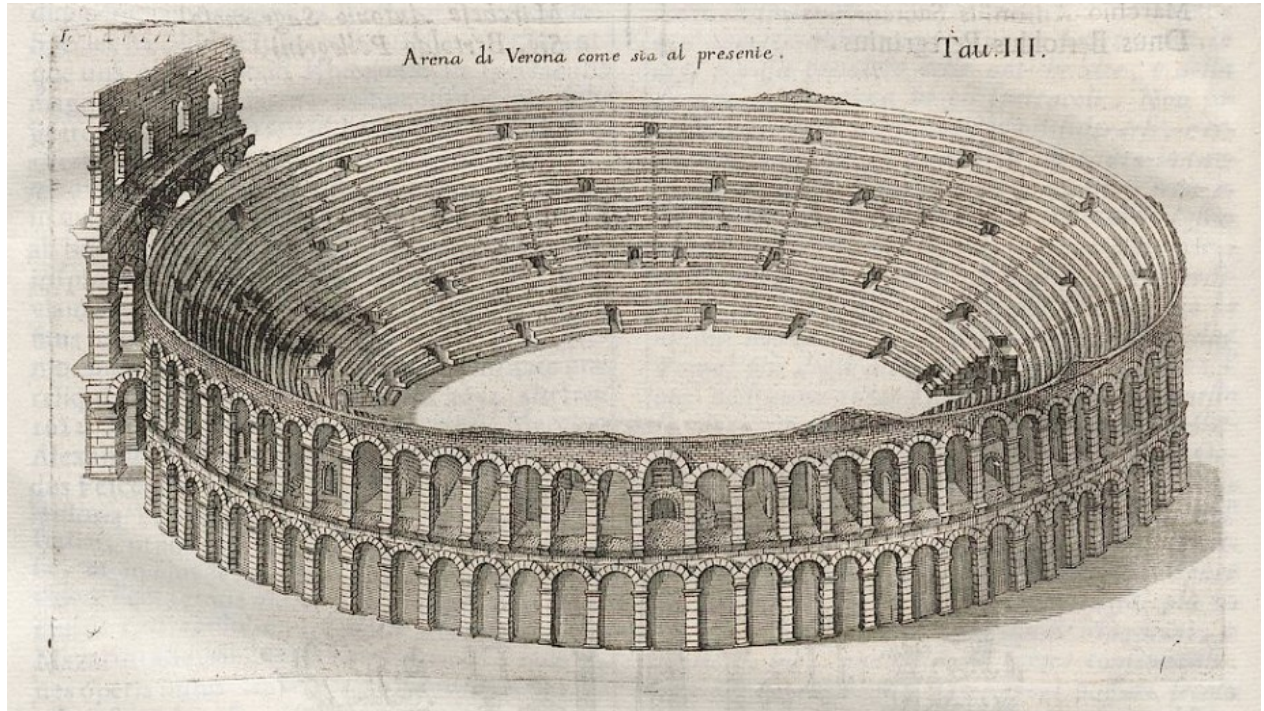


Figure 12. Scribes writing letters for the illiterate near the Holy Innocent's Cemetery as depicted in Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*.



CHAP.LXXXIV

Figure 13. The Verona Amphitheater.



SOURCE: Scipione Maffei. *Verona illustrata*. Verona: Jacopo Vallarsi. 1731/32.

Figure 14. The ninth print from Mantegna's "Julius Cäsars Triumphzug," depicting Caesar and, beneath, *das Gedränge* of putti-like children between the carriage wheels.



Figure 15. *Studio di folla* (study of a crowd) by Francesco Guardi (1712-93).



Figure 16. The ‘carnival medals’ (*Faschingsorden*) sent to Goethe alongside his ‘diploma in foolery’ by the *Berittene Akademie und Mondsuniversität zu Dülken*.



Figure 17. "Nordländer und Tabarri."





Figure 18. Interpretations of Goethe's *Märchen* as notated by Goethe himself in a diary entry from June 14, 1816 (*WA* 42/2 444-45).

Fluß	Die Noth, die Verlegenheit; im allgemeinen jede schwierige Aufgabe.	Das Fließende des Lebens.	Die Hindernisse des Lebens.
Fährmann	Mechanisches Wirken. Fleiß.	Der Stand der Natur.	Die reine sinnliche Thätigkeit.
Irrlichter	Leichter Sinn. Das Genie. <i>Bel Esprit</i> . Der Adel.	Ihr Name ist <i>Legion</i> . Die Versucher von Anfang. Speculanten. Sophisten.	Die Stutzer und Schmarutzer.
Gold	Der Schein.		
Schlange	Industrie und Speculationsgeist. Die Nachahmung. Der Verstand überhaupt.	Die Cultur.	Das Volk.
Mann mit der Lampe	Die Einbildungskraft.	Die Klugheit.	Die Vernunft.
Höhle	Die Natur.		
Jenes Mannes Frau	Der bornirte Sinn.	Der Glaube.	Der Menschenverstand.
Kohlhäupter	Realität.		
Jüngling	Die Leidenschaft.	Die Menschheit.	Die Menschlichkeit.
Riese	Die öffentl. Meinung, das Vorurtheil. Das Gesetz.	Der Wahn.	Der Schlendrian.
Lilie	Die <i>Caprice</i> . Die Phantasterey.	Die Wahrheit. Die Grazien.	Die Weiblichkeit.
Mops		Die Treue.	Die Sinnlichkeit.
Kanarienvogel		Die lyrische Poesie.	Gesang ohne Empfindung.
Habicht	Die Gunst von oben. Der glückliche Moment.	Die Vorsehung. Augur. Der heilig. Geist. Das Genie.	Die Ahndungs[-] und Darstellungskraft
Harfe			Gesang mit Empfindung.
Tempel	Der Genuß und die Ruhe als der letzte Zweck des Lebens.	Die Vernunft.	Die Vereinigung aller Kräfte.
Drey Könige			Die nothwendigsten Eigenschaften des Regiments.
Der Vierte			Diese Eigenschaften unförmlich verbunden.

