The Response of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to the French Revolution

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To Mum and Dad

For everything

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References

When substantial works (i.e. ten pages or more) appear as part of a larger volume by a single author, their title appears in italics (e.g. Goethe, *Campagne in Frankreich*, *Werke*, vol. 16 (1994), pp. 386-572). For shorter works (i.e. less than ten pages) which are not published independently, the title appears in standard font with quotation marks (e.g. Goethe, 'Literarischer Sansculottismus', *Werke,* vol. 18 (1998), pp. 319-24). Titles for specific volumes at their first mention are not given, but their number and date of publication are. The exception to this rule occurs for particularly substantial works of a relatively short collection (e.g. Whaley, *Holy Roman Empire*, vol. 2: *The Peace of Westphalia to the Dissolution of the Reich 1684-1806*).

Introduction

'Daß die Französische Revolution auch für mich eine Revolution war kannst du dencken'.[1]

The French Revolution was the greatest political event of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's lifetime. Its causes and consequences continue to elicit debate, and to provide a focus around which many orient their politics.[2] The Revolution gave birth to notions of the political Left and Right, and more recent revolutionaries have drawn inspiration from it, including the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and even the popular uprisings against the Soviet Union in 1989.

For some, the Revolution represents the emergence of modern liberal democracy; as the empowerment of the masses against corrupt ruling elites. Marxist historiography interprets it as a clash between social classes, in which the increasingly powerful bourgeoisie toppled the defunct nobility to complete the historical transition from feudalism to capitalism. Jonathan Israel describes the coherent philosophy of the 'Radical Enlightenment' as the 'only important direct cause' of the Revolution.[3] The 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, for instance, was inspired not by deputies in the National Assembly, lawyers, or public opinion, but by 'a tiny steering group' of leading *philosophes*.[4] It is to the influence of the Radical Enlightenment on the Revolution, Israel argues, that we owe, among others,

[1] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Letter to F.H. Jacobi, 3.3.1790, *Sämtliche Werke: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. Friedmar Apel and others, 40 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1986-2000), vol. 30 (1991), p. 515.
[2] Gary Kates, *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 1.
[3] Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 16.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 904-05.

human rights, representative democratic government, freedom of the press, and religious toleration.[5]

'In some depressingly unavoidable sense, violence *was* the Revolution itself'.[6] Simon Schama exemplifies how others see the Revolution mainly as a bout of violence which failed to live up to its emancipatory rhetoric, and merely replaced one form of tyranny with another.[7] Schama emphasises how all the major developments of the Revolution, such as the storming of the Bastille, the October 1789 march on Versailles, and the September massacres of 1792, were either initiated or accompanied by brutality, and that this was the symptom of the Revolutionaries' 'neoclassical fixation with the patriotic death'.[8] Schama also argues that the Revolution did not improve the lot of the poor, but benefited those who had already been prospering under the *ancien régime*: 'patriot' nobles who had sided with the Revolution, and the bourgeoisie.[9] Furthermore, he contends that, far from being a society 'doddering its way to the grave', the *ancien régime* was keen on scientific innovation and constitutional reform — and the latter caused its demise.[10] François Furet agrees with Schama (and is opposed by Israel) that the conditions for the Terror had been present in France's political culture since 1789, and accuses Robespierre of leading the country into revolutionary dictatorship.[11] Nicholas Boyle argues that even the abolition of personal monarchy did not interrupt the French state's drive towards monarchical centralism, and that France, in the form of Napoleon, ended up with a monarch 'no less enlightened, and no less despotic, than Frederick the Great'.[12] Boyle concedes that the Revolution was crucial to the development of the

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 937-51.
[6] Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. xv.
[7] William Doyle describes the different approaches to explaining the causes of the Revolution since 1939 in *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 7-40.
[8] Schama, *Citizens*, p. 861.
[9] *Ibid*., pp. 853-55.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 185.
[11] François Furet, *Revolutionary France 1770-1880*, tr. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 140-53.
[12] Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 2 vols. to date (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991-2000), vol. 2: *Revolution and Renunciation 1790-1803* (2000), p. 25.

modern state, but suggests that 'the world might have been happier' if it had not taken such a 'cataclysmic' course.[13] Whatever one's stance towards the Revolution, it is an undeniably fruitful source of political discussion, and an aged Goethe lamented his failure to do literary justice to 'dieses schrecklichste aller Ereignisse'.[14]

There is little dispute that Goethe's response to the Revolution was negative. Claude David describes it thus: 'von Anfang an ablehnend, ohne Einschränkung und ganz selbstverständlich'.[15] The swiftness of Goethe's opposition distinguished him from most German — and European — commentators. Most intellectuals initially greeted the Revolution with optimism, but retracted their support when it entered the more authoritarian and radical phase in 1792 with the invasion of states hostile to the Revolution (including the German Rhineland), the execution of the French king and queen in 1793, and the Reign of Terror.[16] Some contemporaries and more recent scholars saw Goethe's rejection of the Revolution as a reversal, even betrayal, of his previous principles. They perceived works such as *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* and *Götz von Berlichingen*, masterpieces of the *Sturm und Drang*, as expressions of rebellion against the social order and of yearning for individual freedom from aristocratic and courtly custom. Goethe's move to the Weimar court in 1775 and his patronage from Duke Carl August, however, turned him, they argued, into an unapologetic defender of the established order. In Wolfgang Leppmann's words: 'They had hoped that the prince would become like the poet, and saw to their dismay that the poet was

[13] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, pp. 33-4.
[14] Goethe, 'Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort', *Werke*, vol. 24 (1987), pp. 595-99 (p. 597).
[15] Claude David, 'Goethe und die Französische Revolution', tr. Hermann Krapoth, *Deutsche Literatur und Französische Revolution* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), pp. 63-86 (p. 64).
[16] A substantial survey of German responses to the French Revolution may be found in G.P. Gooch, *Germany and the French Revolution* (London: Longmans, Green, 1920), and Reinhold Aris, *History of Political Thought in Germany 1789-1815* (London: G Allen & Unwin, 1936), pp. 21-64.

becoming more like the prince'.[17] Goethe's response to the Revolution was a symptom of his broader political outlook. Defining the nature of this is also problematic.

Goethe did not write any overt political tracts, nor was he a major statesman. Yet his political legacy still provokes controversy, and various political causes have tried to appropriate him. The scholarship of the German Democratic Republic largely treated Goethe according to Marxist and Leninist social theory, philosophy, and aesthetics.[18] The Federal Republic emphasised his humane ideals, which would have rejected Germany's recent experience of National Socialism, and Thomas Mann represented him as an early advocate of Western democracy.[19] The Third Reich cast him as the embodiment of incipient German nationalism, who had a natural affinity with the native people ('Volk').[20] All these regimes accentuated and ignored aspects of Goethe's political utterances and involvement to suit their own ideological ends.[21]

'Goethes Einfluß auf politische Entwicklungen in Sachsen-Weimar war in mehreren Fällen gegen Menschenrechte gerichtet'.[22] W. Daniel Wilson epitomises those who accuse Goethe of reactionary politics which favour the incumbent ruling elite and social order.[23] Drawing primarily on his archival research into Goethe's occupation as Privy Councillor in Weimar, Wilson explodes the long-standing myth of the Duchy as a beacon of benevolent government and harmony between ruler and subjects, and highlights Goethe's complicity in many repressive measures. These included the punishment of peasants who protested against

[17] Wolfgang Leppmann, *The German Image of Goethe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 26.
[18] Karl Robert Mandelkow, *Goethe in Deutschland: Rezeptionsgeschichte eines Klassikers*, 2 vols (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1980-9), vol. 2: *1919-1982* (1989), pp. 152-64.
[19] Thomas Mann, *Goethe und die Demokratie: The Taylorian Lecture 1949* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 4.
[20] Mandelkow, *Goethe in Deutschland*, vol. 2, pp. 88-108.
[21] See Leppmann, *German Image of Goethe*, p. 33.
[22] W. Daniel Wilson, *Das Goethe-Tabu: Protest und Menschenrechte im klassischen Weimar* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), p. 291.
[23] Walter Benjamin accused Goethe of being a liberal in the abstract sense, but a decided reactionary in practice. Walter Benjamin, 'Goethe', *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972-85), vol. 2.2 (1977), pp. 705-39 (p. 737).

excessive labour, the sale of Weimar prisoners to the Hessian army during the American Revolution, and his opposition to the new federal constitution in Weimar in 1816. Most damningly of all, Wilson argues that Goethe's involvement in such decisions was often far from reluctant.[24] Wolfgang Rothe argues that Goethe did not share the main Enlightenment values of optimism and belief in society's potential for self-cultivation, and claims that only more courageous scholars admit that he was an avowed conservative and occasionally staunch reactionary.[25] Klaus Epstein describes Goethe's politics as 'deeply conservative', and argues that he opposed the Revolution because it destroyed the 'natural order' of society, and was founded on 'utopian dreams' with 'disastrous results'.[26]

Other critics give a more liberal portrayal of the political Goethe. T.J. Reed presents him as a pragmatic conservative, who was not inherently opposed to change, but thought it prudent to wait until a clearly better alternative to the status quo emerged.[27] Reed keenly places Goethe as an enlightened thinker, as does Hans Reiss. Reed describes Goethe's commitment to Weimar Classicism as a 'continuation and culmination of Enlightenment individualism'.[28] Reiss depicts Goethe, along with Kant, as a liberal cosmopolitan with conservative leanings, though with a stronger strain of conservatism than Kant due primarily to his belief that freedom and social equality could not co-exist. Goethe's response to the Revolution was, like Kant's, steeped in Enlightenment concerns, most notably the self-realisation of the individual within the rule of law and the rejection of tyranny.[29] Gustav Seibt

[24] Wilson, *Goethe-Tabu*, p. 290.
[25] Wolfgang Rothe, *Der politische Goethe: Dichter und Staatsdiener im deutschen Spätabsolutismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), pp. 213-15.
[26] Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 485.
[27] T.J. Reed, *The Classical Centre: Goethe and Weimar 1775-1832* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 175.
[28] T.J. Reed, 'Goethe and Enlightenment', *Enlightenment Essays in Memory of Robert Shackleton*, ed. Giles Barber and C.P. Courtney (Oxford: Alden, 1988), pp. 257-70 (p. 270). Reed also praises Goethe's contribution to the 'Enlightenment ideal of education' (*Bildung*) in *Light in Germany: Scenes from an Unknown Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 157.
[29] Hans Reiss, 'The French Revolution and the ''Aufklärung''. Two perspectives: Kant and Goethe', *The French Revolution and the Age of Goethe*, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1989), pp. 51-66.

identifies Goethe's remark, made after his intervention to prevent the lynching of a committed Jacobin by a crowd in Mainz, as the nub of his opposition to the Revolution: 'es liegt nun einmal in meiner Natur, ich will lieber eine Ungerechtigkeit begehen als Unordnung ertragen'.[30] Seibt explains how the quotation was often perceived as an authoritarian defence of order at all costs, but offers alternative interpretations, such as opposition to the Terror and an avowal of civil courage in exceptional circumstances.[31] One of the most positive appraisals of Goethe's politics comes from Ekkehart Krippendorff, who regards Goethe as a strikingly prescient — even radical — thinker. Goethe's belief that government should be on a small scale, with its representatives visibly engaged in public life, provides, Krippendorff argues, a healthy antidote to the centralising and nationalistic tendencies of Revolutionary France and nineteenth-century Germany, and an alternative set of values to the international power politics of the twentieth century. By favouring lived experience and concrete realities over abstract principles and grand rhetoric, Goethe's politics come closer to the ideal of republicanism than the French Revolution and many subsequent regimes.[32]

Advocates of both the 'reactionary' and 'liberal' views of Goethe often agree, however, that he opposed mass participation in politics. Wilson describes distrust of the lower orders as a 'constant of Goethe's political outlook', and Epstein argues that Goethe 'feared and hated' the Revolution, as it 'allowed the masses to claim power they were unqualified to exercise', and to believe in the 'legitimacy of breaking up the legitimate order of society'.[33] Reiss agrees that Goethe was 'profoundly suspicious of the mob', as he feared that they would impede a government from spreading Enlightenment values.[34] This is

[30] Goethe, *Campagne in Frankreich*, *Werke*, vol. 16 (1994), pp. 386-572 (pp. 599-600 and p. 603).
[31] Gustav Seibt, *Mit einer Art von Wut: Goethe in der Revolution* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2014), p. 164.
[32] Ekkehart Krippendorff, *Goethe: Politik gegen den Zeitgeist* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1999), pp. 186-209.
[33] W. Daniel Wilson, 'Goethe and the political world', *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed. Lesley Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 207-18 (p. 210), and Epstein, *German Conservatism*, p. 485.
[34] Reiss, 'Kant and Goethe', p. 61.

particularly important in the context of the Revolution, which sought to represent the interests of a nation of politically endowed *citoyens,* and owed much of its impetus to popular revolt and the power of the crowd.[35]

There is also a school of thought which sees Goethe as naturally unpolitical. F.J. Lamport epitomises this approach. Lamport argues that the writer's literary response to the Revolution reflects his failure to come to terms with the 'hostile', 'alien', and 'inhuman' world of politics.[36] He calls Goethe a 'conservative', but equates this term to an 'Unpolitischer': somebody who deems his own political opinions 'so utterly and self-evidently right that he refuses to recognize them as *political* views at all'.[37] Goethe directed much of his artistic efforts towards denying his description of the French Revolution in *Campagne in Frankreich* as an epoch-defining event: 'Von hier und heute geht eine neue Epoche in der Weltgeschichte aus, und ihr könnt sagen, ihr seid dabei gewesen'.[38] According to Lamport, Goethe's works seek to assert that the Revolution did not mark a 'sudden, violent, Volcanic disruption of the organic continuity of human life and human history', but that 'the world and society were still in essentials the same, familiar, and unchanged'.[39] Goethe's frequent preference for comedy over tragedy in his Revolutionary works, and his tendency to portray 'positive' characters as unpolitical (or even anti-political) and 'negative' characters as highly political, exemplify his view of politics as frivolous and/or distasteful.[40]

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[35] George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 1.
[36] F.J. Lamport, ''Entfernten Weltgetöses Widerhall'': Politics in Goethe's Plays', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 44 (1973-4), 41-62 (p. 41).
[37] *Ibid*., 42.
[38] Goethe, *Campagne in Frankreich*, p. 436. This is not a direct quotation from Goethe, but a recollection of what he said to the Prussian Army after their defeat at Valmy on 19 September 1792 (*Campagne in Frankreich* was written between 1819 and 1822). His immediate description of the event in a letter to Karl Ludwig von Knebel is more modest: 'Es ist mir sehr lieb daß ich das alles mit Augen gesehen habe und daß ich, wenn von dieser wichtigen Epoche die Rede sagen kann: et quorum pars minima fui'. *Werke*, vol. 30 (1991), p. 636.
[39] Lamport, 'Politics in Goethe's Plays', 52.
[40] *Ibid*., 56 and 42-6.

Before presuming to find political leanings in the texts, then, such an interpretation of Goethe must be taken into account.

Such criticism inspires important questions which simmer beneath this thesis. How does Goethe's response to the Revolution locate him within Enlightenment thought and political modernity? This work does not respond to these questions in detail, and cannot do justice to all the debates and ambiguities surrounding these two terms. It therefore presumes some of their core components. It considers the main features of the Enlightenment to be independence of thought, realisation of individual potential, and tolerance. How do the texts portray the use of independent thought and freedom of expression (particularly among the *Bügertum*), the individual's capacity to fulfil his potential, and religious and political pluralism? How did Goethe judge human nature, and how did this shape his expectations concerning the future of civilisation? Political modernity is judged according to the criteria of democracy and representative government. To what extent is Goethe comfortable with modern government if it is to be understood as a separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers, which endeavours to represent the interests of the governed? What right have the governed to participate in politics?

This thesis investigates the reasons for Goethe's response to the French Revolution via his fictional writings, mostly those which were completed and published in the 1790s. It seeks to detect patterns and recurrent themes in the political messages of the texts, as well as inconsistencies and contradictions. The social hierarchy is the main prism through which the texts are analysed, and this aims to show how Goethe's response to the Revolution reflected his wider thoughts on its workings. The relationship between the social ranks, their political responsibilities, and their right to political involvement are frequent considerations. The two texts published before the Revolution are *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773) and *Egmont* (1788). Their comparison in the first chapter provides an insight into Goethe's political thought

before 1789, particularly on the crucial subject of freedom, and enables access to the debate on whether the Revolution represented a philosophical turning point.

This thesis does not intend to consistently compare the content of the fictional works and Goethe's personal biography and political activity. Fleeting references to Goethe's letters and diary entries feature, but are not the main source for analysis. Nor does this work deal with Goethe's response to the later (i.e. post-1803) stage of the Revolution. It does not examine, for example, his attitude towards Napoleon and the French occupation of Germany. Similarly, little attention is paid to Goethe's later reflections on the Revolution, such as *Campagne in Frankreich*, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, and his recorded conservations with Johann Peter Eckermann.

Literary fiction requires careful treatment as a vehicle for analysing Goethe's politics. The ideas in the works do not necessarily reflect the author's thoughts, and there is the potential for conflicting viewpoints which may never be resolved. Furthermore, even a fictional work with some political content is seldom solely concerned with conveying a political message. There are other factors, including genre, audience expectations, and the writer's relationship to his patron. On the other hand, literary fiction has the potential to liberate the author intellectually. It gives scope to elucidate the benefits and drawbacks of political approaches, to flirt with ideas which one may avoid in a public or official capacity, and to express subtle misgivings over decisions made or positions taken. Although Goethe's actions in his political life may have sometimes appeared illiberal, his fictional works may show his political imagination to be more generous: as Privy Councillor, for example, Goethe signed a document ordering the execution of a young mother for infanticide, but when Gretchen in *Faust* commits the same crime, she is treated with compassion, and shows moral heroism in refusing to flee with Faust and Mephisto. The thesis rarely consults Goethe's later reflections on the Revolution, for it aims to analyse a more direct response to events.

Recollections allow for greater knowledge and perspective on a subject, but are also vulnerable to memory lapses, confusion of separate happenings, and retrospective attempts — born out of hindsight — to withhold, deny, or refashion previous opinions. The relative immediacy afforded by current texts also enables the reader to see how Goethe dealt with problems as they arose, and to chart any developments or shifts of emphasis in his political thought.

The treatment of the fictional works is historicist, not theoretical. It considers the contexts in which they were written, as well as the expectations of audiences or patrons. It also acknowledges questions of genre, but is not dominated by them. Such an approach avoids the presumption that Goethe's response to the Revolution was based on a specific set of concerns or principles. It is designed to help fiction inform fact.

The thesis argues that Goethe did support the established political order, but not unconditionally. He was more critical of monarchy and aristocracy, and had a more judicious view on their use of power, than his detractors claim. Similarly, it shows that Goethe had greater faith in the *Bürgertum* for political engagement than is widely assumed. Goethe's support for the continuation of the monarchy and aristocracy as the main levers of power was accompanied by a sense of their urgent need to reform. Central to Goethe's politics was the concern for an orderly freedom: he was vehemently opposed to tyranny and absolute political conviction — in whatever form.

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The first chapter focuses on historical dramas, and their main characters, who frequently invoke 'Freiheit': *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Egmont*. This chapter seeks clues as to Goethe's conception of freedom before the Revolution, and asks how this informed his attitude towards the Revolutionary striving for 'liberté'. The second chapter investigates the relationship

between the *Bürgertum* and the *Adel* in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. The main question is the extent to which the nobility help or hinder Wilhelm's personal development (*Bildung*), and what this says about *Bürger* who seek to improve their social and educational status. The *Bürgertum* also plays a prominent part in the third chapter, which interrogates Goethe's view of its penetration of the ruling elite. Analysis revolves around four texts which feature politically-engaged *Bürger*: *Die Aufgeregten, Der Bürgergeneral, Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, and *Herrmann und Dorothea*. The French Revolutionary wars provide the background for *Herrmann und Dorothea*, and their effects represent the large-scale drive to wrest power from the *ancien régime* and put it in the hands of former subjects. The final chapter asks how far Goethe deserves to be branded a *Fürstenknecht*, as he was by some of his nineteenth-century detractors. *Torquato Tasso*, *Der Groß-Cophta*, *Reineke Fuchs*, and *Die natürliche Tochter* stimulate discussion on the responsibilities of those in power, and the representation of those around the pinnacle of power: courtiers. It seeks to understand why Goethe opposed the destruction of the French aristocracy and (later) monarchy during the Revolution, but also why he thought they found themselves in this situation. What could be done to avoid a similar fate in Germany?

Chapter One

The Conception of Freedom in *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Egmont*

This chapter treats the representation of freedom in *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Egmont* by analysing the relationship of the individual to his polity. In doing so, it poses the central question: according to the plays, to what extent should rulers rule and subjects be subjected? More precisely: what freedoms do *Götz* and *Egmont* show rulers as having over their subjects, and what freedoms should subjects expect?

The chapter explores these questions by adopting Isaiah Berlin's distinction between freedom *to* and freedom *from*. In his lecture *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Berlin identifies the issue of obedience and coercion as the 'central question of politics'.[1] He then outlines the 'negative' and 'positive' sense of freedom. The former is freedom *from* interference by others, with Berlin explaining that an individual's freedom is proportionate to his 'area of non-interference'.[2] The main argument behind obedience and coercion is how large that area of non-interference should be. 'Positive' freedom is the individual's freedom *to* 'be his own master'. This includes the ability to be 'a doer — deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men […]'. [3] If men were to be their own master, Berlin asks, how could they best use this freedom to avoid having a destructive influence on society? It was a matter of distinguishing one's 'higher nature' and 'lower nature'. Higher nature was the self 'at its best': an individual who saw himself not as an isolated figure, but as part of a ''social 'whole'', and was able to identify his long term interests. Realisation of one's higher nature could be achieved through membership of a

[1] Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 6.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 8.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 16.

church, tribe, institution, state, or even 'the great society of the living, the dead and the yet unborn', which imposed its 'collective will' on the individual. 'Lower nature', by contrast, was a less refined individualism.[4] If the individual could not realise his higher nature unaided, he would have to surrender some of his liberty to a larger organisation (such as a political party).

Although the positive and negative interpretations of freedom recognise the need for an individual to have his 'private space', they are separated by the extent to which they believe that government has a right to interfere by coercing members of a society.[5] Against the backdrop of such thoughts, the chapter focuses on the following three themes: the direction of political power, the form of freedom, and rebellion and resistance.

The direction of political power considers the responsibilities of governors towards the governed, and asks whether certain parts of the social hierarchy, or certain individuals, should have a greater right to political influence than others. The section on the form of freedom analyses the impact of different political structures and leaders on freedom, and asks how the plays deal with 'traditional' liberty (freedom that is socially and historically conditioned) and 'rational' liberty (freedom which is more systematic and universally applicable). The section on resistance and rebellion considers the relationship between freedom and loyalty towards rulers and the sovereign. It also asks what constitutes a legitimate grievance against a ruler, and what justifies physical resistance. In considering these topics, the representation of the private and public realm is particularly important, and this theme governs much of the chapter.

Before tackling these questions, it must be asked why Goethe wrote these plays which feature characters and events which long preceded his lifetime. Some explanations are that he

[4] *Ibid*., p. 17.
[5] *Ibid*., p. 14.

wished to use the past to inform the present, that he was attracted to the figures of Egmont and Götz, and felt that their experiences partly reflected his own. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe described *Götz* as a portrayal of a significant period in world history and a turning point in the history of states.[6] The same could be said of *Egmont*. The two plays focus on the decline of feudalism and rise of absolutism: on the transition from a society based on personal and traditional loyalties and customs to one based on centralised administration and law-making, what might be called a more 'rational' system of government. Such a transition entails confrontation between the drivers of the social and political change and those more attached to the status quo. Division and conflict, caused by religion or disenchantment with the ruling elite, accompany this political upheaval.

Published in 1773, *Götz* depicts an era in which the feudal system was being undermined by the expansion of the territorial states, and which saw the empowerment of the territorial princes at the expense of the *Ritterstand*: knights in the service of the emperor. As knights were subjected to higher tax and a curtailment of their rights, this led to a rebellion known as the Knights' War. Another erosion of feudalism came via the introduction of Roman Law which aimed to replace the particular and discretionary system of justice (exemplified by the practices of feuding and the *Fehmgericht*) with a theoretical and all-encompassing one. It was also the time of the early Reformation, when the teachings of Martin Luther were beginning to gain traction throughout Germany and the rest of Europe. Herder drew Goethe's attention to the period. In an essay entitled *Über die Reichsgeschichte: ein historischer Spaziergang*, he described the reigns of Emperor Maximilian and Charles V as the most crucial epoch since the Roman Empire, and the basis of all new European constitutions.[7] Herder also referred Goethe to Justus Möser's essays, which included *Von dem*

[6] Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, *Werke*, vol. 14 (1986), p. 834.
[7] J.G. Herder, 'Über die Reichsgeschichte: ein historischer Spaziergang', *Kritische Wälder*, 3, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, 33 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877-1913), vol. 3 (1878), pp. 462-71 (pp. 470-71).

Faustrechte (1769).[8] This argued that feuding was not a disruption of public order but a means of self-help and fighting injustice, and coincided with one of the noblest periods in German history: 'Die Zeiten des Faustrechts in Deutschland scheinen mir allemal diejenigen gewesen zu sein, worin unsere Nation das größte Gefühl der Ehre, die mehrste körperliche Tugend und eine eigne Nationalgröße gezeiget hat'.[9] Goethe also discovered the historical Götz von Berlichingen through studying Johann Stefan Pütter's *Grundriß der Staatsveränderung des teutschen Reichs* (1764), which deepened his knowledge of legal history and of the *Fehden* which had determined knightly conduct in the medieval period. Steffan Davies describes Götz as a 'figure of rebellion against absolutism and […] the representative of a national imperial tradition independent of the princely courts'. Götz is part of a historical drama, with a sense of a national past and issues which it raises 'made alive' to the contemporary observer.[10]

Davies and Volker Neuhaus both see the play as 'revolutionary' in form as well as content, for it represented a break from neo-classical drama and German imitation of it: 'das radikale Neue, das nicht in alte Schläuche paßt'. Neuhaus mentions how contemporary German 'progressives' agreed that the work belonged to the *Sturm und Drang*, but argued over whether it embraced or opposed Enlightenment principles.[11] The work recalls the plays of Shakespeare, as it features a hero who is distanced from the other characters and his surrounding society, and portrays a wide cross-section of that society.[12] These aspects of the play were politically significant, as the deviation from neo-classical form challenged the hegemony of the princely courts and their 'Frenchified' manners. Carl August had a distinct

[8] Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, p. 648
[9] Justus Möser, *Patriotische Phantasien I*, *Justus Mösers Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Werner Kohlschmidt and others, 14 vols (Oldenburg-Berlin: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1944-90), vol. 4 (1943), pp. 263-64.
[10] Steffan Davies, 'Goethe, Theatre and Politics: Götz von Berlichingen from 1771 to 1804', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 70 (2000), 29-45 (p. 31).
[11] Volker Neuhaus, '*Götz von Berlichingen*', *Goethe Handbuch*, ed. Bernd Witte and others, 6 vols (Stuttgart & Weimar: Metzler, 1996-9), vol. 2 (1996), pp. 78-99 (p. 95).
[12] Davies, 'Theatre and Politics', 30-1.

preference for French theatre, and Goethe would later have to adapt his literary output to his patron's tastes.[13] Literary rebellion could, then, be interpreted as resistance to the social elite.

Götz and *Egmont* are both historical dramas set at different stages of the sixteenth century, and deal with the transition from feudalism to absolutism. The chapter will later show in detail how Goethe integrated the Knights' War and the Peasants' War into *Götz*. In featuring these, *Götz* covers two movements brought about by turning-points in the Holy Roman Empire, and which helped to shape the society in which Goethe lived.

Set in the sixteenth century, and completed in 1787, *Egmont* depicts the last vestiges of a feudal system threatened by the onset of absolutism. In this play it is not the nobility which is increasing its power, but the monarchy. However, the designs of the monarchy are similar to those of the territorial princes in *Götz*: King Philip II of Spain envisages a more centralised and bureaucratised state with a uniform system of justice. Just as the *Ritterstand* of the Holy Roman Empire saw its rights and freedoms diminished as it became more dependent on the princes and clergy, the Netherlandish nobility saw its traditional rights and privileges, as well as those of its subjects, swept away by the uniformity favoured by the Spanish crown. The cause of Philipp's intervention in the Spanish Netherlands was a series of religious disturbances by Protestant dissenters (mainly Calvinists) and iconoclasts who were threatening the supremacy of the Catholic Church. In order to quell the disturbances, Philipp sent the Duke of Alba to restore order in the Provinces and to execute the Netherlandish leaders he held responsible for appeasing, and even supporting, the dissenters — including the widely admired Lamoral Graf von Egmont (1522-68).

Reflecting on *Götz* in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe wrote: 'Nachdem ich im Götz […] das Symbol einer bedeutenden Weltepoche nach meiner Art abgespiegelt hatte, da sah

[13] *Ibid*., 32.

ich mich nach einem ähnlichen Wendepunkt der Staatengeschichte sorgfältig um'. He added that the revolt of the Netherlanders caught his attention, and that Egmont embodied deep-rooted values which could not withstand strong and cunningly deployed despotism.[14] In *Egmont*, Goethe wanted to portray the struggles of an exceptional individual against the political tide. When setting the background for the play, Goethe consulted many historical sources, most notably an account of the Dutch revolt by the Jesuit Famianus Strada, *De bello belgico decades duae*. This work portrayed events from a Spanish and Catholic perspective. For a more Protestant and Netherlandish take, Goethe also consulted the German translation of Emanuel van Meteren's *Historica belgica* (*Eygentliche und vollkommene Historische Beschreibung deß Niederlaendischen Kriegs*). Influenced by the particularism of Justus Möser's *Patriotische Phantasien*, Goethe was drawn to the suppression of the Netherlanders' traditional rights by the Spanish Crown.

According to Dieter Borchmeyer, Goethe shared Möser's interpretation of the rationalisation of state power.[15] Möser argued that the current trend for uniform laws and decrees jeopardised basic freedom, and lamented that the senior officials of the justice departments wanted to reduce law-making to simple principles, and to govern the state according to academic theory.[16] Referring to Montesquieu, Möser argued that diversity in the administration of law and government was more natural, and provided a barrier to despotism: '[…] je einfacher die Gesetze, und je allgemeiner die Regeln werden, desto despotischer, trockner und armseliger wird ein Staat'.[17] It was partly here, then, that *Egmont* had contemporary relevance: Goethe sensed the erosion of provincial particularities in the Empire by the increasing bureaucracy and centralisation of enlightened absolutism (Borchmeyer

[14] Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, p. 834.
[15] Dieter Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft und französische Revolution bei Goethe: Adliges und bürgerliches Wertsystem im Urteil der Weimarer Klassik* (Kronberg: Athenäum Verlag, 1977), p. 257.
[16] Justus Möser, *Patriotische Phantasien II*, *Werke*, vol. 5 (1945), p. 22.
[17] *Ibid*., p. 23.

regards Egmont's criticism of Alba's denial of the Netherlanders' heritage as criticism of this development).[18] This fear was, perhaps, made more acute by the attempts of the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II to centralise and rationalise the administration of the Austrian Netherlands in the 1780s.

Like Götz, Goethe found Egmont an attractive personality, and described the hero's 'Leutseligkeit' and 'persönliche Tapferkeit' as the essence of his being. Despite meticulous research, Goethe took liberties with the fictional Egmont. He made him younger than the historical figure, who had a wife and eleven children. Goethe's Egmont is single, but has a love interest in Clärchen. Goethe later accounted for these changes: 'Hätte ich den Egmont so machen wollen, wie ihn die Geschichte meldet, als Vater von einem Dutzend Kindern, so würde sein leichtsinniges Handeln sehr absurd erschienen sein'.[19] Representing a youthful Egmont without constraints, therefore, better enables him to embody freedom than somebody encumbered with family life. Goethe also found something of what he called the 'daemonic' in Egmont. He was a larger than life character who surpassed usual measures of morality, but proved a driving force of history. Goethe reflected on the clash between Egmont and Alba as a conflict between both sides of the daemonic, in which the attractive side ('das Liebenswürdige') falls and the hated one ('das Gehaßte') triumphs, leaving the audience wishing for a third kind to emerge.[20] The play is based on a conflict of interests, both national and social. Initially, the political action revolved not around the conflict between despotism and freedom for the people, but around the rivalry between different personalities of ruler, and religious uprisings.

[18] Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, p. 258.
[19] Goethe in conversation with J.P. Eckermann, 31.01.1827, *Werke*, vol. 39 (1999), p. 226.
[20] Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, p. 841.

The political content of the drama has been disputed. Opinions range from Fritz Brüggemann and Friedrich Sengle, who see *Egmont* respectively as the first German political drama and as one of the most intense historical dramas, to Emil Staiger, who sees it as evidence of Goethe's political naivety. Arguing that the Netherlanders are far ahead of their time in resisting absolutism and insisting on the right to have a say in the fate of their country, Brüggemann also describes the notion of freedom presented in the play as one which was not achieved until Goethe's own lifetime.[21] Emil Staiger, however, contends that, although Goethe is clear in the play as to how political freedom should be achieved and protected, the political Egmont is no more than a well-meaning fool, if an admirable human being.[22] According to T.J. Reed, the dialogue between Alba and Egmont is an example of *Realpolitik.* Alba's description of the people as eternally immature is 'the flattest possible rejection of the Enlightenment's main principle, in the name of absolute power', and his 'cynical cat and mouse' capture of Egmont, who has trusted in a dialogue with authority, confronts the reader with a 'cold political reality'.[23] Despite calling it a 'historical tragedy', and claiming that the hero's legacy cannot be considered 'purely political', Matthew Bell argues that the politics of *Egmont* 'look more like a pro-Republican version of the Julius Caesar story', with the 'popular will' of the Netherlanders presented as a more 'coherent and positive', but also more 'individuated', force than in Shakespeare's play.[24] For Bell, Egmont may be politically naïve, but his demise is not due to a character conflict with Oranien. It is with the style of politics represented by Oranien, Alba, and the Regent Margarethe von Parma: 'a modern style of politics concerned narrowly with success and not with the broader

[21] Fritz Brüggemann, 'Goethes ''Egmont'', *Jahrbuch der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, 11 (1925), 151-72 (p. 154), and Friedrich Sengle, *Das deutsche Geschichtsdrama* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1952), pp. 26-8.
[22] Emil Staiger, *Goethe*, 3 vols (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1952-9), vol. 1: *1749-1786* (1952), p. 298.
[23] T.J. Reed, 'Talking to Tyrants: Dialogues with Power in Eighteenth-Century Germany', *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), 63-79 (p. 75).
[24] Matthew Bell, ''This was a man!' Goethe's *Egmont* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*'', *Modern Language Review*, 111 (2016), 141-61 (p. 147 and pp. 143-46).

sense of the good life'. Bell implies, though, that Egmont is an even greater victim of history, as his 'traditional values' see him succumb to the 'modern age'.[25]

Egmont and Götz are involved in a struggle for freedom, and the issue of 'Freiheit' provides the political focus of both plays. It is necessary to consider the connotations of the term when Goethe was writing them, and during the periods in which they are set.

Hierarchical Freedom and Universal Freedom

The ancients viewed freedom primarily in opposition to slavery. Aristotle defined a free person as somebody who is dependent on his own will, not on that of another person. Only in philosophy did freedom exceed the distinction between free men and slaves, coming to signify something more internal and spiritual, which caused a fundamental tension with later conceptions of the word.[26] The Reformation had a marked effect upon the spiritual understanding of *Freiheit*. According to Luther's teachings, every man was equal in the eyes of God, and should know no superior other than the Lord, but this did not extend to earthly matters. Luther advocated conformity to the ecclesiastical and social order, and putting oneself in the service of one's fellow man: a combination of freedom and dependence ('Freiheit und Bindung').[27] The Protestant reformers saw Christian freedom as a spiritual reality, but the spiritual conception eventually exceeded the theological sphere, and contributed to the early modern understanding of *Freiheit*.

The teaching of the natural equality of all men before God challenged the tendency to see freedom as a symbol of social status. Freedom was not an abstract legal term, but a

[25] *Ibid*., 147.
[26] Werner Conze, 'Freiheit der Philosophen', *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexicon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner and others, 8 vols (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1972-97), vol. 2 (1975), pp. 435-36.
[27] Gerhard May, 'Christliche Freiheit', *Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2 (1975), pp. 443-46 (p. 446).

functional and limited one which correlated to a person's position in the social hierarchy: *ständische Freiheit*.[28] The jurist and researcher Johann Jacob Moser (1701-85) claimed that free people might have a larger or smaller amount of freedom, but all had a basic portion of common rights ('gemeinschaftliche Rechte').[29] In the eighteenth century, property had become a particularly prominent factor in the social distribution of freedom: the greater a person's property, the greater his freedom.

Although the concept of *ständische Freiheit* still prevailed at the time of Goethe's writing of *Egmont* and *Götz*, intellectual and philosophical — as well as religious — figures, from both within and outside the Holy Roman Empire, continued to modify and vary the conception of freedom. The argument boiled down to a belief in increasing an individual's freedom to return him to a more 'natural' state against a belief that an individual should concede some of his freedom to a sovereign in the interest of civilisation, preventing a return to anarchy. Many contemporaries and later scholars positioned Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the former camp.[30] Rousseau described the state of nature as a condition in which an individual had full sovereignty over himself, and this could only be rediscovered by the removal of all social ties, distinctions, and authority. Arthur Lovejoy emphasises, however, that Rousseau's description of the state of nature should not be confused with a veneration of primitivism.[31] Rousseau, indeed, argued that the state of nature prevented man from becoming a social being and realising his talents, and believed that his best — but not ideal — condition was in the patriarchal and communitarian society which preceded political society: '[…] cette période du développement des facultés humaines, tenant un juste milieu entre l'indolence de l'état primitif et la pétulante activité de notre amour-propre, dût être l'époque la plus

[28] Christof Dipper, 'Ständische Freiheit: Jura et libertates', *Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2 (1975), pp. 446-556 (p. 448).
[29] *Ibid*., p. 450.
[30] William A. Dunning, for example, argues that Rousseau saw the state of nature as 'vastly preferable to the social or civil state'. *A History of Political Theories III: from Rousseau to Spencer* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 8.
[31] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Essay in the History of Ideas* (New York: George Braziller, 1955), pp. 14-37.

heureuse et la plus durable'.[32] Rousseau did, though, see political society as a negative step which had failed to remedy the problems of the 'fourth stage' of human development: the last pre-political stage, in which the establishment of private property in land and the accumulation of capital led to increasing inequality in the wealth and power of individuals, and a consequent increase in human ambition and a desire to prove oneself superior to others (a*mour propre*). This had created a society based on mutual harm, in which neither rich nor poor found any security.[33] Rousseau's view of political society conflicted with that of Thomas Hobbes who, a century earlier, had put forward a theory of civil society and 'political' freedom which, he argued, would alleviate the mutual brutality which Rousseau characterised as the 'fourth stage' of human development. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes argued that man surrendered some of his personal sovereignty in return for protection and an orderly state. Each person should, in effect, say to every other: '*I authorize, and give up my right of governing myself to, this man or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him and authorize all his actions in like manner*'.[34]

It was not until the 1790s that political freedom started to be seen in the context of popular participation in sovereignty, a development which was consolidated in the nineteenth century. With the maxim 'liberté, égalité, fraternité', the French Revolution sought to combine natural, civil, and political liberty, as exemplified by the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The Revolution arguably enacted Isaiah Berlin's view of 'positive' freedom, as it outlined what citizens were entitled to do as well as the protection they should expect from their government. For many Germans, the attempt to reconcile natural and political freedom was responsible for the Revolution's chaos and bloodshed. Friedrich von Gentz claimed that

[32] Jeans-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes*, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and others, 8 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-64), vol. 3 (1964), pp. 109-229 (p. 160 and p. 171). Lovejoy argues that this passage should be considered the focal point of the *Discours*. Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, p. 32.
[33] Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, pp. 32-7, and Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 176.
[34] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 227.

freedom should be limited and relativized in civil society, and denounced the Declaration of the Rights of Man as the perilous accident of a shallow philosophy and infantile politics: 'Der Philosoph formt Systeme, der Pöbel schmiedet Mordgewehre daraus'.[35]

For much of history, then, freedom was seen to entail rights to do certain things and not others. Hierarchical freedom (*ständische Freiheit*) meant that some members of society had more rights to do more things than others. The French Revolution, by contrast, advocated a universal and egalitarian form of liberty which shattered the notion of social hierarchy and the principle of subordination. According to the Revolutionary ideal, no social group should be much more powerful than another.

Direction of political power: asserting authority

Götz and *Egmont* feature struggles both for power and between different kinds of power. *Götz* pits knights of the lower nobility against self-aggrandising territorial princes, while Egmont is part of a Netherlandish nobility whose rights and privileges are threatened by the absolutist tendency of the Spanish crown. The two plays include grievances and rebellion against members of the ruling elite, which rigorously tests the latter's application of power.