## Bibliography

Theodor W. Adorno. "Zur Schlußszene des Faust." In: *Noten zur Literatur*. Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 11. Hsg. Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 2002. S. 129-138.

Giorgio Agamben. "Bartleby, or On Contingency." In: *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: SUP 1999. Pg. 243-274.

———. *Idea of Prose*. Trans. Michael Sullivan & Sam Whitsitt. State U of NY Press 1995. ———. "On Potentiality." In: *Potentialities*. Stanford: SUP 1999. Pg. 177-184.

———. *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford UP 1999.

———. *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*. Trans. Adam Kotsko. Stanford: SUP, 2013.

Toby A. Appel. *The Cuvier-Geoffrey Debate: French Biology in the Decades Before Darwin*. New York/Oxford: Oxford UP. 1987.

Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: UCP. 1958. Pg. 301-304.

Aristotle. *De Anima*. Trans. Christopher Shields. Clarendon: Oxford 2016.

———. *Nicomachean Ethics*. In: *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Vol. 1. Trans. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: PUP. 1984. Pg. 3982 (Book X, 1174b1).

Katherine M. Arens. "Humboldt and Goethe's Märchen: A Generic Interpretation." *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Winter, 1984), pp. 42-58.

Maike Arz. "Metamorphose der Tiere." In: *Goethe-Handbuch in vier Bänden. Bd. 1: Gedichte*. Ed. Regine Otte & Bernd Witte. Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler. 1996. Pg. 458-463.

Erich Auerbach. "Entdeckung Dantes in der Romantik." In: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*. VII. 1929. S. 682-692.

Eva Axer, Eva Geulen, & Alexandra Heimes. "Zeit und Form im Wandel. Goethes Morphologie und ihr Nachleben im 20. Jahrhundert." In: *Ästhetische Eigenzeiten: Bilanz der ersten Projektphase*. Ed. Michael Bies & Michael Gamper. Hannover: Wehrhahn 2019. Pg. 325-343.

Eva Axer. "Die 'morphologische Aufgabe' in der Literaturwissenschaft. Zum Verhältnis von Form und Zeit in André Jolles *Einfache Formen*." In: *Literarische Form / Literary Form. Theorien Dynamiken – Kulturen. Beiträge zur literarischen Modellforschung. Theories – Dynamics – Cultures. Perspectives on Literary Modelling*. Ed. Robert Matthias Erdbeer, Klaus Stierstorfer, Florian Kläger. Heidelberg 2018. Pg. 51 – 68.

Timothy Bahti. *Ends of Lyric: Direction and Consequence in Western Poetry*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP. 1996.

Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984 (orig. 1965).

Roland Barthes. "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives." In: *Image – Music – Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill & Wang. 1977. Pg. 79-124.

———. "Myth Today." In: *Mythologies*. New York: The Noonday Press. 1957. Pg. 109-159. Edward M. Batley. "'Das Römische Carneval' oder Gesellschaft und Geschichte." *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 105, 128-143.

Hermann Baumgart. *Goethe's Märchen. Ein politisch-nationales Glaubensbekenntniß des Dichters*. Königsberg 1875.

Sigrid Bauschinger. "Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten (1795)." In: *Goethes Erzählkunst*. Ed. James McLeod & Paul Michael Lützeler. Stuttgart: Reclam 1986. Pg. 134-167.

Eva Beck. "Entelechie." *Goethe-Wörterbuch*. Bd. 3, Sp. 121-122.

Werner Beierwaltes. *Platonismus und Idealismus*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 1972.

Ernst Beutler. "Ursprung und Gehalt von Goethes 'Novelle.'" In: *DVjs*. 16, 1938. Pg. 324-352.

Hans Christoph Binswanger. *Geld und Magie: Eine ökonomische Deutung von Goethes Faust*. Hamburg: Murmann 2018.

George A. Blair. "The Meaning of 'Energeia' and 'Entelecheia' in Aristotle." *International Philosophical Quarterly*. 7(1): 101-117. 1967.

Lothar Bluhm. "'In jenen unglücklichen Tagen...'" Goethes *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* oder: Die Ambivalenz von Kunst und Gesellschaft." In: *Erzählte Welt – Welt des Erzählens*. Ed. Rüdiger Zymner et al. Köln 2000. Pg. 27-45.

Hans Blumenberg. *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 1986.

———. "Zweite Diskussion: Die poetische Illegitimität der Lehrdichtung." In: *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste. Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen (Hermeneutik und Poetik)*. Ed. Hans-Robert Jauß. München: Wilhelm Fink. 1968. Pg. 553-555.

Giovanni di Boccaccio. *Das Dekameron*. Trans. Albert Wesselski. Vorwort von André Jolles. Frankfurt a.M. 1967 [foreword orig. 1921].

Johann Elert Bode. *Von dem neu entdeckten Planeten*. Berlin: Von dem Verfasser in Berlin, und in der Buchhandlung der Gelehrten in Dessau und Leipzig. 1784.

Dieter Borchmeyer. *Höfische Gesellschaft und französische Revolution bei Goethe*. Athenäum 1977.  
Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: CUP, 1977.

Hartmut Böhme. "Fetisch und Idol. Die Temporalität von Erinnerungsformen in Goethes *Wilhelm Meister, Faust* und *Der Sammler und die Seinigen*." In: *Goethe und die Verzeitlichung der Natur*. Ed. Peter Matussek. München 1998. Pg. 178-202.

Robert Brandom. "Freedom and Constraint by Norms." *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 16, (1979), pg. 187-196.

Barthold Heinrich Brockes. *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott. Naturlyrik und Lehrdichtung*. Ed. Hans-Georg.

Stuttgart: Reclam. 1999 [orig. 1721-1748].

Cleanth Brooks. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. New York: Harcourt. 1947.

Jane K. Brown. "Building Bridges: Goethe's Fairy-Tale Aesthetics." *Goethe Yearbook*, Vol. 23, 2016, pp. 1-17.

———. "The Tyranny of the Ideal: The Dialectics of Art in Goethe's 'Novelle.'" *Studies in Romanticism*. Vol. 19, No. 2. (1980). Pg. 217-231.