The confrontation between Alba and Egmont is the dramatic climax of *Egmont*, and is the scene in which freedom becomes the central issue of the play.[36] As the characters exchange views on how best to deal with the Protestant uprisings, they expose their conflicting philosophies of government. Irmgard Hobson describes their meeting as a clash of two 'fundamentally' different personalities and representatives of 'two great moving forces in

[35] Friedrich Gentz, ''Ueber die Deklaration der Rechte', quoted in Diethelm Klippel, 'Der politische Freiheitsbegriff im modernen Naturrecht (17./18. Jahrhundert)', *Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2 (1975), pp. 469-88 (p. 483).
[36] Irmgard Hobson, 'Oranien and Alba: The Two Political Dialogues in *Egmont*', *Germanic Review*, 50 (1975), 260-74 (p. 270).

history'.[37] An analogous scene in *Götz* occurs between Weislingen — a former knight who has thrown in his lot with the territorial princes — and the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian. In their meeting, they discuss how to respond to the Knights' War led by rebellious characters, such as Götz and Selbitz. Perhaps the main distinction to emerge between the approaches to rule taken by Alba and Weislingen, against those of Egmont and Maximilian, is one of forced obedience as opposed to voluntary obedience: either people obey the sovereign out of goodwill or they are compelled to do so via verbal or physical force. In a broader sense, it represents a clash between a dying feudal regime and the modern state. The former is founded on trust and loyalty between the social orders whereas the latter is based on an increase and rationalisation of state power. As Hartmut Reinhardt indicates, Alba enforces absolutism through doctrinaire and terroristic means.[38] According to H.M. Waidson, this makes him 'the villain of the play' — though not completely villainous.[39]

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The violence of Alba and Weislingen is not necessarily pathological, but symptomatic of the absolutist regimes they represent. Alba deals with the Calvinist iconoclasts brutally, and does not tolerate any dissent within the Spanish Netherlands. Similarly, Weislingen advises the Emperor to deal with Götz and the equally troublesome knights harshly, as this is what the territorial princes would have prescribed. The plays depict violence as almost a prerequisite for the assertion of absolutism.

Alba and Weislingen advocate brutality and humiliation in order to deter rebels, and dismiss leniency as weakness. Alba echoes Weislingen in his insistence that Berlichingen and

[37] *Ibid*., 269.
[38] Hartmut Reinhardt, '*Egmont*', *Interpretationen: Goethes Dramen,* ed. Walter Hinderer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992), pp. 158-98 (p. 188).
[39] H.M. Waidson, 'Introduction', Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Egmont* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), pp. v-xxxii (p. xxv).

Selbitz are dealt with severely ('mit Feuer und Schwert').[40] As Weislingen claims that the very knights who are responsible for stirring up the rebellious mob would abuse a mild response from the Emperor, Alba argues that the Calvinist iconoclasts will not be deterred by Egmont's light-handedness. Weislingen argues that it is possible to 'tame' ('bändigen') the rebels by making an example of the main culprits: they should be publicly disgraced so that they are never tempted to rebel again (p. 332). Similarly, Alba claims that issuing a general pardon will result in contempt for the monarch and his representatives, and would even imply that the ruling elite secretly enjoys seeing its authority challenged.[41] Weislingen shows no attempt to understand the motives of the dissident imperial subjects, but simply regards the uprisings as a bout of collective madness ('Schwindelgeist': p. 332).

Alba's and Weislingen's support of brutal measures reflects a deep mistrust and contempt of their social inferiors. Alba exemplifies this when he says that the Netherlanders will not consider themselves free unless they can harm others. Comparing the common people ('ein Volk') to children who never mature, Alba considers the most effective way to deal with them is to curb their freedom ('sie einzuengen': p. 525). For Weislingen, anything short of crushing and humiliating the rebel peasants will cause further uprisings (p. 332). In Alba's and Weislingen's view, then, increased freedom for the common people means increased destruction.

It follows, therefore, that Alba believes that the sovereign should have the freedom to decide what is in his subjects' interest (p. 527). When Egmont asks who is to stand up for the Netherlanders' freedom, Alba responds: 'Was ist des Freiesten Freiheit? – Recht zu tun!' (p. 525) This epitomises the absolutist approach to government: subjects can only be safe and

[40] Goethe, *Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand*, *Werke*, vol. 4 (1985), pp. 279-389 (p. 331).
[41] Goethe, *Egmont*, *Werke*, vol. 5 (1988), pp. 459-551 (p. 524).

content if they conform to the ruler's vision of what is best for the polity. The more control the ruling elite exercises over its subjects, the more its subjects will benefit.

The targets of Alba's and Weislingen's intimidation are different, but their reasons for choosing these targets are almost identical. Alba works to disempower the Dutch nobility, whereas Weislingen seeks to increase the power of the German princes. Alba wants to oppress the Provincials and their noble leaders, whereas Weislingen intends to crush the imperial knights who refuse to serve the territorial princes. However, they both target a perceived obstacle to the self-aggrandisement of a section of the social hierarchy, be it the princes in *Götz* or the monarch in *Egmont*.

One distinction between Weislingen and Alba is that the former is encouraging the sovereign to pursue draconian measures, whereas Alba is carrying out draconian measures on the sovereign's behalf. Weislingen takes greater ownership of the brutality that he advocates, as his view is not initially shared by Maximilian. Alba may support the brutal treatment of the Netherlanders that Philip demands. However, as he is executing orders from a political superior, it is possible that he has doubts about the tyranny he inflicts, and that his defiant rhetoric is just an expression of loyalty to the King. He tells Egmont, for instance, that the application of brutality has been conceived by Philip and his advisers, and that he has not been commissioned to assess its merits. Alba also reminds Egmont that it is his duty to carry out Philip's orders, but admits that he may decide *how* to carry them out: 'Rat verlang ich in seinem Namen wie es zu tun sei, nicht was, denn das hat er beschlossen' (p. 527). Both Weislingen and Alba support the maximisation of the ruling elite's power in handling rebellious subjects, and claim that rulers should not rely on goodwill and voluntary obedience, but should cow their subjects into submission.

Another difference between Alba and Weislingen is the extent of doubt over whether they mean what they say. There is strong evidence that Weislingen is supporting the subjugation and humiliation of the knights due to personal ambition and antagonism towards Götz, whereas Alba seems genuinely determined to protect his monarch against insurrection. There is, then, a degree of honour behind Alba's ruthlessness. Weislingen's advice to the Emperor owes much to Adelheid's seduction of him, in which she persuades him that it would be preferable to be a master of princes than the slave of a nobleman (p. 321). Weislingen's influence on the polity is neither as extensive nor as pernicious as Alba's. He neither sets up a network of spies, nor forbids the populace to criticise the regime, but he does order a particularly brutal repression of the Peasants' War, including the burning alive of Metzger.

For securing the obedience of their subjects, Egmont and Maximilian prefer persuasion and magnanimity to dogma and oppression. Unlike Alba, Egmont highly values popular goodwill: 'Und ist der gute Wille eines Volks nicht das sicherste, das edelste Pfand?' According to Egmont, a monarch who attracts this will enjoy voluntary obedience, and not need to resort to brutality. Were Philip to issue a general pardon, it would calm tempers, and cause his subjects to love, trust, and revere him once more (p. 523). Egmont sees forgiveness as not only a more humane, but more effective, way of securing obedience, and argues that rulers who practise it will be held in much higher esteem by their contemporaries and posterity.

While agreeing to punish the knights, the Emperor does not call for such a drastic response as Weislingen. They should be imprisoned and disciplined, he says, but not harmed. Maximilian displays similar compassion towards the other rebels, by declaring that he wishes to spare them for their valour. Beyond a sense of decency, there is a pragmatism to the Emperor's approach: he realises that he might need their support in time of war (p. 332). The

Emperor appears to be moderate and reflective in comparison to the hard and rash Weislingen, rather as Egmont and the Regent Margarethe and her secretary, Machiavell, provide a kinder counterweight to the merciless Alba.

Margarethe is presented as a reluctant regent who is unable to keep control of events. Her opening remark that she has had enough of riding can be seen as a metaphor for her will to be out of the 'saddle' of power. She perceives the sending of Alba to the Provinces as an attempt by Philip to undermine her shaky authority, and does not subscribe to the monarch's draconian methods, as she tries to appease the rebels. However, she does not share Egmont's pragmatism, nor that of her secretary, Machiavell.

Goethe portrays Machiavell as a much grander and more political figure than his historical counterpart, who was merely a messenger to the Regent. Ritchie Robertson interprets this as Goethe's attempt to 'announce that his play was concerned with various ways of conducting politics'.[42] Robertson notes that Machiavell shows much pragmatism in his proposed policies, and that events vindicate his prediction that a draconian approach would unite the nation in opposition against the ruling elite, as Alba's brutality towards the dissenters eventually led to the successful revolt of the Netherlanders.[43]

The politicisation of the fictional Machiavell also invites comparison with his near namesake, Niccolò Machiavelli, as the latter was also an 'extreme exponent of pragmatism'.[44] Machiavell's support for lenient treatment of the Protestant dissenters could be considered 'Machiavellian': it is not based on a belief in the freedom of conscience, but a practical measure for dealing with a problem. It is also one that was advocated by several of the historical Philip's advisers, who drew their ideas from Machiavelli. Machiavelli's

[42] Ritchie Robertson, 'Goethe and Machiavelli', *The Present Word: Culture, Society and the Site of Literature: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Boyle*, ed. John Walker (London: Legenda, 2013), pp. 126-37 (p. 128).
[43] *Ibid*., p. 129.
[44] *Ibid*., p. 126.

Discourses emphasised the importance of historical and political particularism to the inhabitants of a polity, and warned that anybody wishing to alter the form of government should ensure that it 'retains at least the shadow of its ancient customs'. Unlike Egmont, Machiavelli (who called for the unification of the Italian states in *The Prince*) did not mean this as a defence of tradition and custom per se. He just argued that it was the most effective way of implementing radical change, as 'men in general' were 'frequently influenced more by appearances than by the reality'.[45] The compromising of personal principles to wield power is a feature of *The Prince*, however, and is advocated by both Machiavell and Egmont.[46]

Machiavell's thoughts seem similar to Egmont's, and possibly Goethe's. Paul Kerry argues that Machiavell 'propounds a proto-Enlightenment thought' in his attitude towards governing the Dutch provinces, and advocates a 'policy of tolerance' which 'seems modern'.[47] By urging the Regent to officially acknowledge Protestantism and its adherents in the civil order, Machiavell sees the wisdom of running a dual-faith polity in the interest of long-term peace (p. 469). Machiavell apparently shares Margarethe's idealistic wish to unite her subjects around the 'purity' of Catholicism, but pragmatically accepts that trying to resist the new religion will be counter-productive. This approach contrasts sharply with that of the zealously Catholic Philip, who, Machiavell argues, does not understand the following point: 'daß es einem König anständiger ist Bürger zweierlei Glaubens zu regieren als sie durch einander aufzureiben' (p. 470). It also helps to identify Machiavell as one of what Pamela Currie called the modernising 'lawyer-historians' who emerged between 1560 and 1660, and appreciated that 'the sectional and confessional divisions of traditional society caused conflict

[45] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, tr. Leslie J. Walker (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 175.
[46] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, tr. George Bull, intro. Anthony Grafton (London: Penguin, 1961), pp. 84-5.
[47] Paul Kerry, *Enlightenment Thought in the Writings of Goethe* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), p. 56.

and threatened anarchy'.[48] The 'enlightened' part of Machiavell's argument, argues Kerry, comes in his recognition that 'religious pluralism is not necessarily a threat to the civil order'.[49] The problem with Machiavell is that 'his modern world view is years ahead of Philip's and to some extent Margarethe's'.[50]

At first glance, Machiavell's view on the relationship between politics and religion may seem to mirror that of Egmont. He anticipates Egmont's emphasis on the importance of the Netherlanders being ruled by a compatriot, asking: 'Will ein Volk nicht lieber nach seiner Art, von den seinigen regiert werden als von Fremden […]'. As Egmont claims that the provincials will not trust rulers who have no stake in their future, Machiavell says that the Netherlanders will view the Spanish as opportunist plunderers ruling in an unfriendly and distant manner (p. 471). Yet there is a difference in Egmont's and Machiavell's attitude to tradition. Egmont has an emotional relationship to it, inspired by the legacy of his ancestors, and sees it as a desirable feature of government in the Netherlands. There is no evidence that Machiavell has the same affinity for tradition, but he realises that many of the Regent's subjects do. It is, therefore, a *sensible* feature of provincial government. Although they may start from different dispositions, Egmont and Machiavell politically converge.

If Machiavell is to be taken, as Paul Kerry suggests, as a proto-Enlightenment thinker, it raises the question whether Egmont's political outlook is also before his time. This is, perhaps, implausible. The main point is more likely to be that the backward-looking Egmont and the forward-thinking Machiavell agree on the same policy. However, it is possible that Egmont is unusual for his time: he lives instinctively and does not contemplate his actions

[48] Pamela Currie, *Literature as Social Action: Modernist and Traditionalist Narratives in Germany in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995), p. 48.
[49] Kerry, *Enlightenment Thought*, p. 56.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 57.

deeply. He does not rule according to a theory or ideology, but a disposition: what he deems the best practical outcome within given circumstances.

Regardless of the extent to which Goethe intended Machiavell as an approximation of Machiavelli, Machiavell certainly adds to the political gravitas of the play — and of Egmont. Machiavell's approach to governing is not cavalier, but reasonable: it is based on an assessment of human nature and the likely outcome of certain measures. As Heinrich Clairmont notes, Machiavell provides a cerebral grounding to Egmont's attractive personal qualities. By explaining Egmont's (the freedom warrior's) liberal art of governing, and reiterating the importance of history and tradition in statecraft, Machiavell (the historical prophet) supports and clarifies the hero's conception of freedom and means of administering it. He thereby helps to emphasise the distinction between the traditional Netherlandish constitution and the Spanish governorship, and the inevitable conflict which will arise from it.[51]

This conflict is encapsulated in Act Four. Yet, although their exchange may constitute the dramatic climax of the play, Alba and Egmont do not represent diametrically opposed political standpoints. Nor is their argument resolved, but remains clouded in ambiguity. They both want to see peace and stability restored in the Provinces, and believe that the rulers of the Netherlanders are superior to their subjects, and need to take responsibility for them. Their methods for achieving this, however, differ.

Egmont's comparison of his subjects to a noble horse helps to distinguish his view of the Netherlanders and of governing from Alba's, but it also reveals similarities between them. Egmont considers the Netherlanders to be a nobler 'breed' than the sheep-like herd that Alba sees, who will not let themselves be abused by their 'rider' (p. 526). However, the image of a

[51] Heinrich Clairmont, 'Die Figur des Machiavell in Goethes *Egmont*', *Poetica*, 15 (1983), 289-313 (p. 309).

horse and rider implies that the aristocratic ruler should still be 'in the saddle' of power, and 'on top' of his subjects. As the rider has superior intellect to the animal, the ruler has a greater ability to think and plan empirically. He knows how to harness multifarious needs, talents, and wants, to make them socially productive: he provides his subjects with the sense of direction which they lack.

The horse imagery supports Hartmut Reinhardt's argument that Egmont essentially shares Alba's belief in the immaturity ('Unmündigkeit') of the Dutch people, and uses this to secure their obedience.[52] Egmont holds his subjects in higher regard than Alba (hence his treatment of them through dialogue rather than force), and both admires and slightly fears their autonomous spirit. However, he still sees them as a different, instinctively erratic — and ultimately inferior — 'animal'. Paul Kerry notes how the difference of degree in Alba's and Egmont's perception of the Netherlanders' immaturity explains their contrasting approaches to governing them, or, as he puts it, 'the difference between pressing, as a rider might press a horse with his knees, and oppressing'.[53] Egmont agrees that the 'rider' must 'hold the reins', if not as tightly as Alba suggests.

If Götz and Egmont appear to have a relaxed approach to authority, it may be because they are not keen on submitting to it themselves. They live as social outsiders, refusing to operate within the legal structures of the emerging absolutist state. How far does this help or hinder their subjects' freedom? Do the plays defend feudal society against the modern state, and do they encourage the audience to emulate their heroes?

The exchanges between Egmont and Oranien, and Götz and Weislingen help to answer such questions. Egmont decides to stay and face Alba whereas Oranien flees the province to raise support for a counter-offensive. Egmont deems his decision to remain loyal

[52] Reinhardt, '*Egmont*', p. 188.
[53] Kerry, *Enlightenment Thought*, p. 65.

to the king and not abandon the Netherlanders as honourable, whereas Oranien sees his own plans as sensible. Oranien claims that the oppression of the Dutch nobility and imposition of a Spanish tyranny is inevitable, and that it is therefore wise and bold to escape in advance. Egmont fears that Oranien's proposal would be interpreted as an act of rebellion against the Crown, and that a blood-ridden civil war would ensue. However, Oranien's riposte reveals him as more calculating. If it is reasonable to sacrifice themselves for thousands, it is also reasonable for them to save themselves for thousands — combating the King's mighty army is futile. The main reason for Egmont's naivety in this scene comes from his disbelief that Alba is on his way, or that Philip has any intention of suppressing the Netherlands, and would be ignoble enough to do so, given that he is the son of the much-admired Charles V (pp. 494-500). That Egmont is captured and it is left to Oranien — as in historical reality — to lead the Netherlanders' liberation from the Spanish Crown would suggest that the latter's predictions are vindicated.

Egmont's effectiveness as a champion of freedom has attracted much debate. Certain critics, such as Martin Swales, perceive him as a failure due to the political naivety just discussed. Swales describes Egmont as a courageous aristocrat, but politically irresponsible.[54] Such criticisms imply that, had Egmont realised the scale of the Spanish menace earlier, he would have saved himself and his subjects from military oppression. Egmont may have laudable ideals, the detractors' argument goes, but he is not an effective 'politician'. However, some scholars deem this unfair. John Ellis contends that Egmont is, in fact, the most politically-aware character of the play, making him not only its hero but also its prophet.[55] Both supporters and opponents of this argument, though, see Egmont's meeting

[54] Martin W. Swales, 'A Questionable Politician: A Discussion to the Ending of Goethe's *Egmont*', *Modern Language Review*, 66 (1971), 832-40.
[55] John M. Ellis, 'The Vexed Question of Egmont's Political Judgement', *Tradition and Creation: Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Mary Wilkinson*, ed. C.P. Magill and others (Leeds: W.S. Maney & Son, 1978), pp. 116-29.

with Oranien as a pivotal insight into the Count's political nous. For Swales, the scene epitomises Egmont's 'very imperfect awareness of the political actualities of the world in which he moves'.[56] For Ellis, it shows that Egmont has 'more *fundamental* political realism' than the other protagonists.[57] The meeting with Alba might expose Egmont's political 'philosophy' (attitude towards governing the Netherlands), but, in the scene with Oranien, he determines his political — and personal — fate.

Egmont's detractors claim that it is Oranien who reads the situation correctly, or, at least, more accurately. He knows that Philip is sending Alba to suppress the Netherlands, and eradicate the nobility — with he and Egmont among its first victims. Egmont's idealistic belief that he can persuade Alba through friendly means, and his 'romantic' resolve to remain loyal to the King and not to desert his people, are undoubtedly noble, but, as Swales argues, politically irrational.[58] Egmont believes, too, that Philip would assemble the Order of the Golden Fleece if he entered the Provinces, enabling him and Oranien to defend themselves against accusations of treachery. Oranien appreciates Philip's hostility to this institution, however, and predicts that he will strip the nobles of their rights and condemn them without proving their guilt (p. 496). History is on his side. Founded by Duke Philip the Good in 1430, the Order of the Golden Fleece was designed to enable knights from the leading families to speak to the sovereign of government without fear of offence, and, to protect this right, knights could only be tried by the chapter. Whereas Charles V comfortably cooperated with the chapter, Philip did not, and effectively ended its political role in 1568 when he had some of its members tried and executed for treason.[59] Yet the fictional Egmont deems Philip

[56] Swales, 'A Questionable Politician', 835.
[57] Ellis, 'Egmont's Political Judgement', p. 121.
[58] Swales, 'A Questionable Politician', 835.
[59] Peter Pierson, *Philip II of Spain* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), p. 81.

incapable of such injustice and foolishness, just as he refuses to believe Alba would want to take over the Provinces (pp. 496-97).

Many of Oranien's predictions are, indeed, vindicated and the play proves Egmont's judgement on the course of events to be, in several cases, wrong. Yet, as Ellis also argues, it is unfair to accuse him of being politically naive because he is not entirely right.[60] He correctly predicts that Alba's oppressive measures will prove counter-productive, and that fleeing would be seen as incitement to rebellion. Swales regards Egmont's avowed disbelief that Alba is on his way to the Provinces as the epitome of political ineptitude, claiming that Egmont 'rejects a fact, because he does not *want* it to be true'.[61] Ellis insists, however, that Egmont is not doubting Oranien's honesty, but cannot 'believe' that Alba would be politically naive enough to act so provocatively.[62] Egmont is aware of the political reality, but reluctant to accept it, and unable to understand its rationale.