Marco Brusotti. "That they all point, is all there is to it.' Wittgenstein, Frazer, eine 'Tatsachensammlung' und ihre 'übersichtliche Darstellung.'" In: *Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer. The Text and the Matter*. Ed. Lars Albinus, Josef. G.F. Rothhaupt, & Aidan Seer. Boston/Berlin: de Gruyter 2016. Pg. 311-338.

———. *Wittgenstein, Frazer und die 'ethnologische Betrachtungsweise.'* Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2014.  
Frederick Burwick. *The Damnation of Newton: Goethe's Color Theory and Romantic Perception*. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter 1986.

Ernst Cassirer. "Goethe und die mathematische Physik. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Betrachtung." In: *Idee und Gestalt. Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, Kleist*. Berlin: Bei Bruno Cassirer. 1921. Pg. 27-76.

Stanley Cavell. *Pursuits of Happiness. The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard UP 1981.

———. "The Uncanniness of the Ordinary." In: *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*. Chicago: UCP 1988. Pg. 153-180.

Tom Cheesam. "Goethes 'Novelle' und der Bänkelsang." In: *Goethe-Jahrbuch*. Vol. 111. 1994. Pg. 125-140.

Brian R. Clack. "Wittgenstein and Anthropology." In: *A Companion to Wittgenstein*. Ed. Hans-Johann Glock & John Hyman. West Sussex 2017. Pg. 627 – 638.

———. *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*. New York: MacMillian 1999.

Christian Clement. "'Offenbares Geheimnis' oder 'geheime Offenbarung'? Goethes Märchen und die Apokalypse." *Goethe Yearbook*, Vol. 17, 2010, pp. 239-257.

Johann Amos Comenius. *Orbis Sensualium Pictus. Hoc est, Omnium fundamentalium in Mundo Rerum & in Vita Actionum Pictura & Nomenclatura. Die sichtbare Welt / Das ist /Aller vornemsten Welt-Dinge und Lebens-Verrichtungen Vorbildung und Benahmung*. Trans. Sigmund von Birken. Nürnberg: Endterus 1658.

James Fenimore Cooper. *Die Lederstrumpferzählungen. Der letzte Mohikaner*. Meersburg/Leipzig 1936.

Jonathan Culler. "Lyric, History, and Genre." *New Literary History*. Vol. 40, No. 4. Autumn 2009. Pg. 879-899.

Ernst Robert Curtius. *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter*. Tübingen & Basel: Francke Verlag. 1993 (erste Auflage: 1948).

- Eduard Joseph d'Alton & Christian Heinrich Pander. *Vergleichende Osteologie: Die Skelete der Pachydermata abgebildet, beschrieben und verglichen*. Bonn: bei Eduard Weber. 1821.
- Eduard Joseph d'Alton. *Das Riesen-Faulthier. Bradypus Giganteus, abgebildet, beschrieben und mit den verwandten Geschlechtern verglichen*. Bonn: Bei Eduard Weber. 1821.
- Georges Devereux. *Baubo. Die mythische Vulva*. Trans. Eva Moldenhauer. Frankfurt a.M.: Syndikat. 1981.
- Karl Eibl. *Kommentar: Goethe: Gedichte 1800-1830*. Hsg. Karl Eibl. Berlin: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag. S. 1103-4.
- Johann Gottfried Eichhorn. *Einleitung ins Alte Testament. Dritter Teil*. 2. Ed. Reutlingen: bei Johannes Erzginer 1790.
- Norbert Elias. *Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie*. Luchterhand 1981.
- Wolfgang Emrich. *Die Symbolik von Faust II. Sinn und Vorformen*. Frankfurt a.M./Bonn: Athenäum 1957.
- Arne Eppers. "Zwischen Biologie und Ökonomie: Goethes Vorstellungen über die Grenzen des Wachstums im Lehrgedicht 'Athroismos.'" *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*. Vol. 23, No. 3 (2013). Pg. 524-542.
- Ernst Feise. "Goethes Terzinen." In: *PMLA*. Vol. 59, No. 4 (Dec., 1944). Pg. 1162-1166.
- Eckart Förster. *Die 25 Jahren der Philosophie. Eine systematische Rekonstruktion*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 2012.
- . *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy. A Systematic Reconstruction*. Trans. Brady Bowman. Cambridge: Harvard 2012.
- James George Frazer. *Balder the Beautiful: The Fire-Festivals of Europe and the Doctrine of the External Soul*. Vol. 1. London 1913.
- . *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*. New Abridgement from the Second and Third Editions. Oxford: OUP 1994.
- Sigmund Freud. *Totum und Tabu*. Ed. Herman Westerink. Vienna 2013. Pg. 130.
- Paul Friedländer. *Rhythmen und Landschaften im Zweiten Teil des Faust*. Weimar: Hermann Beyer & Söhne. 1953.
- Erich Fromm. *Haben oder Sein. Die seelischen Grundlagen der neuen Gesellschaft*. München: dtv. 1979.
- Ulrich Gaier. "Soziale Bildung gegen ästhetische Erziehung. Goethes Rahmen der 'Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten' als satirische Antithese zu Schillers 'Ästhetischen Briefen' I-IX." In: *Poetische Autonomie? Zur Wechselwirkung von Dichtung und Philosophie in der Epoche Goethes und Hölderlins*. Ed. Helmut Bachmaier & Thomas Rentsch. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1987. Pg. 207-272.
- . *Kommentar: Faust Dichtungen*. Stuttgart: Reclam. 2010.

Michael Gamper. *Masse lesen, Masse schreiben. Eine Diskurs- und Imaginationsgeschichte der Menschenmenge 1765-1930*. München: Wilhelm Fink 2007.

Anthony Giddens. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984.

Eva Geulen. *Aus dem Leben der Form. Goethes Morphologie und die Nager*. Berlin: August. 2016.

———. “Aktualität im Übergang: Kunst und Moderne bei Max Kommerell.” In: *Max Kommerell: Leben – Werk – Aktualität*. Hsg. Walter Busch & Gerhart Pickerodt. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag. 2003. S. 34- 53.

René Girard. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Trans. Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Hopkins UP 1965.