Ellis and Swales present two different perceptions of political awareness. Swales interprets it as the ability to understand the psyche of political opponents and to predict how they will act. Ellis interprets it as a sense for the most prudent long-term political measures and how subjects will react to them. By the first marker, Egmont falls short: his overestimation of Philip's and Alba's compassion and understanding of the Netherlands has disastrous short-term consequences for the Provinces — and himself. By the second marker, he does better: his prediction that the Netherlanders will resent the brutality and dogma of Spanish absolutism is vindicated. Egmont's failure to combine these two interpretations of 'political awareness' contributes to his downfall. This arguably makes the case that he should listen more to his political allies (namely Oranien and, to a lesser degree, Margarethe),

[60] Ellis, 'Egmont's Political Judgement', p. 121.
[61] Swales, 'A Questionable Politician', 835.
[62] Ellis, 'Egmont's Political Judgement', pp. 121-22.

tempering the individuality and instinctiveness which drive his governance with other perspectives.

After Egmont's death, Oranien's historical counterpart cemented a place for himself in Dutch national memory by leading a rebellion which eventually led to the Netherlands' independence. However, his calculation over sentiment, and apparent selfishness over foolish selflessness, made him a more active warrior for freedom than the historical Egmont. That said, Oranien led the Dutch people's fight for independence on the back of Egmont's inspirational martyrdom. As Mommsen claims, Egmont's sacrifice encourages the reader to see him as the play's hero rather than the dry statesman Oranien. Despite all his faults, it is Egmont the passionate and noble human being, not Egmont the politician, who saves the Netherlands.[63]

It is also questionable whether the Netherlanders value Egmont's leadership as highly as some of them claim and as Egmont believes. Clärchen's rallying cry to the residents of Brussels to rescue Egmont falls on deaf ears, despite the townspeople's earlier praise of him. Clärchen is convinced that they all feel a burning desire to give freedom back to the man who epitomises it, and asks how they could live with themselves if they let Egmont perish (p. 532). The townspeople's inaction suggest that they are not worried enough to risk their life: in times of peace, the burghers of Brussels can promise to defend Egmont when he is in danger, but, faced with the reality of Spanish tyranny, their determination to protect their ruler wanes. Notions of allegiance and honour, integral to the feudal code, are not reciprocated to Egmont. This may indicate that the burghers of Brussels are not as ill-suited for a new political system and set of values as they, and Egmont, fear.

[63] Wilhelm Mommsen, *Die politischen Anschauungen Goethes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1948), p. 47.

This is not, though, entirely fair. The dream sequence at the end of the play shows the Netherlanders marching for their country's liberation, and it would be futile for the Dutch to resist the Spanish army without back-up from other quarters. Clärchen's pleas for support also come across as hysterical and impractical. When she tries to persuade Brackenburg to ride out to the castle in which Egmont is imprisoned, Brackenburg points out that Alba's guards are just around the corner and encourages Clärchen to see sense. Although claiming to be equally willing to give his life for Egmont, Brackenburg recognises the hopelessness of the situation (p. 553).

If Goethe meant to side with the more realistic and rational characters, though, why did he condemn Weislingen to an early death? Andrew Erwin argues that Weislingen's demise may seem 'counter-intuitive' as it is based on the common misconception that he surrenders himself entirely to the absolutist state. The conflict between Götz and Weislingen does not simply pit feudalism against absolutism. Instead, it is a clash of two types of feudalism: military feudalism (represented by Götz) and territorial feudalism (represented by Weislingen). Götz directly serves the Emperor, and has full ownership and autonomy over his land in return for imperial protection. Weislingen decides to trade in autonomy over his land for an increase in the size of his estate, giving him increased lordship rights and a prestigious state office. In Erwin's words, he 'takes advantage of an opportunity presented by the early modern state to increase his lordship and solidify his social standing among the new noble elite'.[64]

Complicity with the modern state does not mean the ability to control or influence it. Weislingen's feuding with Götz may be in his own interest, but is also to the princes' benefit. Erwin notes that feuding, far from being immediately discarded under absolutism, was an

[64] Andrew Erwin, 'Goethe's Historical Particularism', *Goethe Yearbook*, 20 (2013), 179-97 (p. 184).

'outgrowth of modernisation'. Gaining power and prestige within the new social order was highly competitive, and feuding gave ambitious knights the possibility to expose their rivals as weak and incompetent. Likewise, it was in the princes' interest to either provoke, or not prevent, feuds in order to extend their influence over neighbouring territories. The Bishop of Bamberg, for instance, has a 'geopolitical incentive' to extend his feud with Götz, as he wants to gain a foothold in the rival principality of Swabia. Features of medieval society had their use, therefore, in bringing about the modern state, and the early modern principalities established impersonal power relations via the personal power relations of feudalism.

According to Erwin, Weislingen's straddling of the two societies makes his demise just as inevitable as Götz's, if more protracted. An indication that he is destined for self-destruction comes towards the end of the play when he describes himself as 'hollowed out' (p. 381). Weislingen mistakes his unsuccessful attempt to confine Götz to his estate for a contribution to the new regime. He confuses the power of the state with personal power.[65] On this basis, Weislingen does no more for the preservation of his social rank than Götz.

Although Weislingen's demise may not seem logical from a political perspective, it may be more understandable from a dramatic one. *Götz* is a human as well as political drama, and Weislingen is presented as an opportunist with strong and conflicting emotional desires. Not all the historical details to which Erwin refers are apparent, or particularly significant, in the play, and the fictional Weisingen seems to suffer more from his own character faults than his social position or political manoeuvres. Adelheid calls him a chameleon whose actions do not match his words, and Weislingen admits that he is so tormented by his identity that he is not bothered by other people's impressions of him (p. 320). This is reflected by his relationship with Maria. Weislingen professes friendship and loyalty to Maria, and sees her as

[65] Erwin, 'Historical Particularism', 193.

a means of escaping worldly pressures (pp. 306-07). Yet this does not prevent him from falling under the spell of the seductive Adelheid, who titillates Weislingen by describing him as the quintessence of virility (p. 326).

Weislingen is also a pitiable figure. When Maria pleads with Weislingen to save Götz's life, Weislingen begs her not to push a miserable man into desperation. The word 'Verzweiflung' is telling, as it also connotes the idea of doubt, something which haunts Weilsingen throughout. He also renounces responsibility for his actions, claiming that men do not control their own lives but are at the mercy of evil spirits devoted to man's destruction. This scene also shows his closeness to Götz, and his inability to reconcile himself to his role in the Knight's death. He dreams of challenging Götz to a duel, but feels powerless in his presence: 'Er [Götz] ist gefangen und ich zittere vor ihm […]' (p. 382).

Weislingen may be perfidious or just a weak and indecisive character. His entry into a series of complex relationships could be seen as a criticism of loose courtly morals, and a contrast to the settled family life of Götz. There is little sign that Weislingen's 'political' career is much concerned with the transition from a feudal to a modern regime, but is essentially driven by a desire to overcome and destroy Götz: politics becomes a means for personal revenge. Whatever the reasons for Weislingen's actions, they do not show him to be entirely in control of personal or political matters. This makes his demise less surprising than one might expect. How does Götz compare: is he more a hero for freedom or a bandit?

That Götz is widely liked by all sections of the social order indicates that he fulfils his duties towards his dependents, and treats them well. He emphasises his pride in embodying the archetypal free knight who is dependent on God, the Emperor, and himself only. His benevolent deeds, like Egmont's, are almost folkloric. Martin describes Götz as the bane of the aristocracy and the saviour of the oppressed, and relates how a fellow monk praised

Götz's stoicism after losing his right hand in battle (pp. 288-89). Elisabeth tells Karl how Götz helped a tailor who won a shooting competition in Stuttgart to claim the prize money denied to him by kidnapping a couple of merchants from Cologne (p. 291). This may be a comment on the state of society that subjects have to rely on good-natured knights for the administration of justice, when access to the law is expensive or even impossible. However, Götz rejects Weislingen's claim that the princes are essentially altruistic, merely concerned for peace and justice within an empire that is being undermined by unruly knights, and argues that they are intent on manipulating the Emperor in order to oppress those on the lower rungs of the social order ('bis sie die Kleinen unterm Fuß haben': p. 298). Götz's attempt to fight the political tide of the age is, at least in his eyes, a fulfilment of his responsibility towards his dependents. His personal fate is intertwined with theirs. Were the princes to prevail, all imperial knights and their dependents would lose the rights and privileges attached to their social status.

The argument with Weislingen, however, also encourages us to consider the territorial princes' right to power. Weislingen justifies his support of the princes by referring to Götz's activity as a highwayman, asking whether the princes can be certain that they are safe from the unjust knights who attack their subjects on the highways, thereby furthering the oppression of other dependents throughout the Empire (p. 298). Weislingen implies that nobles would be more responsible rulers than knights. Yet the depiction of Weislingen as fickle and opportunistic casts doubt on the validity of these remarks.

It is unclear whether Weislingen believes in what he says about the nobles, or if he even cares about the welfare of their subjects, as he switches allegiances between Götz and the Bishop of Bamberg. Having been such a close friend and warrior ally of Götz, the knight recalls how Weislingen was corrupted by the pleasures of court life and its female attractions (p. 297). In the first act in Jaxthausen, Weislingen laments his previous dependence on

nobles, and says that the only title he now desires is that of Maria's husband. Claiming to be in the process of a psychological transformation ('Sinnesänderung': p. 308), Weislingen's subsequent return to Bamberg, and exposure to the sexual allure of Adelheid, soon causes him to renege on his supposed personal re-discovery. It is possible that Weislingen reflects Götz's description of him as a serial bootlicker of the court ('Hofschranzen': p. 298): he ingratiates himself with the nobility by merely repeating the arguments that they use to defend their actions.

A more reliable sign that the nobility's intentions are not as pure as Weislingen claims is the outbreak of the Peasants' War. If the nobles are such responsible rulers, why do the peasants feel the need to revolt?

Some historians view the causes of the Peasants' War as primarily socio-economic, others as mainly theological. However, the uniting factor may be opposition to a form of authority. At its height, the rebellion may have counted 300,000 belligerents. It began with sporadic and localised uprisings, but was eventually subdued by the princes, either through their superior armies or compromise with the peasants' demands.[66] The Peasants' War was more socially diverse than that of the Knights, as discontented urban dwellers augmented the peasants' ranks. Peter Blickle argues that this makes it more appropriate to describe it as the 'revolution of the common man', and Joachim Whaley notes that the few lower nobles who supported the peasants did so 'under duress', with only Florian Geyer and Götz von Berlichingen among the more active participants.[67] The increased power of the territorial princes led to a reduction in the rights of the peasants (including the right to hunt and fish), who already occupied the bottom rung of society, and were powerless to prevent the lord

[66] Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), vol. 1: *Maximilian I to the Peace of Westphalia 1493-1648*, p. 220.
[67] Peter Blickle, *Der Bauernkrieg: Die Revolution des Gemeinen Mannes* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1998), pp. 41-6, and Whaley, *Holy Roman Empire*, vol. 1, p. 220.

from using their land as he wished. The justice system — dominated by the clergy and wealthy burgher and patrician jurists — provided no outlet for peasants' grievances. Religion aggravated the tensions, with Lutheran teachings encouraging defiance of the supposedly corrupt and exploitative Catholic Church.

Even an historical event, however, does not suffice to *disprove* the truth of Weislingen's remarks. It may be that the causes of the *Bauernkrieg* were not purely political, but included the desire of a troublesome minority to manipulate a relatively low level of discontent. As this chapter will later discuss, the motives behind the uprisings need to be interrogated: it must not be presumed that they are solely, or even genuinely, based on grievances against aristocratic landlords.

Whatever the truth behind the characters' motives, the play poses questions about the redirection of political power caused by the rise of the imperial territories. Central to these is the conflict between knights and nobles. Both parties are keen to emphasise their loyalty to the sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire, and to claim that they are representing his interests. Although Götz sees himself as one of the Emperor's most willing servants, the Bishop of Bamberg, a representative of the self-aggrandising upper nobility and natural enemy of the resistant *Ritterstand*, implies that Götz typifies the arrogant knights who are thwarting Maximilian's plans to bring peace to the Empire, abolish feuds (*Fehden*), and restore the reputation of the legal courts (pp. 303-04). It should be noted that, at the time of *Götz*, the Holy Roman Empire counted some 1800 territorial rulers, giving plenty of scope for feuding. The nobles are, therefore, driving a political change which will ensure the longevity of the Empire, by saving it from internal conflict. This will enable all inhabitants to enjoy greater security and freedom than they could in what the Bishop describes as the current den of murderers ('Mördergrube'), caused by people like Götz (p. 304).

According to the nobles, then, Götz's handling of power is reckless and destructive. While he may command the loyalty and affection of his own dependents, he does little for the prosperity of the Empire that he claims to cherish. The nobles present themselves as the more trustworthy source of authority, and believe that the knights are abusing their status. Namely: the knights have too much freedom to influence the internal affairs of the Empire, through their private warfare and highway robbery, and are thereby weakening its entire structure. The aristocrats are keen to introduce a new legal system based on Roman law, which signifies a transition from a feudal into a more rational regime. The next part of this chapter analyses why the nobles largely support it, and considers its implications for freedom.

Form of freedom: Liberty in the 'medieval' and the 'modern' state

As he associates feudalism with chaos, the Bishop of Bamberg wants to combine the implementation of a new legal system with a peaceful and orderly Holy Roman Empire, and seeks advice from Olearius, a professor of law and humanist. Olearius, like Machiavell in *Egmont*, exemplifies the lawyer-historians mentioned by Pamela Currie, who started to direct political affairs in the late medieval period, during the transition from a feudal to modern state. Along with princes, lawyers took the mantle of 'theoretical experts' (previously held by the clergy) to formulate a 'new legal world view with which they intended to shape the consciousness of their contemporaries'.[68] Olearius also refers to the *Codex Justiniani*, a standard compendium of Roman law commissioned by the Emperor Justinian, which contained a collection of universally applicable laws, leaving no grey areas in decision-making. This presentation of Olearius as a figure of the modern absolutist age is accentuated by the invitation of the text to mock the Abbot who has never heard of the *Codex*: when

[68] Currie, *Literature as Social Action*, p. 47.

Olearius first mentions it the Abbot replies ‘Es mag ein schön Buch sein’, and later asks whether it contains the Ten Commandments (p. 301).

Bamberg’s and Olearius’ support of the introduction of Roman law appears to be based on a dim view of human nature, or, at least, of their social inferiors. Olearius believes that the traditional legal system based on ancestry and region-specific statutes no longer suffices to run the empire. The mass of people (‘der Pöbel’) is fickle, and needs consistent and unchangeable laws to prevent confusion and injustice. Olearius, therefore, prefers uniformity guaranteed by written documents to the lived experience of legal practice, which relies on the age, knowledge, and intelligence (‘Urteilskraft’) of judges who can apply past cases to the present (p. 302). According to the Bishop of Bamberg and his juridical supporters, systematisation and uniformity trump tried and tested discretion and experience.

Elements of the new legal system conflict with aspects of Götz’s character, particularly his aversion to writing. During his confinement in Jaxthausen, he describes writing as merely busy idleness, and adds that writing about his experiences frustrates him, as it reminds of a time when he could act (p. 367). It is tempting to ask whether there could be a link between Götz’s attitude to writing and to the Roman law, which relies heavily on bureaucracy and documentation.

Here, it pays to recall Götz’s irreverence towards the noble court in Act Four. His refusal to sit down shows contempt for the council, as does the remark that the chair smells as sinful as the whole room. His use of the phrase ‘Ich kann stehn’ might be an allusion to the words mythically uttered by Martin Luther when he was on trial before the Reichstag of Worms. As Luther was supposed to be in Worms to recant his heresies before the emperor, it is intended that Götz recants his ‘heresies’ against the values and the new legal code of the nascent absolutist state. Like Luther, Götz refuses (p. 357). The futile exchange between Götz

and the official induces the scribe to comically ask whether he should be recording all this (p. 360). This contrasts the official's formal approach to the trial with the knight's whimsicality, and reveals that Götz attaches little importance to the scribe's function.

Egmont regards writing with equal disdain: 'unter viel Verhaßtem ist mir das Schreiben das verhaßteste' (p. 491). Like Götz, Egmont's dislike of writing is accompanied by a preference for action and discretionary decision-making. He spares some iconoclasts, who have torn down a picture of the Virgin Mary, from the death penalty on the grounds that he is tired of hangings. He does not deal with provincial affairs prescriptively but with an innate sense of fairness. For Egmont, administration reflects the systematisation of Spanish absolutism, which he utterly rejects: 'Ich habe nun zu der spanischen Lebensart nicht einen Blutstropfen in meinen Adern, nicht Lust, meine Schritte nach der neuen bedächtigen Hofkadenz zu mustern' (pp. 491-92).

Just as he rejects a format for dealing with provincial cases, Egmont rejects a format for leading his life. He prefers to enjoy the present, to carve out his own path, and to let others do the same (p. 492). He is also not afraid to put himself at the mercy of fortune, comparing life to being on a chariot of fate, trying to 'hold on' and dodge any obstacles which may arise (p. 493). Egmont does not seek a predetermined structure to his life, but prefers to lead an adventurous and contingent existence — something which documentation cannot provide.

Götz and Egmont lament the impersonal nature of the new regimes. Götz associates the empowerment of the territorial princes with a more distant relationship between nobles, masters and their dependents, and Egmont clearly prefers intimate government to the distant rule under the Spanish. Götz attends the wedding of a farming family as proof of his bond to those who owe him their allegiance, but fears that the political trend will make such

occasions a rarity (pp. 328-30). He nostalgically recalls the days when nobles and masters could dine together outside, and the rural labourers would flock to see them, and share in the glory of their landlords (p. 353). This idyllic image shows a closeness and mutual contentment between the social orders. It is a relationship which involves deference from farmer to landowner, but is not marred by resentment or jealousy.

Egmont has a remarkable relationship with his inferiors (and is even respected by the scribe and rogue lawyer Vansen). As well as admiring his valour in battle, the grocer and burgher of Brussels, Soest, points out that Egmont is genuinely concerned for his subjects' wellbeing, and attentive to everybody he meets. This is exemplified by Egmont's ability to remember Jetter's name, and that Jetter once served as his valet (p. 486). Egmont stresses to Alba the importance to the Netherlanders of being governed by a compatriot, as they believe him more likely to empathise with their circumstances, and have a vested interest in them (p. 526). The Spanish forces provide the counterpoint to personable rule, as Jetter compares them to demonically-controlled machines (p. 511). The Spanish occupation is deliberately distant and imposing, and symptomatic of the brutal measures taken to cow its subjects into submission.

The scene above also makes the effect of the Spanish occupation on the Netherlanders' liberty explicit, with its denial of freedom of action, expression, and even thought. All of this is underpinned by a network of spies and mutual suspicion. The carpenter mentions how an order from Alba has allowed groups of three or more people talking together on the street to be automatically charged with high treason. All political discussion, including any criticism of the government, carries the punishment of death. This highlights Alba's determination to create a regime which penetrates the private and public sphere so far as to make them indistinguishable. The encouragement of mutual spying and suspicion between ordinary provincials is designed to turn the most intimate domestic matters into a

political concern (p. 510), and make the Netherlanders complicit in their own oppression. Alba's rule vindicates Margarethe's branding of him as paranoid ('er sieht alles als ein Gotteslästerer, ein Majestätenschänder': p. 503). Whereas Egmont and Götz believe in restricting the political realm, Alba wants it to saturate all areas of society.

Götz's and Egmont's preference for intimate government feeds into the wider emphasis on ancestry and posterity in the plays, and shapes the portrayal of freedom.

The idea of posterity appears regularly in *Götz*, and informs many of the actions and opinions of Berlichingen and his dependents. In the closing line, Lerse uses it in reference to Götz: 'Wehe der Nachkommenschaft die dich verkennt' (p. 389) — a lament for those who will never know Götz's true legacy, possibly including Goethe's contemporaries. If Götz is remembered as a vagabond and traitor to Emperor Maximilian, his sacrifice will be in vain. Lerse's remark evokes a connection between the individual, community and future generations, and the idea that the former has a duty to set a good example and be concerned for the latter's welfare. Götz claims that he and his followers should find consolation in death. Having resisted the domination of the territorial princes, they will have secured the happiness of their grandchildren as well as the emperors who rule over them (p. 352). The knight's and his servants' valour and selflessness will exceed their own lifetime. Götz does not want them to leave their offspring a considerable financial and material inheritance, but to pass on a set of values which transcend the social order.

The term 'Familienschatz' links the family with political affairs. Just as parents should care for their children, princes should care for their subjects. Götz's relationship to Maximilian is more than a political allegiance: it is a personal tie. This is reflected by the fact that Götz holds his lands directly from the Emperor, to whom he is also duty-bound. Götz regards Maximilian as a fatherly figure, and believes that he has a duty not only to serve but

also to protect him. When the desperate knight is forced to seek refuge in a gypsies' camp, he cries, 'O Kaiser! Kaiser! Räuber beschützen deine Kinder' (p. 379). This may give the impression that Götz favours a patriarchal society, in which those on its lower rungs have little responsibility in ensuring their own welfare and determining their future, and that he does not seek material or political empowerment for his dependents.

Much importance is attached to ancestry in *Egmont*, too. Vansen bases his call to arms against the Spanish on a desire to emulate the Netherlanders who ensured that their rulers respected their rights (p. 483), and, as mentioned, part of Egmont's attempts to convince Alba that oppressive measures will be counterproductive is by referring to the Netherlanders' attachment to their traditions. Egmont argues that attachment to custom ('alten Sitten') defines the Netherlanders as a proud, tenacious, and autonomous people. Any attempt to impose a novel, as well as 'foreign', means of government on them is futile and dangerous (p. 525).

Yet it is not just the Dutch provincials who appeal to tradition to protect their interests, but also members of the ruling elite. This causes tension across the social hierarchy. Machiavell believes that the continuation, and restoration, of the Netherlanders' legacy of modest self-determination and minimal monarchical interference favours the accommodation of Protestantism. Yet such logic does not extend to Regent Margarethe von Parma, who accuses Machiavell of taking the enemy's side (p. 471). Margarethe's determination to uphold the supremacy of Catholicism stems not just from religious conviction, and much pressure from Philip, but also from the fear that appeasing the dissenters will denigrate the sacrifices of the Dutch nobles' forefathers: 'Sollen wir gleichgültig gegen unsre bewährte Lehre sein, für die so viele ihr Leben aufgeopfert haben?' (p. 470). Margarethe's fear that such a measure would encourage indifference towards this legacy reflects Vansen's fear that her subjects are indifferent to their ancestors' efforts to maintain constitutional freedoms.

In *Götz* and *Egmont*, tradition makes freedom identifiable and quantifiable, the type of freedom to give a decent *Bürger* a proportionate amount of it ('so viel […] als er braucht', *Egmont*: p. 487). Götz's and Egmont's plans for their dependents' or subjects' freedom are not expansive but protective. They do not seek to add to what their inferiors may 'do', but to consolidate what they may be free 'from' — an example of Berlin's interpretation of negative liberty. They wish to protect their 'traditional' status: the place in society — with its specific rights, duties, and loyalties — that they have inherited from their ancestors and will pass on to their successors. That Götz's dependents or Egmont's subjects can refer to actions of previous generations means that the Knight and the Count want to conserve recognisable and practical freedoms. This prevents liberty from being infinite and idealist, and descending into the anarchy feared by Alba. The problem with the 'new' trend of absolutist rule is its inability to define other people's freedoms and to limit its own. Innovation threatens to give those in authority uncontrollable power.

There are also signs that many characters find ample freedom within the feudal order. Götz finds aspects of feudalism empowering, especially loyalty, duty and servitude. He claims to be more anxious to serve the needs of others than his own, and tells Georg and his serfs that they can find consolation in death if servants serve princes as nobly and freely as they have him, and if the princes serve the emperor as well as he (Götz) would like to serve Maximilian (p. 352). The principle of service trumps an individual death, therefore, and Götz associates it with virtue and freedom. He feels that there is something voluntary about servitude.

Justus Möser linked the concept of freedom very closely to that of servitude. Nobody was truly free, he wrote, as all members of society were in a position of service. A monarch was no freer than a common man or a general no freer than a soldier. *Freiheit* could only be understood as freedom from common duties or an exception from a certain rule. Moreover,

Möser argued that freedom came *through* service: 'Freiheit muß verdient werden'. Failure to fulfil one's social duties would result in a loss of trust and damage to the wider community: '[…] der Fürst, der in einem Dorfe nur einen Mann aus der Reihe gehen läßt, verletzt das allgemeine Vertrauen'.[69] Götz takes heed of such advice.

Götz does not, however, unconditionally support servitude. He is opposed to serving an empowered nobility, and is horrified by the thought of being dependent on the court. His struggle against this is not just personally motivated, but also designed to save the entire *Rittertum* from ruin. He resents Weislingen's slavish relationship to his supposedly jealous and stubborn neighbour, the Bishop of Bamberg (p. 298), and criticises him for sacrificing relative autonomy for the material comfort and social prestige of the princely court. Götz does not want to serve a social rank which, he argues, is undermining the Holy Roman Empire and of which Weislingen is a tool (p. 299). His only interest is in serving God and the Emperor.

Certain characters regard duty and even self-sacrifice as liberating. Georg yearns to emulate Götz's military exploits, and, when he finally has the chance to go into battle, he claims to feel like a bird that has been released from its cage. Similarly, Martin, a monk and possible allusion to Martin Luther, envies Götz's invigorating occupation as a knight, as opposed to his banal and burdensome existence. He, like Georg, finds the quiet life imprisoning, also comparing it to a cage (p. 287).

Duty and servitude are not blanket principles for the feudal society portrayed in *Götz*. Depending on their context, they can either help or hinder freedom. Götz favours the current feudal system, as he thinks that it is conducive to liberty. As essential features of this system, Götz cherishes duty, servitude, and self-sacrifice. The chance to display valour by doing

[69] *Den Patriotische Phantasien verwandte Handschriften*, Möser, *Werke*, vol. 10 (1968), p. 68.

battle adds exhilaration and satisfaction to duty, and distinguishes burdensome servitude from invigorating and liberating servitude. Götz associates his duties with freedom and nobleness, and therefore performs them gladly. Martin complains that obedience is an onerous part of his existence. Götz is voluntarily obedient to the Emperor, but an empowered nobility would enforce his obedience.

Götz and Egmont strive for freedom, but how far do they perceive this as a political concept? There are suggestions that Götz sees freedom in a more domestic or spiritual light. His service to such a remote figure as the Emperor cannot demand a huge loss of autonomy, and his service to God necessarily has a greater spiritual than earthly significance. In the eyes of God, he is equal with all his fellow men and has the promise of eternal and unfettered freedom in the afterlife. This is strongly alluded to with his final words: 'Himmlische Luft. – Freiheit! Freiheit!' (p. 388). There are also enough scenes to suggest that Götz prefers private to public life. Much of the action occurs around his dwellings, and involves interaction with his wife and children. The argument between Götz and Weislingen is interrupted by the news that dinner is ready. Götz greets this shift from political discussion to a domestic activity as a welcome relief ('fröhliche Botschaft'), and refers to Weislingen not as a politician but as a formerly attractive figure to ladies (p. 300). These examples suggest that it is not power that motivates Götz, but the desire to have a refuge from political concern.

Almost half the scenes in *Egmont* take place in the domestic sphere. It is mainly Clärchen who provides the counterweight to the hero's political existence, as Egmont himself acknowledges. Waidson notes that the relationship between Egmont and Clärchen is entirely fictional, and contributes little to the 'main dramatic action'.[70] Clärchen and the relationship do, though, have considerable symbolic significance. Her vainglorious attempt to save

[70] Waidson, 'Introduction', p. xxviii.

Egmont, according to Hartmut Reinhardt, creates a symbolic connection with freedom, encapsulated by the dream sequence.[71] In Clärchen's company, Egmont is no longer the morose, tense, and cold man suffering under the burden of political responsibility, but the truly calm, open, and happy Egmont who is loved by the purest of hearts (p. 509).

Clärchen initially appears as one of the most unpolitical figures in the play. She admits that she is of a very different ilk to the likes of Margarethe ('sie ist ein ander Weib als wir Nähtrinnen und Köchinnen'), and that she could not cope with the political burden that the Regent carries (p. 508). Yet she ends up trying to rally the townspeople to rescue Egmont. This may seem a remarkable transformation, but her 'political' activity is stimulated by a personal interest: the fate of her lover. The onset of absolutism and the decline of old feudal loyalties do not concern her.

Or do they? This may seem a harsh assessment, as Clärchen is perturbed by the sight of so many Spanish soldiers on the street. Clärchen arrives at a position of political leadership by default; she is not naturally vociferous and assertive, but temporarily becomes so once the essence of her life is captured. Adversity forces her to mature. Although still devoted to Egmont, Clärchen is able to see private concerns in a broader public – political – context. She goes from seeing him merely as an object of desire, who can rescue her from the personal torment of an undesired lover, to an exemplary leader on whose fate her compatriots' fortunes depend. Clärchen ultimately realises that to save Egmont is to save liberty (p. 532).

Although Clärchen recognises Egmont's association with freedom, however, she does not see his feud with Alba as a conflict between two ways of running a polity, but as a merely personal matter. Consequently, she believes that it can be resolved through human intervention, not the military wherewithal of a state. This reinforces the sense that her attempt

[71] Reinhardt, '*Egmont*', p. 165.

to save Egmont may be admirable, and, as his lover, perfectly natural, but is also naïve, parochial, and politically foolhardy.

When she realises that saving Egmont is impossible, Clärchen's suicide, like the candle after Brackenburg's final departure from her house, provides a 'flame' of hope. Her appearance in the final scene is her most blatant association with divinity and liberty. She illuminates Egmont's dream and her white robe indicates purity. She is the only one of Egmont's subjects to give her life for him, and her intimate relationship with Egmont renders her devotion personal as well as political. That she assures Egmont that he will secure the Provinces' freedom is, therefore, confirmation that his sacrifice for his people has not been in vain. Clärchen ends up embodying the close, but subtle, link between the personal and political Egmont.

Götz and Egmont are not unpolitical figures (Götz's desire to have a *refuge from* politics should not be mistaken for a desire to be *free from* politics), but nor are they political obsessives. They place just as much, if not more, value on their private life. They both discover, however, that many of their personal pleasures are threatened by current political developments (albeit too late), and that they may only be saved through armed resistance.

Rebellion and Resistance

This part of the chapter considers when and how subjects are entitled to rebel violently against authority. Götz does not immediately support the Peasants' War. He, like Egmont, initially prefers to support the sovereign ('Soll ich mein ritterlich Wort dem Kaiser brechen, und aus meinem Bann gehen': p. 371), and shuns violence, especially the sort promoted by Metzler (pp. 371-73). Metzler has a particularly negative depiction in the play, with even his name conjuring the bloodthirsty image of 'slaughterer'. Goethe's treatment of the rebels in

the play may be indicative of his thoughts on the historical peasants' uprising. Another potential stimulus for analysing his attitude towards popular revolt is the exchange between Alba and Egmont. Alba argues against a constitution allowing the Netherlanders to live according to ancient rights for the following reason: 'weil sie Schlupfwinkel abilden, in welchen der Kluge, der Mächtige, zum Schaden des Volks, zum Schaden des Ganzen, sich verbergen oder durchschleichen kann' (p. 526). A defence of a permanent and unchanging constitution, this argument may also be yet another example of Alba's contempt for the King's subjects, and distrust of them. Does the text suggest, however, that he might have a point? Do the plays show popular armed resistance to be justified, or more as a vehicle for malevolent individuals to wreak havoc?

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The ancient rights of the Netherlanders have a remarkably dubious spokesman in Vansen. The Carpenter immediately gives the reader a negative impression of him, as he tells his companions not to get involved with a 'bad bloke': a scribe who has been dismissed by numerous employers and now practises as a rogue lawyer, and is also a reputed alcoholic ('ein Branntweinzapf': p. 482). Vansen makes rude interjections into their conversation and calls the townspeople to finally break free from the chains of Spanish oppression, restore their traditional liberties, and scrutinise their rulers. This soon sees him shouted down, and a street brawl ensues. This scene may portray Vansen as provocative and destructive, and support Alba's connection between an appeal to ancient liberties and exploitation by troublesome individuals. Yet what Vansen, the apparent scoundrel of the play, essentially advocates is echoed by its hero. Why is one portrayed more positively than the other?

Vansen encourages violence against the Spanish regime, whereas Egmont calls for calm and dialogue with the King. However, Vansen emphasises how former nobles governed

in accordance with the Netherlanders' traditional rights, privileges and customs, and how the Netherlanders' ancestors kept a close eye on their ruler, and protested when he abused his power ('wenn er über die Schnur hauen wollte': p. 483). This reflects Egmont's description of the Dutch provincials as thoroughly proud and independent people ('ein jeder rund für sich ein kleiner König, [……] an alten Sitten hangend': p. 525), who want to preserve their ancient constitution, and need to be governed according to their temperament.

Furthermore, Vansen could even be considered more prescient than Egmont. In supporting insurrection, he arguably recognises the futility of negotiation with the Spanish Crown long before the nobleman. He also shows considerable insight into the workings of the Spanish Inquisition: he notes their ability to make innocent people sound guilty by lulling them into a false sense of security, and finding contradictions in their remarks as the prisoners speak freely (p. 514). More importantly, he senses that the Duke of Alba will employ similar methods to condemn Egmont, whereas Jetter claims that the Count's membership of the Golden Fleece makes him perfectly safe. Such examples cast doubt on Jetter's remark that Egmont is infinitely more intelligent than Vansen (p. 513).

W. Daniel Wilson claims that Vansen's alleged gluttony and alcoholism delegitimise him as a revolutionary, and, by extension, revolution itself — typical of the 'conservative discourse' in Goethe's published writings.[72] However, what Vansen proposes is not 'revolutionary' in the post-1789 sense. Although the idea of 'das Buch' containing the Dutch constitution may seem worryingly novel, the freedom Vansen says it prescribes is not. Vansen does not advocate infinite liberty for the Netherlanders, but a mere restoration of the freedoms and privileges their forefathers enjoyed. He favours a return to the status quo ante — that is, before the Spanish Crown's excessive interference in the Provinces — not an

[72] W. Daniel Wilson, 'Hunger/artist: Goethe's revolutionary agitators in *Götz*, *Satyros*, *Egmont* and *Der Bürgergeneral*', *Monatshefte*, 86 (1994), 80-94 (p. 84).

experimental rupture with the past. In fact, there is almost a nostalgic yearning for the time when the Provincials admired sympathetic rulers and each province had its own states and region-specific social ranks (p. 483). Nor does Vansen advocate the abolition of the noble hierarchy and its replacement by a regime led by *Bürger*. If Egmont does fear that people like Vansen would manipulate freedom for political self-empowerment, there is little evidence of it here.

Vansen's attitude towards liberty appears, then, rather modest. It also contains echoes of Justus Möser's opposition to excessive monarchical rule, and support for a powerful and independent nobility which upheld its traditional rights and liberties. Möser described the monarch as the first among landowners, not of all people gathered in a state. His duty was to keep the majority ('die Menge') in order, and ensure that they had no reason to damage the property of other landholders.[73] Vansen does not explicitly advocate a powerful nobility in his praise of the constitution, but certainly includes it as a component of the Netherlanders' 'ancient' rights and freedoms. Wilson rightly argues that Vansen's opinions closely resemble Möser's (and, by association, Egmont's). Perhaps the only clear — but considerable — difference is Vansen's condoning of violence in (partial) defence of the nobility. That said, although Vansen is scolded for attempting to incite rebellion, his detractors are eventually forced to do just this. His assessment of Philip's intentions, and the methods needed to counter them, are vindicated.

The clue as to why Vansen is subjected to much scorn and derision might lie in his personality and behaviour. The problem is not just what he says but also the way he says it. When he first appears on the town square, his speech makes him sound bossy, arrogant, and smug. It includes many demands and sharp, penetrating questions such as '[…] steckt die

[73] *Den Patriotische Phantasien verwandte Handschriften, Sachgruppe: Religion, Staat*, Möser, *Werke*, vol. 9 (1958), pp. 258-59.

Köpfe zusammen', 'Merkt das!', 'Begreift ihr das?' (pp. 482-83) He comes across as completely confident of his own opinions, as he describes the Spanish monarch's increased interference in provincial affairs as 'as clear as day' (p. 483). There is also a drastic and violent tone to Vansen's language, perhaps summed up by the phrase: 'wir könnten die spanischen Ketten auf einmal sprengen' (p. 482). This proposal suggests that Vansen is keen on violence for its own sake, which is compounded when he associates himself with the Calvinist iconoclasts: 'Eure Brüder in Flandern haben das gute Werk angefangen' (p. 485). Here, he praises the latter's violence and implies that it should be followed in the Netherlanders' struggle to blast the Spanish occupation.

Although Vansen's speech makes him seem uppity and obnoxious, it manages to stir up the curiosity of several townspeople. A group referred to as 'das Volk' show particular curiosity in the contents of the book which supposedly contains evidence of the Netherlanders' ancient rights. Their demands for Vansen to reveal the words of the book resonate with those who flock to hear the Calvinist preachers deliver them from Catholicism. As the Protestant faith promised to give people more freedom over their interpretation of the Bible, Vansen's book promises the townspeople greater freedom as subjects of the Spanish Crown. This is exemplified by their demand: 'Sagt uns von Privilegien! Haben wir noch mehr Privilegien?' (p. 485). The reference to 'das Volk' conveys an image of an indiscriminate mass, as opposed to the named characters in the scene. It implies that their expressions are a collective mantra rather than the result of critical and independent thought. This makes it doubtful whether they understand the implications of extra freedoms and privileges, or are just attracted to an energetic personality who claims to possess a little more

knowledge than they do. The above points might substantiate Wilson's description of Vansen as a 'pseudo-intellectual who seduces the normally peaceful masses into revolt'.[74]

Whereas Vansen appears aggressive and agitated, Egmont's entrance on the scene — and first appearance in the play — shows him to be calm and reasonable, and to prefer sense and decency to force. His first words are a plea for peace and order ('Ruhig! Ruhig, Leute!'), followed by a plea to the townspeople to reject violence and not to antagonise the King any further. Egmont assures the townspeople that a measured response has been taken to the Spanish oppression, and claims that reasonable people ('Vernünftige') can achieve much (p. 487). Egmont's language also seems consistent with the content of his message. His contributions contain fewer demands and exclamations, making him seem less dramatic and more considered.

It is difficult to see how Vansen is representative of the Dutch provincials or of a specific social rank. Like Metzler, he antagonises many who sympathise with his support of struggle against oppression, and is verbally abused and threatened. The tallow chandler calls him 'Du Hund!' when he praises the iconoclasts in Flanders (p. 485), and Jetter brands him a loudmouth ('Lästermaul': p. 513). As in *Götz*, certain subjects — Jetter, the tallow chandler, the carpenter — initially dissociate themselves from advocates of violence, and support their social superior in advocating a peaceful resolution to the disturbances. They see force as a last resort, and not as a pleasurable end in itself. The carpenter describes this difference in attitude between members of a broadly similar social rank: Vansen represents the gluttonous and idle vagabonds who seek to relieve their boredom and satisfy their base, selfish desires by preaching principles of the general good to the curious and gullible (p. 487). Vansen does not typify a section of society, then, but is an aberration.

[74] Wilson, 'Hunger/artist', 84.

Alba's reference to 'der Kluge' in his exchange with Egmont (p. 526) is (perhaps deliberately) ambiguous, and not conspicuously confined to a specific part of the social hierarchy. Vansen must, though, be credited with more cunning than his opponents would care to admit — even if he does not put it to good use. The play proves that Alba is right to fear that 'cunning' characters such as Vansen would *try* to exploit the loopholes of an unfixed constitution. Whether he is right to think they would be successful goes unanswered.

Metzler's motivation for rebellion is a thirst for revenge on the territorial princes and sadism. His commitment to violence is unambiguous, and distinguishes him from Götz and the other peasants, particularly Wild. He delights in the fear and pain he causes the nobles who he feels have mistreated them, and compares the sight of princes squealing and tumbling over each other as they flee a burning castle with the warm feeling experienced after a glass of brandy (p. 370). Whereas Götz and Wild reluctantly use violence to assert their rights against the territorial princes, Metzler uses it enthusiastically and vindictively. He sees the purpose of the peasants' war thus: 'Uns an Feinden zu rächen, uns empor zu helfen!' Götz only agrees to lead the rebels on the condition that they refrain from future misdeeds, and is appalled to discover that his orders not to burn the town of Miltenberg have been disobeyed. Wild agrees that the destruction and carnage must come to an end. Metzler, however, has no interest in appeasement, and shows his disdain for negotiation with the following threat: 'wenn's Händel setzt wegen des Vertrags, schlagen wir den Verträgern zusammen die Köpfe ab' (p. 373).

Just as Egmont's followers reject Vansen's call to arms against the Spanish Crown and treat him with contempt, the other peasants in *Götz* appreciate the Knight's support, and disdain Metzler and his brutality. Kohl responds to Metzler's verbal abuse of Wild by calling him a 'Vieh'. Metzler's command to stir up other peasants and not to let any 'bastard' stand in his way causes Kohl to say to himself: 'Wir haben doch den großen Haufen auf unsrer

Seite' (p. 373). Like Vansen, Metzler might fancy himself as a ringleader of rebellion, but he is, in fact, a disliked and ridiculed outsider.