———. *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Hopkins UP 1972.

Horst Albert Glaser. “Karneval und Karnevalstheorien – anlässlich Goethes Das Römische Carneval.” In: *Italienbeziehungen des klassischen Weimar*. Ed. Klaus Manger. Tübingen 1997. Pg. 101-112.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Ästhetische Schriften V (1824-1832)*. Frankfurter Ausgabe. 1. Abteilung, Bd. 22. Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1987.

———. *Italienische Reise*. Frankfurter Ausgabe. 1. Abteilung, Bd. 15/1 & 15/2. Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1987.

———. *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Hsg. Michael Böhler. Stuttgart: Reclam. 1977 (Erstdruck 1820).

———. *Schriften zur Morphologie*. Frankfurter Ausgabe. 1. Abteilung, Bd. 24. Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1987. E. H. Gombrich. “Understanding Goethe.” In: *Art History*. Vol. 5. Issue 2. June 1982. Pg. 237-242.

Annette Graczyk. *Das literarische Tableau zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft*. München: Wilhelm Fink 2004.

Ernst Grumach. *Goethe und die Antike*. Berlin: de Gruyter. 1949. Friedrich Gundolf. *Goethe*. Ed. 7. Berlin: Georg Bondi. 1920.

Claus Günzler. “Die Bedeutung des aristotelische Hylemorphismus für die Naturbetrachtung Goethes.” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*. Bd. 2, Heft 2 (April – June 1967). Pg. 208-241.

Jürgen Habermas. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Neuwied-Berlin 1971.

Pierre Hadot. *The Veil of Isis. An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*. Trans. Michael Chase. Cambridge: Harvard UP. Pg. 247-261.

Albrecht von Haller. “Die Falschheit menschlicher Tugenden.” In: *Albrecht von Hallers Gedichte*. Frauenfeld 1882. S. 61.

Robert Haydon. “On the Comparison between the Venetian Horse’s Head, said to be by Lysippus, and the

Horse's Head from the Parthenon, in the Elgin Collection." *Annals of the Fine Arts*. Vol. III, No. 9. 1818. Pg. 177-185.

Benjamin Hederich. Entry: "Priapus." In: Reales Schul-Lexikon, Sp. 2320-2321; Gründliches mythologisches Lexikon, Sp. 2078.

Werner Heisenberg. "Das Naturbild Goethes und die technisch-naturwissenschaftliche Welt." *Physikalische Blätter*. 24. Jahrgang, Heft 5. 1968. Pg. 193-200. & "Fortsetzung." In: Heft 6. Pg. 241-247.

Klaus W. Hempfer. *Lyrik. Skizze einer systematischen Theorie*. Stuttgart: Steiner 2014.

John Hennig. "Goethes Begriff 'ZART.'" *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*. Vol. 24, No. 1 (1980), pg. 77-102.

Johann Gottfried von Herder. *Sämmtliche Werke. Zur schönen Literatur und Kunst. 7. Theil: Stimmen der Völker in Liedern. Neu herausgegeben durch Johann von Müller. 1. Antheilung. Ueber Ossian und die Lieder der alten Völker*. Stuttgart & Tübingen: J.G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung 1828 [orig. 1773].

Frederick Hiebel. "The Beautiful Lily in Goethe's Märchen." *Monatshefte*, Vol. 41, No. 3/4 (Mar. – Apr., 1949), pp. 171-185.

Klaudia Hilgers. *Entelechie, Monade und Metamorphose. Formen der Vervollkommnung im Werk Goethes*. München: Wilhelm Fink. 2002.

Hellmuth Himmel. "Metamorphose der Sprache. Das Bild der Poesie in Goethe's 'Novelle.'" *Jahrbuch des Wiener Goethe-Vereins*. Vol. 65. 1961. Pg. 86-100.

E.T.A. Hoffmann. *Prinzessin Brambilla*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971.

Oliver Wendell Holmes. *Missouri v. Holland* 252 U.S. 416 (1920).

Eva Hölder. *Der Dichter der Hölle und des Exils*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann. 2002.

Wilhelm von Humboldt. *Aesthetische Versuche. Erster Theil. Ueber Göthes Hermann und Dorothea*. In: *Werke II: Schriften zur Altertumskunde und Ästhetik. Die Vasken*. Ed. Andreas Flitner & Klaus Giel. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 2002. Pg. 125-356.

———. *Briefe. Bd. 3: 1795-1797*. Ed. Philip Mattson. de Gruyter: Berlin/Boston 2017. ———. "Das achzehnte Jahrhundert" [1795/96]. In: *Werke*. Bd. II. Berlin: Behr's Verlag 1904.

Simon Jarvis. "Bedlam or Parnassus: The Verse Idea." *Metaphilosophy*. Vol. 43, Nos. 1-2. Jan. 2012. Pg. 71-81.

———. "The melodics of long poems." *Textual Practice*. Vol. 24, No. 4. 2010. Pg. 607-621.

André Jolles. *Einfache Formen. Legende, Sage, Mythe, Rätsel, Spruch, Kasus, Memorabile, Märchen, Witz*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1969 [orig. 1930].

Rolf Jucker. "Das Römische Karneval. Mit Gesetz und Ordnung gegen Gedränge." In: *Goethe-Jahrbuch* Vol. 111. Pg. 35-44.

- Immanuel Kant. *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Meiner 2017 [orig. 1793/94].
- . *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. 1998 (ursp. 1787).
- . *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Hamburg: Meiner. 2006.
- Wolfgang Kayser. “Goethes Dichtungen in Stanzen.” In: *Kunst und Spiel: Fünf Goethe-Studien*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 1961. Pg. 86-99.
- Werner Keller. “Variationen zum Thema: ‘Wär’ nicht das Auge sonnenhaft ...” In: *Prägnanter Moment: Studien zur deutschen Literatur der Aufklärung und Klassik*. Hsg. Peter-André Alt, Alexander Košenina, Hartmut Reinhardt und Wolfgang Riedel. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann. S. 439-512.
- Wolf Kittler. *Die Geburt des Partisanen aus dem Geist der Poesie. Heinrich von Kleist und die Strategie der Befreiungskriege*. Freiburg a.B.: Rombach 1987.
- Joseph Leo Koerner. *Bosch & Bruegel: From Enemy Painting to Everyday Life*. Princeton: PUP, 2016.
- Max Kommerell. *Gedanken über Gedichte*. 3. Auflage. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt a.M. 1956.
- . “Faust II. Zum Verständnis der Form.” In: *Geist und Buchstabe der Dichtung*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 2009 (erste Auflage: 1956). S. 9-74.
- Johann Caspar Lavater. *Physiognomische Fragmente, zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniß und Menschenliebe*. Bd. 2. Leipzig. 1776.
- Aryeh Kosman. *The Activity of Being. An Essay on Aristotle’s Ontology*. Cambridge: HUP. 2013.
- Olav Krämer. “Transformationen des wissenschaftlichen Lehrgedichts um 1800. Erasmus Darwins The Temple of Nature und Johann Wolfgang Goethes Metamorphose der Tiere.” In: *Das Wissen der Poesie: Lyrik, Versepiik und die Wissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Henning Hufnagel & Olav Krämer. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter. 2015. Pg. 37-68.
- Ingrid Kreuzer. “Strukturprinzipien in Goethes Märchen.” *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, Vol. 21 1977, pp. 216-246.
- Dorothea Kuhn. *Empirische und ideelle Wirklichkeit. Studien über Goethes Kritik der französischen Akademiestreites*. Graz/Wien/Köln: Hermann Böhlau. 1967.
- Jonathan Lear. *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life*. Cambridge: HUP, 2000.
- Lebensform und Praxisform*. Ed. Jens Kertscher & Jan Müller. Paderborn: mentis 2015.
- Caroline Levine. “Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies.” *Victorian Studies*. Vol. 48. No. 4. 2006. Pg. 625-657.
- Claude Lévi-Strauss. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: UCP 1962.
- George Henry Lewes. *Life of J. W. von Goethe*. Ed. Nathan Haskell Dole. Vol. 1. New York: Bigelow, Brown & Co. 1902.



- Hans Lipps. "Die Subordination der Organe. Zur Philosophie der Biologie." In: *Die Wirklichkeit des Menschen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 1921.
- . "Goethes Farbenlehre." In: *Die Wirklichkeit des Menschen. Werke* Bd. 5. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. Pg. 108-124.
- Camilla Lucerna. *Das Märchen. Goethes Naturphilosophie als Kunstwerk. Deutungsarbeit*. Leipzig: Fritz Eckardt Verlag 1910.
- Lucretius *On the Nature of Things: De Rerum Natura*. Trans. Walter Englert. Newburyport: Focus Philosophical Library. 2003.
- . *Von der Natur der Dinge*. Übersetzt von Karl Ludwig von Knebel. 2. Auflage. Leipzig: bei Georg Joachim Göschen. 1832. (1. Auflage: 1821).
- Susanne Lüdemann. "Vom Römischen Karneval zur ökonomischen Automate. Massendarstellung bei Goethe und E.T.A. Hoffmann." In: *Massenfassungen. Beiträge zur Diskurs- und Mediengeschichte der Menschenmenge*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink 2010. Pg. 107-124.
- Niklas Luhmann. "'Die Paradoxie der Form.'" In: *Kalkül der Form*. Hsg. Dirk Baecker. Frankfurt a.M. 1993. S. 197-212.
- . "Gesellschaftliche Struktur und semantische Tradition." In: *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1980, pp. 9-70.
- . *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 2001.
- Salomon Maimon. "Ueber Stetigkeit in der Natur." *Deutsche Monatsschrift*. Bd. II. 1791. Pg. 136-145.
- Wolfgang Martens. "Goethes Gedicht 'Bei Betrachtung von Schillers Schädel,' motivgeschichtlich gesehen." In: *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*. Vol. 12, 1957. S. 275-295.
- Christian Martin. "Four Types of Conceptual Generality." *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 36:2 (2015), pp. 397-423.
- Meredith Martin. *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930*. Princeton: Princeton UP. 2012.
- Peter Matussek. "Formen der Verzeitlichung. Der Wandel des Faustschen Naturbildes und seine historischen Hintergründe." In: *Goethe und die Verzeitlichung der Natur*. Hsg. Peter Matussek. München: Verlag C.H. Beck. 1998. S. 202-232.
- Franz H. Mautner. "'Ist fortzusetzen:,' Zu Goethes Gedicht auf Schillers Schädel." In: *PMLA*. Vol. 59, No. 4 (Dec., 1944). Pg. 1156-1162.
- Kurt May. "Goethes Novelle." *Euphorion*. Vol. 1, No. 33. 1932. Pg. 278-283.
- Louis-Sébastien Mercier. *Tableau de Paris*. Vol. 1. Paris: 1782.
- Heinrich Meyer. "Neu-deutsche religiös-patriotische Kunst." In: *FA I* 20, 123-4 [orig. in: *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum in den Rhein- und Mayngebenden*. I.2. 1817.

———. “Siebente Weimarische Kunstausstellung vom Jahre 1805. In: *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*. 3. Jahrgang. Bd. 1. 1806. Pg. 1-12.

Hermann Meyer. *Natürlicher Enthusiasmus: Das Morgenländische in Goethes ‘Novelle.’* Heidelberg: Lothar Stiehm Verlag 1973.

Peter Michelsen. “Fausts Schlaf und Erwachen. Zur Eingangsszene von *Faust II* (‘Anmuthige Gegend’).” In: *Im Banne Fausts: Zwölf Faust-Studien*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann. 2000. S. 91- 123.

Julia Mierbach. “Die Reihe. Zur mathematischen Poetik einer Denkfigur um 1800. (Goethe, Schelling, Herbart, Novalis).” *DVjS*. Vol. 92, Issue 3. Sept. 2018. Pg. 377-427.

Géza von Molnar. *Goethes Kantstudien. Eine Zusammensetzung nach Eintragungen in seinen Handexemplaren der “Kritik der reinen Vernunft” und der “Kritik der Urteilskraft.”* Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger. 1994.