The disagreement and hostility between Metzler and his fellow rebels complicates their depiction. Götz agrees with Metzler on the need to revolt against the territorial princes, but, unlike Metzler, does not support violence for its own sake. Despite being initially prepared to follow Metzler's bloodthirsty example in confronting the princes, the other peasants are quickly persuaded by Götz's gentler approach (pp. 371-73). This seems to reflect the image of the horse and rider in *Egmont*: the peasants need a figure to properly direct their anger and energy against the upper nobility. The peasants themselves admit the need for a nobleman (albeit a 'lower' one) to give their cause credibility, with Link claiming that Götz's leadership would give their movement 'ein Schein' (p. 370).

Götz may also be considered a rebel, even if he does not see himself as one: 'Ich bin kein Rebell, habe gegen Ihro Kaiserliche Majestät nichts verbrochen, und das Reich geht mich nichts an' (pp. 358-59). His whole endeavour in the play may be perceived as a — sometimes violent — rebellion against the political trend. Does Götz use violence, however, to destroy law and order, and thereby defend anarchy, or is his rebellion directed against a particular conception of authority as represented by the emerging absolutist state?

Götz does not deny that his activities are technically illegal, nor that he is revolting against the princes. He does not, though, consider the princes as authority figures: they are neither his social nor political superiors, as his only allegiance is to the higher, and only meaningful, authority of the Emperor. Weislingen explains that the princes find Götz and the other knights very troublesome due to their accosting of the princes' subjects on the highways, and plundering of their villages and castles, when the Empire is threatened by foreign invasion. Götz argues that the princes are trying to undermine the Emperor, and

brands them the true thieves, for they use peace and tranquillity as an excuse to fleece their subjects: 'Den wünscht jeder Raubvogel, die Beute nach Bequemlichkeit zu verzehren' (p. 298). For Götz, then, fighting the princes does not mean rebelling against authority, but administering justice. He is engaged in an internal war within the Holy Roman Empire and the feudal order, but does not intend to harm either.

The justification of Götz's violence is a source of contention. Horst Lange discusses Götz's relationship to it in the context of Hobbesian social contract theory, and focuses on the distinction between legality and legitimacy. Lange argues that Götz may be aware that his actions are illegal in the new state, but does not believe that they transgress broader principles of justice. Furthermore, according to Hobbes' social contract theory, Götz is right not to recognise the legitimacy of the new state, as he has not given it his support: he has not agreed to surrender some of his personal freedom and to subordinate himself to the sovereign (the state). The Hobbesian sovereign is the product of a social contract between men in a 'state of nature' wanting to ensure public peace. This is not to be confused with Rousseau's understanding of the state of nature. Hobbes did not see it as an uncivilised world devoid of social ties, in which men existed as isolated individuals. Instead, he saw it as a 'war of every man, against every man', in a society in which men were already connected through clans and families and gave stability to their lives through 'bonds of words' — in other words, as medieval society.[75] According to Lange, the ubiquity of warfare in *Götz* reflects Hobbes' characterisation of life in the state of nature as 'nasty, brutish, and short'.[76]

However, it seems that Lange misinterprets Selbitz, as he misses the irony when the latter exclaims: 'Götz! Wir sind Räuber!' (p. 329) Lange perceives it as an admission of their

[75] Horst Lange, 'Wolves, Sheep, and the Shepherd: Legality, Legitimacy, and Hobbesian Political Theory in Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*', *Goethe Yearbook*, 10 (2001), 1-30 (p. 19).
[76] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 186.

barbaric lifestyle, whereas it is more an expression of incredulity. Selbitz is astounded to hear that the Emperor's tax collectors fleeced a farmer of eighteen florins, whilst he and Götz are branded thieves by the territorial princes and even the Emperor himself. This should not overshadow the central point of the Hobbesian argument which Lange addresses: whether authoritarian rule is preferable to anarchy.

Lange argues that the text is infused with Hobbes' political thought, describing it as an 'allegorical depiction of the struggle of a sovereign to protect his subjects in the face of a lawbreaker'. The princes' alleged commitment to public peace and security reflects the state that Hobbes envisaged, whereas Götz continues to live in the state of nature, hence Weislingen's comparison of him with a wolf and the princes with shepherds (p. 298). Götz combats what Lange considers one of the main themes of the play: the 'historical emergence of the modern state as the establishment of a Hobbesian sovereign'.[77] For Götz, freedom simply means 'the absence of subjection to a sovereign', and his mission is to 'rescue the medieval order from a fundamental flaw by nullifying Hobbes' reasons for the establishment of a sovereign […]'.[78] Here, Götz may coincide with Isaiah Berlin's concept of negative liberty.

Lange also asks what motivates Götz's violence. He considers the charge that it is for material gain, pointing to the knight's encouragement to Georg to kidnap and rob, and claiming that it is dubious whether Götz's attack on the Nuremberg merchants is justified or just to satisfy his thirst for revenge on Bamberg.[79] During his trial, Götz shows a lust for dealing with problems using physical aggression. After flooring one of the armed townspeople with a mighty clout, he dares the others to take him on: 'Kommt! Kommt! Es

[77] Lange, 'Wolves', 17.
[78] *Ibid*., 18.
[79] *Ibid*., 14.

wäre mir angenehm den tapfersten unter euch kennen zu lernen' (p. 360). This suggests that Götz relishes confrontation and challenges to his person, and that he sees violence as a means for others to display courage. Violence is not, in Götz's eyes, entirely negative.

However, Weislingen, who seeks to ingratiate himself with the peace-seeking modern state, does not shun violence either. There is a deep irony in his advocacy of a harsh treatment of the dissident imperial knights, and the remarkably brutal execution of Metzler. Weislingen wants to remove figures who are proving especially hostile to the modern state, and whose violence is deemed incompatible with it. Yet his methods of achieving this involve the very violence that he and the princes deplore.

Here it is useful to reflect on Max Weber's theory that only the state may legitimately use violence. Weber perceived the state as: 'diejenige menschliche Gemeinschaft, welche innerhalb eines bestimmten Gebietes […] das *Monopol legitimer physischer Gewaltsamkeit* für sich (mit Erfolg) beansprucht'. The right to use physical force, he added, is only granted to any other associations or individuals to the extent that the *state* itself permits this, therefore making the state the sole source of the 'right' to use force.[80] In order for the state to function, Weber argued that the ruled must submit to the authority claimed by those ruling at the time.[81] Götz believes that the right to use violence (and, therefore, political power) should be spread more evenly throughout society. His belief that the territorial princes should not have the monopoly on power makes him unable to submit to their authority. Having sacrificed his former personal power to the princes, Weislingen may see himself as entitled to exercise violence in a way that Götz is not. Götz's refusal to accept the legitimacy of the 'modern'

[80] Max Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Horst Baier and others, 43 vols to date (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1984-2016), vol. 17 (1992), pp. 157-252 (pp. 158-59).
[81] *Ibid*., p. 160.

state demonstrates his commitment to feudalism: a refusal to surrender his personal power and recognise the princes as the new locus of authority.

Götz's efforts to resist the political tide are, from his perspective at least, understandable. Whaley writes that the German knighthood of the early sixteenth century saw its 'traditional assumptions and […] self-image' challenged by political, technological, and economic developments, which eventually led to the 'knights' rebellion of 1522-3.[82] Many saw their independence threatened by subjugation to a prince, increasingly interventionist administrations, and the introduction of a legal system based on Roman law. The knights also saw their key role in medieval warfare reduced by the introduction of artillery and an increasing tendency for rulers to employ mercenaries. Their predicament contrasted with the relative affluence of the Imperial Cities and their patricians. As Whaley puts it, 'the rich merchant and the non-noble official trained in Roman law were the twin bogeys of the old noble elite'.[83]

Lange is wrong to view Götz as a wild anarchist. The Knight is keen to mete out justice, and to maintain a system of law and authority which he deems preferable for himself and his dependents. In the emerging absolutist state, Götz sees a more rigid and oppressive form of power and justice. Whereas he gladly concedes very little personal freedom to the feudal system embodied by the Emperor, he considers it politically and morally irresponsible to sacrifice a much greater amount of autonomy to a coercive sovereign.

Although Whaley doubts that the historical Knights' War had much to do with the Peasants' War, there does seem to be a similarity in the motives of the fictional knights and the fictional peasants revolting against the upper nobility. Both parties feel that the rise of the territorial princes is eroding their privileges and freedoms, and that the latter are not

[82] Whaley, *Holy Roman Empire*, vol. 1, p. 210.
[83] *Ibid*., p. 212.

displaying the magnanimity, flexibility, and approachability of their forefathers. Götz cannot criticise the peasants for using some physical force, as he also resorts to it to protect himself, his dependents and his property. However, herein lies another distinction between Götz and Metzler, as well as in the justification of rebellion. Lange argues that Götz 'seems to love violence for its own sake', but the weight of evidence suggests that he uses it as a means of self-defence and to restore (what he considers) justice.[84] The apparent pleasure he takes in repelling the townspeople in the trial scene may contradict this (p. 360). On deeper reflection, though, Götz's pleasure may derive more from the successful maintenance of his autonomy. It would be more accurate to see Götz's 'rebellion' as resistance: he is not an instinctive trouble-maker, but a trouble-maker out of necessity.

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The relationship between Metzler and the other peasants gives clues as to the justification of violent rebellion. Götz's position is that violence should be used only to make the princes aware of their social inferiors' grievances and the need to address them. It should not be a means of personal vengeance and injury. Götz wants to use violence for a political cause: to combat the self-aggrandisement of the territorial princes. Metzler wants to use it for parochial reasons: he wants to see specific individuals harmed for personal pleasure.

The likes of Metzler and Vansen merely seek to exploit and exacerbate resentment to satisfy their own shallow desires. The play does not portray all those lower on the social order as inherently violent and resistant to negotiation, but suggests that they may be manipulated into irresponsible behaviour by more unsavoury characters.

[84] Lange, 'Wolves', 2.

Conclusion

Although both texts are ambiguous with reference to the merits and demerits of the different forms of government being fought over, Egmont and Götz believe they are acting in the best interests of themselves and their social inferiors. They both perceive a threat to their subjects or dependents in the rise of the absolutist state, and are attached to a form of government which accounts for the history, traditions, and temperament of the people they rule rather than one based on uniformity. In broader terms, they prefer particularism to rationalism, the latter being embedded in administration and adherence to written documentation. They value an intimate relationship between the ruler and the ruled. The ruler should be recognisable, approachable, and attentive to his subjects' needs without bowing to their every demand. It is a relationship rooted in mutual trust and respect, epitomised by Egmont's comparison of the Netherlanders to a horse. The foundations of this trust and respect lie primarily in history and tradition, hence the high importance that the two texts attach to ancestry. The proximity and intergenerational bonds between ruler and ruled help to make the polity more like a wider family, even if social gradations remain within it. The distinction between the private and public sphere is, therefore, more blurred. Egmont and Götz deplore the prospect of rule by a distant sovereign, yet swear loyalty to King and Emperor respectively. They do this because they do not see the sovereign as threatening, but more as a paternal figure.

Egmont and Götz prefer a form of government which bases people's rights and duties on traditional practice rather than prescribed theory. Regardless of whether they are right or wrong, the texts cast doubt on whether the regimes which succeed their own are any better. However, the main characters certainly prefer the imperilled society to the emerging one. It is perhaps tradition and ancestry which they believe makes freedom quantifiable and identifiable rather than limitless and abstract. Spanish absolutism and the empowerment of the territorial princes both threaten to break the social and political bonds conducive to this

kind of liberty. Egmont and Götz pay the ultimate price for their attachment to values of honour, trust, and even courage. They underestimate the speed and extent of the changing political circumstances, and their attempts to resist these with 'feudal' values are futile. Yet, certainly in *Egmont*, the feudal system appears much more 'liberal' than the nascent absolutist state, particularly in terms of freedom of conscience and speech. Alba and Philip, supposed 'modernisers', come across as intolerant and draconian, a distinct contrast to the 'enlightened' pragmatism of Egmont and Machiavell. If Lange is right to detect Hobbesian political theory in *Götz*, the play presents a theory which looks fragile in practice. Not only does the sovereign power fail to command the support of all its subjects, it does nothing to provide for the peace of its opponents. This might not be the fault of the political system of the modern state: it could be argued that people like Götz are marginal figures who cause their own demise by refusing to toe its line. However, the level of intolerance shown towards these dissenters is, surely, a criticism of absolutism.

The contempt, cynicism, and brutality with which the architects of the modern state treat their opponents portrays them in a negative light — regardless of the validity of their political project. Philip, Alba, Weislingen, and the Bishop of Bamberg refuse to compromise, or to defend their beliefs through intellectual and rhetorical (rather than physical) force. This exposes them as dogmatic, unwilling to have their views challenged, and thereby hostile to a state which encourages independent thought and individuality. Their prescribed political structure is not just destructive of subjects' traditional rights and privileges, but also of subjects' ability to lead their lives in a certain way: without fear of interference from the sovereign.

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Liberty was the cornerstone of the French Revolutionaries' plan for a better society. Although published years before the outbreak of the Revolution, *Götz* and *Egmont* may, nonetheless, help to explain why Goethe did not embrace the Revolutionary promise to grant freedom to 'all men' (an enthusiastic expression of which was the planting of *Freiheitsbäume* by many Germans in 1790 to celebrate the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille).[85] The texts represent freedom as something which needs to be controlled, whether in the hands of the sovereign or of subjects. It needs boundaries and caveats, to be identifiable and recognisable, and its granting to those lower on the social order should be done with care. Ignoring this cautious, arguably 'conservative', message on the form and direction of freedom would lead to the twin evils of absolutism and anarchy. Those who exceed the bounds of their prescribed rights and privileges often cause violence in the process. This might have informed Goethe's view of the French Revolutionaries who crossed the Rhineland in 1792 to bring the perceived virtues of the Revolution and its 'liberating', 'universal' rights to the rest of Europe. Goethe would later address the practical implications of this Revolutionary mantra in the poem *Hermann und Dorothea*, which depicted Germans living on the Rhine having to defend themselves against brutal French troops, being driven out of their homes, and reduced to poverty.

[85] The Rights of Man guaranteed the same rights for all men over thirty and in meaningful employment.

Chapter Two

The Portrayal of the Aristocracy and *Bürgertum* in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*

'*Die Französische Revolution, Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre, und Goethes Meister sind die größten Tendenzen des Zeitalters.*[1]

Published in 1795 and 1796, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* was the culmination of a long and laborious process which involved the scrutiny of Goethe's friend and co-founder of Weimar Classicism, Friedrich Schiller. The Marxist philosopher and critic, Georg Lukács, similarly described the *Lehrjahre* as the most important aesthetic and ideological product of the transition period between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[2] The novel certainly coincided with considerable social, economic and political change in Europe, not least due to the unfolding of the Revolution. However, there were other, longer-term and less tangible preconditions, including reforms in agriculture, the gradual development of a capitalist economy, and those associated with the Enlightenment. By the time of the publication of the *Lehrjahre*, the Revolution had experienced its bloodiest period in the form of the Terror, and witnessed the subsequent execution of Robespierre and his associates, before the creation of a new constitution in 1795. Although this chapter does not seek to measure the impact of the Revolution on the novel, the content of the work encourages one to relate it, at least tentatively, to that event, and to consider how far its treatment of the *Bürgertum* and the *Adel* reflected Goethe's own views.

Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre is often considered the epitome of a Bildungsroman. The main character, dissatisfied with the environment in which he is brought up, strives to better

[1] Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäums-Fragmente*, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler and others, 35 vols (Munich, Paderborn, Vienna: Ferdinand Schöning Thomas Verlag, 1958-79), vol. 2 (1967), pp. 165-255 (p. 198).
[2] Georg Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit* (Bern: A. Francke AG. Verlag, 1947), p. 31.

himself culturally, intellectually and personally. This forces him to confront the structure and conventions of society. Wilhelm's *Bildung* allows, therefore, examination of the differences between the social orders (*Stände*), as well as the flexibility of the social hierarchy: the scope for the individual to progress within it. Wilhelm, born into the *Bürgertum*, tries to escape from its perceived restrictions and heads for the supposedly superior sphere of the *Adel*.

This chapter starts by asking what it means to call the *Lehrjahre* a Bildungsroman, and considers other interpretations of the novel, as well as analysing what is to be understood by *Bildung*. It then asks what is meant by the terms *Bürgertum* and *Adel* in historical reality. Lastly it looks at how these are presented in the novel.

The portrayal of the *Bürgertum* and aristocracy is analysed in three parts. First, it interrogates Wilhelm's description of the *Bürgertum*: does the novel present the *Bürgertum* as being as confined and restricting as he claims? Second, it asks how far Wilhelm's preconceptions of the *Adel* reflect reality: does the nobility supply the values missing from *bürgerlich* life? Lastly, it probes the extent of division and co-operation between the *Bürgertum* and *Adel*: do they share any virtues or vices, and how far are they shown to be working with or against each other? All these considerations form the central question of this chapter: to what extent do the *Bürgertum* and *Adel* help or hinder Wilhelm's *Bildung*?

Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre: A Bildungsroman?

A modern German-English Dictionary also offers many suggestions for *Bildung*, including 'formation', 'education', 'culture'.[3] Wilhelm von Humboldt saw it as a highly individualistic and inward-looking concept. He believed that individual virtue was not about pleasing the

[3] *Collins English-German Dictionary*, 5th edition (Glasgow: Collins, 2004), p. 1194.

outside world, but about internal self-improvement, trying to satisfy the 'inner restlessness which consumes us'.[4] By achieving this, the individual would, inadvertently, benefit society. Moreover, Humboldt saw *Bildung* as the ability for the individual to shape his circumstances rather than be shaped by them.

It was not until the nineteenth century that the *Lehrjahre* was referred to as a Bildungsroman. Uwe Steiner describes how, in this period, the novel replaced drama as the main representative form, and much of the literature that followed the *Lehrjahre* mimicked its essential structure. Wilhelm Dilthey applied the term Bildungsroman to novels depicting the hero's struggle to come to terms with the harsh realities of the world.[5] Lukács agreed that the *Lehrjahre* concerned its hero's acceptance of reality, but thought that the novel would be better classified as an 'Erziehungsroman'.[6]

Others have attached less importance to *Bildung* as a feature of the *Lehrjahre*, and seen it as a more social or sociological text. According to Steiner, this is exemplified by the Society of the Tower's encouragement of Wilhelm to adapt to real circumstances ('äußere Verhältnisse'), and by the 'Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele' — also a piece of 'religious autobiography' expressing Goethe's belief in an active, not introspective, faith — which could be interpreted as an eighteenth-century critique of female socialisation.[7] Friedrich Kittler emphasises Wilhelm's development into a social, as opposed to an essentially egocentric, being, and his rise out of a small *bürgerlich* family into a productive individual. Kittler also concentrates on the transition from *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* to the

[4] W.H. Bruford, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: ''Bildung'' from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 17.
[5] Uwe Steiner, '*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*', *Handbuch*, vol. 3 (1997), pp. 113-52 (p.138).
[6] Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit*, p. 40.
[7] Steiner, '*Lehrjahre*', p. 129.

Lehrjahre from a patriarchal-conjugal to a matriarchal-social family.[8] Found nearly a century after Goethe's death, and not published until 1911, the *Sendung* was the first phase of the *Wilhelm Meister* project, which later included *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Goethe stopped working on the fragment before his journey to Italy in 1786, but several features of the text are present in the *Lehrjahre*. Dieter Borchmeyer describes the *Lehrjahre* as an attempt at reconciliation ('Annäherung') between the *Adel* and *Bürgertum*. If the nobility can renounce feudal privileges which limit and restrain its actions, and thereby become more like *Bürger* in a social and economic sense, the *Bürgertum* can become more like the nobility in its behaviour and outward customs. This reconciliation of social ranks was the objective of the more 'progressive' members ('fortschrittlicher Kreise') of the *Bürgertum*, Borchmeyer claims, in a country that was not prepared for revolution.[9] Ulrich Stadler goes deeper, describing the novel as sociological and psychoanalytical with an anti-Revolutionary message. The origins of this anti-Revolutionary message are to be found in Wilhelm's failed revolt against his *bürgerlich* background, which is prefigured in the symbolic figure of the sick son of the king, as well as in his fascination with *Hamlet*. The performance of *Hamlet* confirms to the reader that Wilhelm has no future in the theatre, and the re-appearance of the painting of the king's sick son towards the end of the novel represents personal reconciliation between Wilhelm and the legacy of his late father, and social and political reconciliation between the aristocracy and the *Bürgertum*.[10]

Pamela Currie asks how far the *Lehrjahre* can be considered either a 'traditionalist' or 'modernist' text. These terms require a working definition. According to Currie, a traditional society mirrors family life. It is based on the security of one's own social status and

[8] Friedrich A. Kittler, 'Über die Sozialisation Wilhelm Meisters', Gerhard Kaiser and Friedrich A. Kittler, *Dichtung als Sozialisationsspiel: Studien zu Goethe und Gottfried Keller* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), pp. 13-124 (p. 22).
[9] Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, p. 198.
[10] Ulrich Stadler, 'Wilhelm Meisters unterlassene Revolte: Individuelle Geschichte und Gesellschaftsgeschichte in Goethes *Lehrjahren*', *Euphorion*, 74 (1980), 360-74.

occupation. The individual has no rights *qua* individual, but is judged by the standards of his group. There is, then, no personal freedom within the collective: one must either adapt to this or leave. Modern society, on the other hand, consists of large and abstract structures, creating little or no emotional bond in the public sphere. The individual is a legal person *qua* individual, and has a greater say on his personal destiny. However, with this greater personal liberty comes greater insecurity in the public sphere, making the private sphere a refuge from permanent uncertainty over one's identity.[11] In Germany, modernisation began in the sixteenth century, and started to polarise opinion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was both supported and directed by those dissatisfied with traditional society, and opposed by those fearing the loss of the purpose of their existence. Both commoners and nobles supported and opposed modernisation, making the difference between the moderniser and the traditionalist the more important social distinction.