Momme Mommsen & Katharina Mommsen. *Die Entstehung von Goethes Werken in Dokumenten*. Bd. 2: Cecilia bis Dichtung und Wahrheit. Berlin: Akademie Verlag. 1958.

Karl Philipp Moritz. *Anthusa oder Roms Alterthümer. Ein Buch für die Menschheit. Die heiligen Gebräuche der Römer*. 2. Auflage. Berlin 1797.

Günther Müller. “Die Gestaltfrage in der Literaturwissenschaft und Goethes Morphologie” (1944). In: *Morphologische Poetik*. Max Niemeyer: Tübingen. 1968. Pg. 146-224.

———. “Goethe: Schillers Reliquien.” In: *Die deutsche Lyrik: Form und Geschichte*. Hsg. Benno von Wiese. Düsseldorf: August Basel Verlag. 1957. Pg. 279-289.

Elena Nährlich-Slatewa. “Das groteske Leben und seine edle Einfassung. ‘Das Römische Karneval’ Goethes und das Karnevals-konzept von Michail M. Bachtin.” *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 106. 1981. Pg. 181-202.

*Neue Sammlung alter und neuer Lieder, die in den preußischen Kirchen gesungen werden, auch einiger Gebete, Gott zu ehren, und der gemeinen öffentliche und häusliche Andacht zu befördern, ausgefertiget.* Königsberg: Dan. Fried. Schulz. 1820.

Gerhard Neumann. “Die Anfänge deutsche Novellistik. Schillers ‘Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre’ – Goethes ‘Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten.’ In: *Unser Commercium*. Ed. Wilfried Barner, Eberhard Lämmert, & Norbert Oellers. Stuttgart: Cotta’sche Buchhandlung 1984. Pg. 433-460.

———. “Fernröhr und Flöte. Erzählte Räume in Goethes Novelle.” In: *Goethe und die Musik*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2012. Pg. 125-144.

John Neubauer. “Athroismos – Metamorphose der Tiere.” In: *Goethe-Gedichte. Zweiunddreißig Interpretationen*. Ed. Gerhard Saurer. Hanser. 1996. Pg. 181-190.

*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Ed. Michael D. Coogan. Oxford: OUP 2007.

Karen Ng. “Leben, Selbstbewusstsein, Negativität: Zum Verständnis von Hegels These der spekulativen Identität.” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. Vol. 64, no. 4. 2016. Pg. 522-550.

H.B. Nisbet. “Lucretius in Eighteenth-Century Germany. With a Commentary on Goethe’s

‘Metamorphose der Tiere.’” *Modern Language Review*. Vol. 100 (2005). Pg. 115-133.

Günter Oesterle. „Die Idee der Poesie ist die Prosa.’ Walter Benjamin entdeckt ‚einen völlig neuen Grund’ romantischer ‚Kunstphilosophie.’“ In: *Walter Benjamin und die romantische Moderne*. Ed. Heinz Brüggemann u. Günter Oesterle. Königshausen & Neumann. Pg. 161-173.

———. “Die ‘schwere Aufgabe, zugleich bedeutend und deutungslos’ sowie ‘an nichts und alles erinnert’ zu sein. Bild- und Rätselstrukturen in Goethes ‘Das Märchen.’” In: *Bildersturm und Bilderflut um 1800. Zur schwierigen Anschaulichkeit der Moderne*. Ed. Helmut J. Schneider, Rolf Simon, & Thomas Wirtz. Bielefeld 2001. Pg. 184-209.

Friedrich Ohly. “Römisches und Biblisches in Goethes ‘Märchen.’” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*. Bd. 91, H. 2 (1961), pp. 147-166.

Maurice Olender. “Aspects of Baubo: Ancient Texts and Contexts.” In: *Before sexuality: The construction of erotic experience in the ancient Greek world*. Princeton: PUP, 1990.

Jutta Osinski. “Goethes Märchen. Noch eine Interpretation.” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, Vol. 103 1984, pp. 38-64.

Catherine Packham. “The Science and Poetry of Animation: Personification, Analogy, and Erasmus Darwin’s *Loves of the Plants*.” In: *Romanticism*. Vol. 10, Issue 2. Pg. 191-208.

Leander Petzoldt. *Bänkelsang. Vom historischen Bänkelsang zum literarischen Chanson*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler 1974.

Adolf Portmann. “Goethes Naturforschung.” In: *Biologie und Geist*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 1956. Pg. 273-292.

Roy Rappaport. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: CUP, 1999.

John Rawls. “Two Concepts of Rules.” *The Philosophical Review* 64 (1955): 3-32.

Peter Reindl. “Tischbeins Entwurf zu einer physiognomischen Systematik für den Historienmaler.” In: *Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein. Das Werk des Goethe-Malers zwischen Kunst, Wissenschaft und Alltagskultur*. Petersberg 2001. Pg. 75-102.

I. A Richards. “How Does a Poem Know When It Is Finished?” In: *Parts and Wholes*. Ed. Daniel Lerner. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe. 1963.

Robert Richards. *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*. Chicago: UCP. 2008.

Karl Veit Riedel. *Der Bänkelsang. Wesen und Funktion einer volkstümlichen Kunst*. Hamburg: Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte 1963.

Joachim Ritter. “Über das Lachen.” In: *Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze*. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M. 1989 (orig. 1940). Pg. 62-92.

Mark W. Rowe. “Goethe and Wittgenstein.” *Philosophy*. Vol. 66, No. 257. July 1991, pg. 283-303.

- Wolfgang Schadewaldt. "Faust und Helena: Zu Goethes Auffassung vom Schönen und der Realität des Realen im Zweiten Teil des 'Faust.'" In: *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*. 30. (1956). Pg. 1-40.
- F.W.J. Schelling. *Aus Schellings Leben. Bd. 1: 1775-1803*. Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel. 1869.
- . *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie. Zum Behuf seiner Vorlesungen*. Jena & Leipzig: Christian Ernst Gabler. 1799.
- . "Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur." In: *Werke*. Bd. 1. Leipzig 1907. Pg. 107-153.
- . "Philosophie der Kunst" [1802-1803]. In: *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Bd. 2: 1801-1803. Frankfurt Suhrkamp. 1985. 181-564.
- . *Ueber Dante in philosophischer Beziehung*. In: *Sämmtliche Werke*. I. Abt. Bd. 5. Stuttgart/Augsburg. 1859.
- Friedrich Schiller. *Schillers Briefe. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Hsg. Fritz Jonas. Bd. V. Stuttgart: a.M.: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt. 1892-97.
- . *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*. Reclam: Stuttgart 2002.
- Heinz Schlaffer. *Faust Zweiter Teil. Die Allegorie des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Metzler 1981.
- Karl Schlechta. *Goethe in seinem Verhältnis zu Aristoteles*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann. 1938.
- August Wilhelm Schlegel. *Briefwechsel mit Schiller und Goethe*. Hg. v. Josef Körner u. Ernst Wieneke. Leipzig: 1926. URL: <http://august-wilhelm-schlegel.de/briefedigital/>
- . "Prometheus." In: Friedrich Schiller. *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1798*. Tübingen: J.G. Cotta. Pg. 48.
- . Rezension: Nr. 6 of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* from Jan. 6, 1979, Sp. 44f.
- . "Schillers 'Die Künstler.'" In: *Sämmtliche Werke*. Ed. Eduard Böcking. Bd. 7. *Sprache und Poetik*. Leipzig: Weidmännische Buchhandlung. 1846. Pg. 3-23.
- . *Vorlesungen über die romanische Poesie*. In: *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik. Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*. II/I. Hsg. Georg Braungart & Ernst Behler. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh. 2007.
- Friedrich Schlegel. *Fragmente*. Hsg. Friedrich von der Leyen. Jena & Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs. 1904.
- Dieter Schlenstedt & Marion George. "Typisch/Typ(us)." In: *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*. Stuttgart: Metzler. 2005. Pg. 191-247.
- Hermann Schmitz. *Goethes Altersdenken im problemgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang*. Bonn: Bouvier. 1959.
- . "Das Ganz-Andere: Goethe und das Ungeheuer." In: *Goethe und die Verzeitlichung der Natur*. Ed. Peter Matussek. München: C.H. Beck. 1998. Pg. 414-435.

Mark A. Schneider. "Goethe and the Structuralist Tradition." *Studies in Romanticism*. Vol. 18, No. 3 (Fall, 1979), pp. 453-478.

Steffen Schneider. *Archivpoetik: Die Funktion des Wissens in Goethes 'Faust II.'* Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag. 2005.

Albrecht Schöne. "'Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben.'" (Goethe, Faust II. Vers 4679-4727)." In: *Bilderwelten: Vom farbigen Abglanz der Natur*. Hsg. Norbert Elsner. Göttingen: Wallstein. 2007. Pg. 9-26.

———. *Schillers Schädel*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck. 1961.

Joachim Schulte. "Chor und Gesetz. Zur morphologischen Methode bei Goethe und Wittgenstein." *Grazer Philosophische Studien*. Jan 1, 1984. Issue 21, pg. 1-32.

———. "Ideen mit den Augen sehen: Goethe und Wittgenstein über Morphologie." In: *Morphologie und Moderne. Goethes 'anschauliches Denken' in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften seit 1800*. Berlin/Boston 2014. Pg. 141-156.

Claudia Schweizer. "Entelechie." *Goethe-Handbuch Supplemente: Bd. 2: Naturwissenschaften*. Ed. Gabriele Busch-Salmen, Manfred Wenzel, Andreas Beyer, & Ernst Osterkamp. Stuttgart: Metzler. 2013. Pg. 383.

David Seamon & Arthur Zajonc (eds.). *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*. Albany: State U of NY. 1998.

Claudia Sedlarz. "Gelehrte und Künstler und gelehrte Künstler an der Berliner Kunstakademie." In: *Netzwerke des Wissens. Das intellektuelle Berlin um 1800*. Ed. Anne Baillot. Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2011. Pg. 245-278.

Georg Simmel. "Die Stetigkeit in Goethes Weltbild." In: *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1909-1918*. Bd. 1. Ed. Rüdiger Kramme & Angela Rammstedt. In: *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 12. Ed. Otthein Rammstedt. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp. 2001 (orig. 1912). Pg. 374-380.

———. *Goethe*. Cyprus: Verone. 2016 [orig. 1913].

Ralf Simon. "Vorüberlegungen zu einer Theorie der Prosa." In: *Poetik*. Hsg. Armen Avanesian u. Jan Niklas Howe. Berlin: Kadmos. Pg. 124-144.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith. *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*. Chicago: U of Chicago P. 1968.

Ingeborg H. Solberg. "Symbolik und ambivalente Funktion des Goldes in Goethes 'Märchen.'" *Jahrbuch des Wiener Goethe-Vereins*. Vol. 73 (1969). Pg. 40-59.

Spinoza. *Ethics*. In: *The Collected Works*. Vol. 1. Ed. & trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: PUP. 1985.

Emil Staiger. *Meisterwerke deutscher Sprache aus dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert*. Atlantis Verlag.

Zürich: Atlantis Verlag 1957.

Rudolf Steiner. *Goethes Geistesart in ihrer Offenbarung durch seinen Faust und durch das Märchen von*

*der Lilie und der Schlange*. Rudolf Steiner Verlag 1918.

Daniel Steuer. "Goethe and Wittgenstein on the Limits of Science: Towards a Critique of Abstraction." *Publications of the English Goethe Society*. Vol. 71, No. 5, pg. 50-61.

———. "Wittgenstein and Goethe: Getting Rid of 'Sorge'." In: *Wittgenstein Reading*. Ed. Sascha Bru, Wolfgang Huemer, & Daniel Steuer. Berlin/Boston 2013. Pg. 115-136.

Ernst Stiedenroth. *Psychologie zur Erklärung der Seelenerscheinungen*. Bd. 1. Berlin: von Ferdinand Dümmler. 1824.

Emil Sulger-Gebing. *Goethe und Dante*. Berlin: Verlag von Alexander Duncker. 1907.