Currie writes that the novel is commonly perceived as a vision of modern society, in which Wilhelm 'entrusts himself to free-market forces and finds happiness in a self-regulating system of risk-taking and reward'. However, she concludes that the novel has an essentially traditionalist message, with the story 'ultimately one of integration into a patriarchal world'.[12] This is symbolised by Wilhelm's abandonment of a theatrical career, and the presence of Felix, who represents a means of passing on Wilhelm's wealth to future generations. Currie's reading partly agrees with the older interpretation by Lukács, who interprets the novel as a critique of economic forces, such as the capitalist division of labour and the pigeonholing of people according to their occupation.[13] This chapter pays much attention to the conflict between Wilhelm's pursuit of his own will and social reality: to what

[11] Currie, *Literature as Social Action*, p. 9.
[12] *Ibid*., p. 231.
[13] Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit*, p. 33.

extent does Wilhelm's accommodation with social reality preserve his individual ambition or see him bend to a traditionalist system?

Michael Beddow, however, denies that Goethe pursued a single 'idea' in the *Lehrjahre*, and argues that it is 'oversimplified' either to see Wilhelm's experience as a straight-line of self-discovery and cultivation or to claim that the novel treats *Bildung* with irony by showing Wilhelm to be baffled and unfulfilled throughout.[14] Wilhelm's 'journey' includes several set-backs and high-points, and fluctuations in his self-confidence and sense of identity. Apparent set-backs and negligible details, however, contribute to the realisation of Wilhelm's creative energy ('schöpferische Kraft'), and his reason ('Vernunft').[15] Wilhelm is made to acknowledge that he does not live in a social vacuum, and cannot act entirely according to his own will without harming others or himself. At the same time, he should not let himself be defined entirely by the circumstances into which he is born, but find a social role which accommodates — and encourages — his individuality. Such a message, Beddow claims, enables us to see the *Lehrjahre* as a 'modern' text: it accepts that individuals need to have a *social* function (to be useful to their community), but argues that their social function should be of their *own* choosing (a 'Bestimmung'), not one allotted to them by convention.[16] The novel implies that rampant individualism and rampant collectivism thwart the realisation of mankind's potential, but does not suggest how most human beings can avoid the two evils in modern society.[17]

There are also several scholarly interpretations of how *Bildung* is represented in the novel. Some emphasise Wilhelm's individual development, others his integration into society. Kurt May sees it as Wilhelm's integrating into society instead of focusing purely on

[14] Michael Beddow, *The Fiction of Humanity: Studies in the Bildungsroman from Wieland to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 70-4.
[15] *Ibid*., p. 84.
[16] *Ibid*., pp. 154-55.
[17] *Ibid*., p. 157.

himself.[18] Bruford claims that the essence of this *Bildungsroman* — which he sees as highly autobiographical — is Wilhelm's discovery of 'what is best for him and how he intends to pursue it'. According to Bruford, this does not happen until Wilhelm's correspondence with Werner in the fifth book.[19] Albert Berger also emphasises the link between the concept of *Bildung* and happiness (*Glück*) that is essential to the realisation of the self.[20] T.J. Reed's interpretation could be seen as either pessimistic or simply realistic. For Reed, the *Lehrjahre* presents *Bildung* as a person's recognition of a futile endeavour, and search for a more realistic means of self-fulfilment: 'die Bereitwilligkeit zur Rücknahme des einst in gutem Glauben Erstrebten'.[21] Hans-Jürgen Schings defines it as the main character's development into an 'active' member of society, through an association with the politically prominent *Adel*, as epitomised by his marriage to Natalie.[22] Mattias Pirholt initially describes his view of Wilhelm's *Bildung* as a form of 'healing' from the 'sickness' of a lack of education as well as the 'subject's adjustment to the demands of modernity and to a modern mode of representation'. Largely through the influence of the Society of the Tower, Wihelm learns to comply with society and defer to the wisdom and authority of those who guide him.[23] Similarly, Ernest Schonfield associates Wilhelm's *Bildung* with his compromise with society and achievement of an inner confidence.[24] Wilhelm eventually learns to deal with *bürgerlich* society 'on its own terms', and realises that compromise 'need not be limiting, but can

[18] Kurt May, *Form und Bedeutung: Interpretationen deutscher Dichtung des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1957), pp.161-66.
[19] Bruford, *Tradition of Self-Cultivation*, p. 30.
[20] Albert Berger, *Ästhetik und Bildungsroman: Goethes „*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre'' (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1977), p. 121.
[21] T.J. Reed, 'Revolution und Rücknahme: Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre im Kontext der Französischen Revolution', *Goethe Jahrbuch*, 107 (1990), 27-43 (p. 38).
[22] Hans-Jürgen Schings, 'Wilhelm Meister und das Erbe der Illuminaten', *Die Weimarer Klassik und ihre Geheimbünde*, ed. Walter Müller-Seidel & Wolfgang Riedel (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), pp. 177-203.
[23] Mattias Pirholt, 'A Symbolic-Mystic Monstrosity: Ideology and Representation in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*', *Goethe Yearbook*, 16 (2009), 69-99 (p. 92).
[24]Ernest Schonfield, 'Compromise and Collectivity in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 81 (2012), 12-25.

sometimes be mutually beneficial'.[25] Most of these interpretations indicate that *Bildung* requires a combination of individual ambition and acknowledgment of social reality, if to differing extents.

Furthermore, the novel puts its own slant on the term, drawing on the proximity between the meanings of *Bildung* and *bilden*. The noun *Bildung* appears in various contexts. An example of its versatility is in the correspondence between Wilhelm and Werner in Book Five. Werner writes that the best way for Wilhelm to realise his *Bildung* is by travelling, but Wilhelm is convinced that he can only achieve it via the theatre.[26] Wilhelm later asks Aurelie how she can hate the French language, as it forms an integral part of a person's *Bildung* (p. 711). *Bilden* is also a word with a wide range of meaning. It can be translated as 'to form', 'to fashion', 'to shape' (in terms of a character), to educate (in the sense of 'to bring up', or 'erziehen'), and 'to develop'.[27] In Book Eight, *Bildung* and *Bilden* appear alongside each other. When the narrator claims that Wilhelm has completed his apprenticeship, Wilhelm strongly believes that *Bildung* is not a premeditated, but a 'natural' process: 'da die Natur uns auf liebliche Weise zu allem bildet, was wir sein sollen'. It is Nature, then, that 'shapes' an individual. Wilhelm sees its conception in civil society as merely superficial, intellectual, and essentially unrealistic: it might make a person more socially adept and culturally knowledgeable, but it will not develop their character: 'O, der seltsamen Anforderungen der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, die uns erst verwirrt und mißleitet und dann mehr als die Natur von uns selbst fordert!' He then pleads: 'Wehe jede Art von Bildung, welche die wirksamsten Mittel wahrer Bildung zerstört, und uns auf das Ende hinweist, an statt uns auf dem Wege

[25] *Ibid*., 25.
[26] Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, *Werke*, vol. 9 (1992), pp. 355-994 (p. 636).
[27] *Collins*, p. 119.

selbst zu beglücken'. It is through fatherhood — not the theatre — that Wilhelm feels that he has discovered himself, that his character has been 'shaped' (p. 881).

Despite the nuances, some common features emerge from most of these interpretations of *Bildung*. There is the deliberate moral and cultural development of the individual, his acceptance of society, and efforts to become a respectable and influential member of it. These interpretations indicate, then, a need to combine the pursuit of individual ambitions — the realisation of one's potential — with social adeptness (to be *civilised*). As a working definition for this chapter, therefore, *Bildung* may be understood — following Bruford's interpretation — as 'self-cultivation'.

Bürgertum and Adel in eighteenth-century Germany

The term *Bürger* is essentially untranslatable. Interpreting it depends on the era and political context in which it is used, and no other language can do its various meanings full justice. Originally referring to a resident of a fortified town ('Burg'), by the late eighteenth century, *Bürger* had become a far more politicised concept. English translations usually offer 'citizen' or, less often, 'bourgeois', whilst French comes up with 'bourgeois', 'citoyen', or 'citadin'. That German provides only one term, 'Bürger', reflects its flexibility and malleability, as well as the peculiar social and political development of the German nation. It may even be said that the *Lehrjahre* presents a unique version – or even versions — of the term, and possibly hint at Goethe's personal understanding of it.

The late Middle Ages saw the term encompass an entire *bürgerlich* rank ('Stand') between the agricultural rank (*Bauer*) and the feudal knights (*Ritter*). The general European tendency towards absolute monarchical sovereignty in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries threatened to separate *Bürger* from *Untertanen*. The former included those with a

stake in state affairs. The latter included those who did not, and were merely 'subjects'. By the eighteenth century, however, it was thought possible to be both a *Bürger* and an *Untertan*, and the enlightened absolutism of the German *Aufklärung* saw *Bürger* regain a broader meaning for all subjects of the state. This was not confined to politics, as a concept of *Bürgerlichkeit* played a prominent role in the German Enlightenment. Although it did not eradicate social distinctions, *Bürgerlichkeit* could encompass anyone from a moderately educated town-dweller to aristocrats and even ruling princes, as it implied 'virtue and virtuous behaviour, […] civic responsibility and a commitment to the improvement of society'.[28] Being *bürgerlich* was, then, a question of mentality, moral disposition, and the individualism associated with the *Aufklärung* — and many German courts sought to foster a *bürgerlich* culture, and even a *bürgerlich* nation.[29]

Friedrich Scheidemantel, a lawyer and adviser to the Prussian government, attempted to create a general and specific meaning for *Bürger*. According to the general meaning, all members of the state were *Bürger*. This even included the monarch himself, the first *Bürger* of the nation. According to the specific meaning, *Bürger* connoted the traditional sense of a member of an urban community, and distinguished him from the *Adel* and *Bauer*. Whereas all members of the state qualified as *Bürger*, the role of an *Untertan* was clearly defined: 'Untertan aber jeder, welcher den höchsten Befehlen des Regenten gehorchen muß'.[30] The political fragmentation of the Holy Roman Empire precluded the development of an independent *bürgerlich* consciousness to rival that of France.

[28] Whaley, *Holy Roman Empire*, vol. 2: *The Peace of Westphalia to the Dissolution of the Reich 1648-1806*, p. 460.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 528.
[30] J.F. Scheidemantel, 'Das Staatsrecht nach der Vernunft und den Sitten der vornehmsten Völker betrachtet', vol. 41, *Allgemeines Staatsrecht*, Jena: 1770, p. 207, quoted in Manfred Riedel, 'Bürger, Staatsbürger, Bürgertum', *Grundbegriffe*, vol. 1 (1972) pp. 672-725 (pp. 684-85).

In reaction to the levelling tendency of absolutism on the *Bürgertum*, Justus Möser reverted to the old Germanic constitution in an effort to reconstruct the semantics of the traditional term. He wanted to determine an individual's rights according to his stake in society, which was determined by how much property he owned. This view of the *Bürger* as a stakeholder (*Aktionär*) distinguished him from the serfs (*Knechte*), and pitted him against the nationalistic image, advocated by the National Assembly in 1789, as a mere member of a state enterprise (*Staatskompagnie*). Attaching much importance to Möser's writings, Goethe tried to encourage Carl August to govern Weimar according to the ideas put forward in the *Patriotische Phantasien*. These writings from the state attorney of Osnabrück, and later privy councillor of justice, praised the perceived virtues of politics within the manageable limits of the small state (*Kleinstaaterei*) system — which also involved much *bürgerlich* engagement.[31] Goethe recalled his first meeting with Carl August in Frankfurt, and that he gave a copy of the *Phantasien* to a young duke who he felt was intent on using his position benevolently. Adding that all Germans should take an interest in Möser's work, Goethe noted the author's particularly positive portrayal of the *Kleinstaaterei* system for the development of culture (even if detractors bemoaned the supposed political fragmentation, anarchy, and impotence of the Holy Roman Empire).[32]

The French Revolution infused the term *citoyen* with much greater political meaning than that connoted by *Bürger*. Drawing upon Rousseauistic principles of the 'general will', it was declared in 1793 that the whole (now republican) nation was composed of just 'citoyens', in whom sovereignty was completely, and equally, invested. This led to another potential translation of *Bürger*: *bourgeois*. This was a more private term for individuals engaged in business and commerce. *Bourgeois* was devoid of any connotation of 'subjection',

[31] *Ibid*., p. 688.
[32] Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, p. 700.

and had a highly egalitarian nuance. Due to the relative stability of the old hierarchical and monarchical system, no adequate German equivalent was found for the Revolutionary nuance of 'citoyen'.[33]

According to Wolfgang Rothe, Goethe used *Bürger* as not a social, but an anthropological, term. A good *Bürger* would perform domestic duties, work hard, and remain true to himself. He would accept his predetermined ('schicksalsmäßigen') place in the world, and avoid inappropriate ambition: he would not attempt to climb the social ladder.[34] Rothe mentions Goethe's pride at being a *Bürger*, and that he saw the *Bürgertum* as the most solid and durable part of a state.[35] This, however, was in a strictly apolitical capacity: *Bürger* should not expect to participate in government. Roethe also claims that Goethe saw reverence for the aristocracy as compatible with *bürgerlich* status, referring to Goethe's verse in the poem *Vier Jahreszeiten*: 'Wer ist das würdigste Glied des Staats? Ein wackerer Bürger;/ Unter jeglicher Form bleibt er der edelste Stoff'.[36]

In the concept of *Bildung*, ideas of *Adel* and *Bürgertum* were very influential – for both Goethe and Schiller. Manfred Riedel mentions that the terms *bürgerlich* and *adlig* were employed in opposition to each other, signifying separate cultures. Whereas the *bürgerlich* world revolved around work, the aristocratic way of life was based on representation, and seen as exemplary. Only in the theatre can a *Bürger* achieve this, writes Wilhelm to Werner, as the actors can move and speak with the elegance and eloquence befitting a nobleman (pp. 658-59). Schiller, however, wondered whether the *bürgerlich* striving to imitate the aristocratic way of life would harm internal *Bildung*, as it would ultimately be founded on pretence. Central to the *Lehrjahre* is the question of bridging the gap between aristocratic

[33] Riedel, 'Bürger', p. 698.
[34] Rothe, *Der politische Goethe*, p. 137.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 143
[36] *Ibid*., p. 142, and Goethe, 'Vier Jahreszeiten', *Werke*, vol. 29 (1988), pp. 237-49 (p. 245, lines 139-40).

representation and the *bürgerlich* work ethic. This, according to Riedel, is how the novel defines *Bildung*.[37]

Whilst acknowledging that English has no adequate substitute for *Bürger*, this chapter will use the term 'burgher' in order to avoid constant switching between languages. For the same reason, *Adel* will often appear as 'aristocracy' or 'nobility'.

Aristotle defined aristocracy as the rule of 'the best men'. He also argued that it was the preferable form of government, as it combined administration with virtue.[38] According to Johann Heinrich Zedler's eighteenth-century dictionary, *Adel* meant: 'ein Ehrenstand, welcher um hervorgehender Tugenden und Verdienste willen von der höchsten Obrigkeit verliehen wird, und auf die Nachkommen erbet'.[39] The original meaning of the term *Adel* implies ownership and rootedness in one's place of birth ('Erbsitz' and 'Heimat').[40] These have constituted perennial features, as well as a disposition to rule (particularly over those who work on the land), military leadership, valour, virtue, good breeding, and wealth. Over the course of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the Holy Roman Empire witnessed the emergence of the *Hofadel*, the courtly nobles who served the various state princes of the Empire. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though, absolutist monarchs throughout Europe sought to reduce the influence of the *Adel* as they assumed more centralised power. The aristocracy's role as an intermediary between the monarch and the people, as advocated by Montesquieu, was in jeopardy. However, this period paradoxically saw the rise of another kind of nobility — the *Beamtenadel* — as the number of public posts in bureaucracy increased. The *Beamtenadel* was seen as part of a patriotic endeavour to provide the monarch with the financial and military strength to create a more prosperous and powerful nation.

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[37] Riedel, 'Bürger', p. 700.
[38] Aristotle, *The Politics*, tr. T.A. Sinclair, ed. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), pp. 256-60.
[39] Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschafften und Künste*, Digitale Sammlungen, p. 273.
[40] Werner Conze, 'Adel, Aristokratie', *Grundbegriffe*, vol. 1 (1972). pp. 1-48 (p. 1).

Despite these challenges, the *Erbadel* persisted. This 'traditional' aristocracy had largely been sustained on the *Geblütsprinzip*: a belief that hereditary succession would produce a lineage of similarly venerable figures to wield power.[41] This distinction with the nobility is analogous to the distinction between the French *noblesse de la robe* (whose members served in administrative and judicial posts) and *noblesse de l'épée* (whose members descended from illustrious warriors who had received landed estates in return for their military service).

During the eighteenth century, the expansion of trade and commerce led to an increasingly powerful *Bürgertum* and greater social mobility, which caused greater scrutiny of the legitimacy of the old aristocracy. The German priest and writer, J.C. Mayer, advocated the replacement of the *Adel* with an *Elite*. This 'elite' would be a more meritocratic nobility, whose members would be selected on their achievement rather than their birth. Even if this did not cause the abolition of the *Adel* in Germany, it prompted more moderate, or 'conservative', figures, such as Justus Möser, to call for modernising and reforming measures. In all cases, though, the term 'feudal' had acquired a negative connotation. The increased use of the term *Elite* as opposed to *Adel* was perhaps most symbolic of the incompatibility of the *Erbadel* with the spirit of the times.[42]

The French Revolution had profound consequences for the *Adel*, which was now inextricably linked with the term *aristocrat*. The Revolutionaries considered the aristocracy in a partisan context, as an implacable opponent of 'democracy', and the zealous egalitarianism and fraternity for which their cause supposedly stood. Aristocrats had oppressed nations for centuries: the Revolution finally spelt the end of their noxious role in history, radicals hoped. In France, and in French-occupied Mainz in 1792, somebody who interacted with aristocrats could be accused of being either an anarchist or a reactionary. That

[41] Conze, 'Adel, Aristokratie', pp. 20-3.
[42] *Ibid*., pp. 23-7.

is, he was seen as either a rebel against the Revolutionary doctrine or an apologist for the *ancien régime*. Although the French Revolution did not remove the aristocracy in Germany, it severely weakened it. The 1790s saw many calls for a nobility-free republic ensuring the equality of all citizens. Immanuel Kant deemed the hereditary nobility antithetical to the ideal republican representational constitution, and held that virtue was no longer the preserve of aristocratic circles, but should contribute to an ennoblement of humanity.[43] Others, such as the playwright and diplomat, August von Kotzebue, continued to uphold the hereditary principle. Describing the social hierarchy as a law of nature, he stressed the essential decency and spiritual importance of the aristocracy, its bond between the 'Fürst und Volk' and status as a bulwark against monarchical and democratic despotism.[44]

When the *Lehrjahre* was published, therefore, the *Adel* still conjured positive images for some, but also had many severe critics and opponents. It had retained much of its original sense as an affluent, landed and (in the case of the *Erbadel*) hereditary elite, and an identity very different from that of the *Bürgertum*. It was arguably more vulnerable than at any other time in its history, and needed to reform to secure its longevity. Yet it still commanded deference — even awe — from its subjects, and was generally accepted as the most apt *Stand* to rule.