Martin Swales. "The Threatened Society: Some Remarks on Goethe's *Novelle*." In: *Publications of the English Goethe Society*. Vol. 38. 1967-8. Pg. 43-68.

Ralph Szukala. "Goethes Beobachtungen zum römischen Karneval." In: *Goethe: neue Ansichten, neue Einsichten*. Würzburg 2007. Pg. 159-168.

Astrid Orle Tantillo. *The Will to Create. Goethe's Philosophy of Nature*. Pittsburgh: UPP. 2002. Charles Taylor. "To Follow a Rule." In: *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995, pp. 165-180.

Michael Thompson. *Life and Action. Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard UP 2008.

Ludwig Tieck. *Die neuesten Musenalmanache und Taschenbücher (1796-1798)*. In: *Kritische Schriften*, Bd. 1. Leipzig. F.U. Brockhaus. 1848.

———. *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst*. In: *Werke und Briefe*. Ed. Wilhelm Wackenroder. Berlin & München: 1984.

———. "Die neue Zeit 1800." In: *Gedichte*. Hg. von Ruprecht Wimmer. Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag. Pg. 408-414

Ute Tintemann & Jürgen Trabant (eds.). *Wilhelm von Humboldt: Universalität und Individualität*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink. 2012.

Tzvetan Todorov. "Goethe sur l'art." In: *Écrits sur l'art*. Paris: Klincksieck. 1983. Pg. 7-59.

Marius Tölzer. "'Wissen sie nicht [...] uns irgend ein Märchen zu erzählen?' Betrachtungen zur Struktur von Goethes *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* hinsichtlich Schillers Briefen *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*." *DVjS* 92. Jahrgang, 2018.

Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Oxon/New York: 1969.

Gert Ueding. "Gesprächsgesellschaft in Utopia. Goethes *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*." In: *Aufklärung über Rhetorik. Versuche über Beredsamkeit, ihre Theorie und praktische Bewährung*.

Tübingen: Max Niemeyer 1992. Pg. 125-137.

Jakob von Uexküll. *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere*. Berlin: Julius Springer. 1909.

Ludwig Uhlig. "Goethes 'Römisches Karneval' im Wandel seines Kontexts." *Euphorion*. Vol. 1, Issue 72, 1978. Pg. 84-95.

"Ungeheuer." *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. Vd. 24, Sp. 691.

Karl Viëtor. "Goethes Gedicht auf Schillers Schädel." In: *Geist und Form: Aufsätze zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte*. Bern: A. Francke AG Verlag. 1952. S. 194-233.

Joseph Vogl. *Kalkül und Leidenschaft. Poetik des ökonomischen Menschen*. München: Diaphanes 2002.

Johann Jacob Volkmann. *Historisch-kritische Nachrichten von Italien*. Vol. 2. Leipzig: Caspar Fritsch. 1770.

Erwin Wäsche. *Honorio und der Löwe: Studie über Goethes 'Novelle' mit einem Abdruck derselben*. Salckingen: Hermann Stratz Verlag 1947.

Leif Weatherby. "Das Innere der Natur und ihr Organ: von Albrecht von Haller zu Goethe." In: *Goethe Yearbook*. Vol. 21. 2014. Pg. 191-217.

———. *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ. German Romanticism between Leibniz and Marx*. New York: Fordham UP. 2016.

Hasso von Wedel. *Heinrich von Wittgenstein, 1797 bis 1869: Unternehmer und Politiker in Köln*. Rheinisch-Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv zu Köln 1981.

Liliane Weissberg. "Weimar and Jena: Goethe and the New Philosophy." In: *Goethe und das Zeitalter der Romantik*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann. 2002. Pg. 163-174.

David Wellbery. "Form und Idee. Skizze eines Begriffsfeldes um 1800." In: *Morphologie und Moderne. Goethes 'anschauliches Denken' in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften seit 1800*. Ed. Jonas Maatsch. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2014. Pg. 17-42.

———. "Rites de passage. Zur Struktur des Erzählprozesses in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Prinzessin Brambilla*." In: *Seiltänzer des Paradoxalen*. München: Hanser 2006. Pg. 118-145.

———. "Zur Methodologie des intuitiven Verstandes. Anmerkung zu Eckart Försters Goethelektüre." In: *Übergänge – diskursiv oder intuitive? Essays zu Eckart Försters "Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie"*. Ed. Johannes Haag und Markus Wild. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann 2013. Pg. 259-274.

Larry D. Wells. "Organic Structure in Goethe's 'Novelle'." *The German Quarterly*. Vol. 53, No. 4. Nov., 1980. Pg. 418-431.

"Weltleben." In: *Grimm-Wörterbuch*. Bd. 28, Sp. 1630.

Peter Winch. "Understanding a Primitive Society." In: *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 1, No. 4 (Oct. 1964), pg. 302-324.

D. W. Winnicott. "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena." In: *Playing and Reality*. New York 2005. 1-34.

Bernd Witte. "Das Opfer der Schlange. Zur Auseinandersetzung Goethes mit Schiller in den

Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten und im Märchen.” In: *Unser Commercium. Goethes und Schillers Literaturpolitik*. Ed. Wilfried Barner, Eberhard Lämmert, & Norbert Oellers. Stuttgart: Cotta'sche Buchhandlung 1984. Pg. 461-484.

Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough*. In: *Philosophical Occasions, 1912- 1951*. Ed. James C. Klagge & Alfred Nordmann. Indianapolis 1993. Pg. 115-155.

———. *Philosophische Untersuchungen / Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, & Joachim Schulte. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell 2009.

Sp. Wukadonovic. *Goethes 'Novelle.' Der Schauplatz – Coopersche Einflüsse*. Halle a.S.: Max Niemeyer 1909.

Max Wundt. “Aus Makariens Archiv: Zur Entstehung der Aphorismensammlung in den Wanderjahren.” In: *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift* 7 (1915), S. 177-184.

Rolf Christian Zimmermann. *Das Weltbild des jungen Goethe: Studien zur hermetischen Tradition des deutschen 18. Jahrhunderts*. Bd. 2. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag. 1979.