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Before analysing the text, we must consider whether it is right to treat the *Lehrjahre* as a Bildungsroman. The numerous interpretations of the novel may warn against such a one-dimensional approach. Does Wilhelm achieve *Bildung*? If so, are his experiences meant to represent the social and cultural prospects of all *Bürger*, or merely a personal story? What,

[43] Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden*, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel and others, 6 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel-Verlag, 1960-64), vol. 6 (1964), pp. 193-251 (pp. 204-07).
[44] Conze, 'Adel, Aristokratie', pp. 29-32.

then, does the novel really say about Goethe's thoughts on the scope for self-advancement within the social hierarchy? The chapter cannot use all the possible interpretations of the *Lehrjahre* to examine the work, and the nature of this thesis is political. The novel also contains sufficient references to *Bildung*, the *Adel*, and the *Bürgertum*, to assume the Bildungsroman interpretation as the main line of enquiry. Whatever political or social messages the chapter gleans from Wilhelm's experiences may be briefly considered against more personal readings of the novel in its conclusion. This will also help to assess the political and social content of the *Lehrjahre*, and how this affects the representation of *Bildung* in the work.

Bürgertum **and the nobility in** ***Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre***

Wilhelm spends the first book of the *Lehrjahre* yearning to leave home and employment in his father's business. The narrator explains his eagerness to join a theatre company as a desire to escape the dull and drab life of a burgher ('sich aus dem stockenden und schleppenden bürgerlichen Leben heraus zu reißen': p. 386). When he finally has the chance to travel (albeit officially for business reasons), he compares his preparations for departure to a prisoner cutting away at his chains in a cell (p. 419). What does Wilhelm find so confining about *bürgerlich* life, and is there anything that he says in its defence? How far is he really 'imprisoned'?

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A starting point is Wilhelm's and Werner's correspondence in Book Five. Werner is, apparently, happy with the ideal *bürgerlich* life, which he defines as securing enough capital and material wealth for an enviable status (p. 656). Once this is achieved, Werner believes, one can enjoy the company of friends and family, and not worry about the rest of the world,

unless you can make a profit from it (p. 655). Wilhelm finds this attitude repulsive, and it stiffens his resolve to continue his theatrical exploits. In his reply to Werner, he sets out a different set of values, and accuses his brother-in-law of the primitive thinking which characterises their social rank.

Wilhelm has higher cultural and intellectual aspirations, which surpass the boundary ('Grenzlinie') in which most burghers feel comfortable (p. 658). He wants to attain a sufficiently elegant air, and refined taste in art, to circulate with aplomb in wider social circles, chiefly among the *Adel* (p. 659). For Wilhelm, noblemen exude a natural confidence, grace, and manners, nurtured by their prominent role in public life, whereas *Bürger* are forced to feign prestige. Any confidence, grace, and manners that they show in public is likely to be superficial and worthy of ridicule (pp. 658-59). According to Wilhelm, the closest a *Bürger* can come to attracting the public acclaim enjoyed by the *Adel*, and exuding the airs and graces of a nobleman, is on stage. However, this reinforces the notion that a burgher's social confidence and refinement can only ever be synthetic. Dieter Borchmeyer describes Wilhelm's reference to the importance of appearance ('Scheinen') as reflective of opposition to a *bürgerlich* system of values. Whilst Werner claims that one should only care about the world in as far as one can make use (i.e. profits) out of it, Wilhelm's emphasis on aesthetics goes above and beyond such primitive concerns ('die gemeine Nutz- und Mittelwelt').[45] Borchmeyer also notes that it is through performance that Wilhelm sees his escape from the *Bürgertum*, and a move towards its true alternative: the lifestyle of the nobility.[46]

This correspondence between Wilhelm and Werner provides an insight into some priorities of *bürgerlich* life: an obsession with money and material goods, leading to philistinism. Werner is portrayed more negatively than in the *Sendung*, in which his

[45] Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, p. 25.
[46] Ibid., p. 23.

counterpart also praises trade, but does not appear so ruthless, and takes some interest in Wilhelm's theatrical ambitions.[47] The Werner of the *Lehrjahre* is often seen as a caricature of his social rank. Like all satire, though, this can appear comical whilst revealing its author's perception of bleak reality. Elements of this caricature are not only to be found in Werner's letter to Wilhelm, but also earlier in the novel.

Werner's emphasis on money is closely linked with a general love of trade. Werner is convinced that Wilhelm just needs a bigger role within the family business to be swept away by the ability of trade to service people's needs, and provide a living for men of business (p. 389). The narrator says that Werner feels spiritually uplifted whenever he thinks of his friend's financial affairs (p. 390), and Werner describes double-entry bookkeeping as one of the greatest inventions of the human mind. Such hyperbole epitomises his highly mercenary mind-set, which essentially regards life as a series of debit and credit, savings and acquisitions. This is in stark contrast to Wilhelm's emphasis on the 'Fazit des Lebens' (p. 389). 'Fazit' is another accounting metaphor, but is used to make Werner understand that a fulfilling life requires a 'balancing' of money and material comfort with intellectual and spiritual stimulation.

Werner is avowedly unscrupulous in his quest for profit. He laughs when recalling how he used to exploit Wilhelm's puppet shows, by stripping the puppets of their clothes and selling the materials. Comparing himself to a war looter, he claims that there is nothing more sensible than capitalising on people's foolishness, and that trying to cure such foolishness would be a vain endeavour (p. 388). This suggests that Werner has little time for sentiment or idealism, especially when it compromises trade. These remarks seem deeply cynical and

[47] The Werner of the *Sendung* calls double-entry bookkeeping one of the greatest inventions of the human mind, but does not condone the exploitation of human folly. He also listens to Wilhelm's frustration at not being able to write a well-structured drama. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung*, *Werke*, vol. 9 (1992), pp. 9-354 (pp. 115-21 and pp. 70-7).

selfish, but they are also pragmatic, accepting inherent human imperfection, rather than loftily seeking its remedy. They could portray Werner as an astute man of business, who tailors things which do not interest him (such as puppet shows) to other people's wants and his own financial gain. However, the passage does little to portray Werner favourably. Werner's advice to Wilhelm to throw his drafts of a play into the fire makes his dismissal of Wilhelm's cultural aspirations seem particularly harsh (p. 388).[48] Werner's dialogue conveys an obsession with money which makes him seem narrow-minded and pathetic.

Werner is not the only character to be affected by money. The theatre director, Serlo, admits to only being interested in lucrative productions, and is willing to yield to the expectations of the audience rather than to respect the artistic and aesthetic value of a play. This is exemplified in his dispute with Wilhelm over whether to stage the whole of *Hamlet* or an abridged version (p. 661-62), and even whether to allow the main protagonist to die. Serlo wants to gratify the audience with a play in piecemeal, easily digestible form, whereas Wilhelm favours a lengthier, more rigorous version which honours its literary craftsmanship, and respects the original plot. Serlo's response shows that his priorities lie with the consumer rather than with the playwright: 'Wer das Geld bringt, kann die Ware nach seinem Sinne verlangen' (p. 682). He, like Werner, shuns idealism and pragmatically works around economic reality. It seems that money does, to a large extent, shape — even dictate — the considerations and aspirations for members of the *Bürgertum*.

In Wilhelm's eyes, burghers are so absorbed by their pursuit of capital that they neglect anything not immediately relevant to it. This results in superficiality and philistinism. Wilhelm's father not only considers his son's puppet shows pointless, but is also vexed by their daily occurrence. Similarly, his mother complains that Wilhelm's excessive passion for

[48] In the corresponding passage in the *Sendung*, Werner gives no such advice (pp. 115-21).

puppetry is disturbing her domestic peace, provoking her son to ask despairingly whether everything is useless which does not lead to immediate financial or material gain (pp. 361-62). Furthermore, it exemplifies why Wilhelm thinks that such an environment offers him no hope of *Bildung* as Mattias Pirholt interprets it: a cure from the 'sickness' of a 'lack of education'.[49]

This is a *Bürgertum* in decline. The sale of the grandfather's art collection shows the father's indifference to its cultural value, and perhaps even ignorance of it. It also hints, however, that past generations of burghers were not as philistine and finance-driven as those in the novel. This might support Lukács' and Currie's comments on capitalism: finding a 'product' that appeals to many, rather than creating something intrinsically valuable, has become the norm in *bürgerlich* life.[50]

According to Wilhelm, this dearth of education encourages prosperous burghers to seek trivial sources of pleasure and pride. In the 'Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele', Natalie's aunt admires the fine taste and order of her niece's house, as well as the arrangements for the wedding celebrations (pp. 782-83). When Werner coincidentally meets Wilhelm in Lothario's castle, he remarks on how the women in Wilhelm's town spend all their time attending to their appearance, and ensuring they are well turned out in public (p. 880). For Wilhelm, such habits are symptomatic of a general malaise within his social rank. He stresses the importance of communication for self-development, claiming that people who attach great importance to material belongings are less sociable and amiable (p. 454). Wilhelm fears, therefore, that the *Bürgertum* values material possessions more than human relations, making its members less socially adept.

[49] Pirholt, 'Monstrosity', 86.
[50] Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit*, p. 33, and Currie, *Literature as Social Action*, p. 231.

Much of the above would support Pirholt's assertion that the *Bürgertum* is characterised by intellectual and cultural 'limitation and lack'.[51] It certainly includes ridiculous, scheming and unsavoury characters with scant regard for anything that does not affect their day-to-day existence. However, to what extent are these people representative of the whole social rank, and do they have any redeeming features?

However critically he depicts his *bürgerlich* upbringing, Wilhelm owes a considerable part of his theatrical career — and, therefore, his *Bildung* — to it. His father's and Werner's business enables Wilhelm to leave the confines of his home town, and it is on his travels that he meets the theatre company which dominates his experiences in the first half of the novel, and encounters the aristocrats he has always dreamt of emulating. Wilhelm also confesses to Werner that he relies completely on his brother-in-law's dedication to business for management of his own finances (p. 660). It is, paradoxically, this dependence on Werner — the apparent epitome of the *bürgerlich* mercenary mind-set and philistinism he is so determined to escape — that allows Wilhelm to concentrate fully on the 'nobler' artistic pursuits which play a pivotal role in his personal development.

The *Bürgertum* is also shown, through Wilhelm, to have some positive values, such as the 'Ordnung und Reinlichkeit' in which he lived and breathed as a child (p. 410). This indicates Wilhelm's, at least partial, dependence on features of burgher society, even if he does not necessarily appreciate them. The imagery of breathing ('atmete') makes his reliance on the order and cleanliness of a burgher household seem almost essential to his existence. When he later enters the actors' dressing room, he is sensitive to its untidiness. Wilhelm feels that a brighter spark ('ein besserer Funke'), which exists in all people, is denied the nourishment it needs by the daily needs and apathy ('der Asche täglicher Bedürfnisse und

[51] Pirholt, 'Monstrosity', 77.

Gleichgültigkeit') of *bürgerlich* life. The quotation also suggests, though, that some aspects of his *burgerlich* environment are necessary to keep Wilhelm's spark alive (p. 407). According to this analogy, it is essential that an ambitious burgher keeps his social roots in order to survive, even thrive, in high society and culture. Wilhelm admits, too, that people are seldom satisfied with the circumstances in which they find themselves, and yearn to be in their (equally discontented) neighbour's position (p. 405). Here, Wilhelm displays a sense of perspective by not blaming his will to escape on the deficiencies of a specific social station, but on an innate human desire to better his lot. It is quite possible, though, that this desire is more pronounced in *bürgerlich* circles. While some burghers envy the nobility, the nobility does not envy them.

Despite some points in mitigation, then, there is also substantial reason to argue that, for a creative and inquisitive individual like Wilhelm, *bürgerlich* life appears limited. Wilhelm's introduction to the theatre, and the personal development that ensues, is a by-product, not a design, of his *bürgerlich* peers. Wilhelm certainly owes the *Bürgertum* much in terms of financial security, and his fellow burghers do not deliberately prevent his intellectual and cultural development — they are just insufficiently versed in these areas to support him. *Bürgerlich* society might not willingly imprison its members, but its 'lack and limitation' beyond money and materialism creates many involuntary captives.

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If the *Bürgertum* imprisons Wilhelm, does the *Adel* set him free? Judging by Wilhelm's early depiction of the aristocracy, this is a reasonable expectation. It seems that the aristocracy's virtues will compensate for the flaws of the *Bürgertum* by providing not only the arena, but also the cultural and intellectual nourishment, for the 'weitere Kreis' in which Wilhelm

wishes to circulate (p. 659). Is this true: does the aristocracy really have the virtues to propel Wilhelm's artistic and social development?

In *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* (1788), Adolph Freiherr von Knigge described effective social integration as being noticed without being envied, and adapting convincingly to the temperament of those with whom one conversed: 'sich ungezwungen in den Ton jeder Gesellschaft stimmen zu können, ohne weder Eigentümlichkeit des Characters zu verliehren, noch sich zu niedriger Schmeichelei herabzulassen'.[52] In Germany, though, this could prove particularly difficult, due to the differences in custom and temperament throughout the politically and culturally fragmented provinces, as well as an especially acute distinction between the various social ranks. Such distinctions were based on age-old prejudices, the way people were brought up, and even on the constitution of a state.[53] Burghers and aristocrats consequently had very different social manners.

Lukács claims that the nobility was revered partly because it was perceived as a springboard for development of character. However, he also notes that much contemporary literature showed that one was not guaranteed to 'spring' from it. Furthermore, he strongly implies that the nobility plays no part in Wilhelm's *Bildung*, but thwarts it: describing the novel as a humanist social critique, Lukács writes that it opposes the inhibition, and even destruction, of the individual through awareness of his social standing. Wilhelm's exposure to aristocrats intensifies this.[54]

Wilhelm accepts the invitation to the Count's castle in the belief that it will expose him to the perceived merits of the nobility. This will help him to gain a wealth of knowledge about life, himself, and art. For Wilhelm, those born into an elevated social status are free

[52] Adolph Freiherr von Knigge, *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* (Hannover: Ritscher, 1804), p. 8.
[53] *Ibid*., pp. 9-10.
[54] Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit*, p. 34.

from the trials and tribulations of burghers, not having to fret over their material welfare, nor struggle to gain a foothold in society. Instead, they can channel their energy into an appreciation of aesthetics and beauty (pp. 512-13). Not only are they more socially adept, they are also more intellectually and culturally refined.

The theatre company's initial experiences at the Count's castle suggests that the nobility is not as socially considerate as Wilhelm imagines — at least not to their inferiors. The magical image from the carriage of a 'Feengebäude' (p. 515) — a beacon of hope, security, and opportunity for the actors — is soon shattered on their arrival. The allocation of their original rooms in the newer, more luxurious part of the building to last-minute guests (of the Prince, as it turns out), and their chaotic relocation to the dark, dank, and decaying 'old castle', does not just leave the actors shivering and bemused (pp. 517-18). It also demonstrates their relative insignificance — they appear mere objects to be shunted around for aristocratic convenience. Far from a fairy-tale beginning, is this an early indication that the real world of the nobility does not match that of myth?

Admittedly, the actors do not meet aristocrats on their arrival, but the castle's servants. The latter show that snobbery also exists outside the aristocracy, as their treatment of the troupe is decidedly unwelcoming. In fact, the servants appear much more disdainful of their guests than the aristocrats, letting the actors stand in the rain, and not apologising for the inconvenience (p. 525). Even after the Count reprimands the servants for their carelessness, they are still described as 'unwillig' when attending to the actors (p. 534). It is as if they, the social inferiors of their aristocratic employers, are seeking social inferiors of their own, thus internalising and exaggerating their masters' values and vices.

Despite the servants' rudeness, the aristocrats' arrival provides some evidence of the natural grace and manners that Wilhelm expected. Unlike the servants, the Count is most

apologetic, and anxious to rectify the situation. He engages effortlessly with the actors, addressing them by name and cracking the odd joke, causing them to be quite delighted by his company (p. 521). News of the Prince's arrival might whip the castle into a frenzy, but, when he finally appears, everyone admires his affability and condescension (p. 535). His condescension ('Herablassung') must be interpreted positively: he talks to the attendants pleasantly and with ease, but does not treat them as social equals. The Prince is, then, friendly without being intimate. The aristocrats are certainly polite and well-mannered, but is this a mere veneer for thoughtless behaviour? If so, does this help Wilhelm's *Bildung*?

The castle receives illustrious visitors every day, and the Count makes use of his well-stocked library, as well as his excellent memory and knowledge of classical literature, to help Wilhelm in the staging of a play to honour the Prince (p. 530). This aristocratic residence seemingly provides much of the polished society and erudition that Wilhelm lacked at home. There are signs, then, that Wilhelm's new environment has the potential to ignite his 'inner spark'.

However, Wilhelm's interaction with the castle's inhabitants is not always smooth. He discovers that, even at court, culture is conditioned by audience expectations. He has to adapt the play he writes for the Prince's arrival to the Count's demands by agreeing to display the household's coat of arms at the end, and to compromise his *bürgerlich* conscience by performing himself (pp. 528-29). Neither in Serlo's productions nor in the nobility, then, is the artist entirely free to enact his own ideas. This casts doubt as to whether even the *Adel* can help Wilhelm to realise his notion of aesthetic purity.

Wilhelm's inferior social status is often accentuated in aristocratic company. Instead of impressing the Prince with his (genuine) love of theatre, Wilhelm bores him with a monologue on his passion for the works of Racine. Met only with a pleasant look, he almost

prevents the Prince from circulating by unwittingly blocking his path. The narrator mentions Jarno's astonishment at this scene, and that Wilhelm would have gladly continued his eulogy had the Prince not moved on. Wilhelm's unawareness of his impropriety (pp. 538-39) leaves the reader wondering if he has any chance of acquiring the etiquette to move permanently in aristocratic circles. It is not at all certain, though, that moving in these circles will be as beneficial to Wilhelm's *Bildung* as he assumes.

Ulrich Stadler dismisses the aristocrats whom Wilhelm encounters in the castle: 'Sie verhalten sich verschroben, eitel oder aufgeblasen […]'. Stadler describes them as representatives of the *Repräsentationsadel*, who are not only useless but also socially harmful.[55] For all the aristocrats' faults, though, Wilhelm himself believes that he has benefited from their company. Far from giving him a more sober view of the nobility, Uwe Steiner suggests that Wilhelm's experiences heighten his estimation of it.[56] The letter that he writes to his family shortly before departing the Count's castle may give a sanitised account of events, but does not entirely disguise his true feelings. Wilhelm claims that he is financially and spiritually enriched, enjoying a healthier bank balance thanks to aristocratic patronage ('die Gunst der Großen'), and the opportunity to develop his physical and intellectual attributes. This makes him more optimistic about the future (p. 568). Even if the novel shows this to be somewhat deluded, mingling with aristocracy leaves an undeniable mark on Wilhelm: it increases his happiness and self-confidence — two major components of *Bildung*.

[55] Stadler, 'Wilhelm Meisters unterlassene Revolte', 367.
[56] Steiner, '*Lehrjahre*', p. 125

Blurred boundaries: the *Turm-Gesellschaft* and the Theatre

Pirholt warns that Wilhelm's polarisation of the *Bürgertum* and aristocracy in his correspondence with Werner is simplistic. Areas of commonality exist, and it must be remembered that society is composed of distinct individuals, as well as internal groupings. In the *Adel*, for instance, there is strictly hereditary aristocracy and petty nobility. The latter, according to Pirholt, 'lacks both influence and culture'.[57] The character or behaviour of one person does not, therefore, necessarily represent all their social peers. When analysing the extent of co-operation and conflict between the *Bürgertum* and *Adel*, it is necessary to consider the potential for rivalries within the two *Stände*. If a polarisation of the *Bürgertum* and *Adel* is simplistic, it should also be simplistic to assume that they will have distinct influences on Wilhelm's development.

Riedel describes how the economic and cultural emancipation of the *Bürgertum* led to increased interaction between the latter and the nobility by the eighteenth century. Paradoxically, though, this caused the nobility to make a more conscientious effort to distinguish itself from the 'inferior' rank, a possible sign that it was feeling insecure.[58] If true, it might be expected that the *Lehrjahre* would depict an element of rivalry — even animosity — rather than co-operation between the *Adel* and *Bürgertum*. It might also be expected that the aristocracy, whilst grudgingly acknowledging its growing economic and political dependence on the *Bürgertum*, would be reluctant to help a burgher seeking moral and intellectual self-improvement. Is this the case?

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[57] Pirholt, 'Monstrosity', 78.
[58] Riedel, 'Bürger', p. 694.

The Count's castle provides a comparatively realistic view of the nobility as they are, whereas Lothario's residence accommodates a view of nobility as they might be. Lothario is a multi-faceted character, with attributes befitting a feudal regime, but also reforming ambitions for the future. Demonstrably concerned for his tenants, he visits a young lady with whom he once had an affair, and sees to her children's welfare. His plans to create a more egalitarian and consistent method of collecting taxes are designed to help his tenants secure their own property, and to give them more freedom over how they spend their money. In Michael Beddow's words, Lothario wants a 'meritocracy unhampered by class restrictions or feudal customs'.[59]

On the one hand, then, Lothario appears benevolent and paternalist, a paragon of *noblesse oblige*. On the other, he seeks to dismantle the feudal system. His proposed taxation system no longer depends upon traditional aristocratic whims and discretion, but upon the needs of the state. Lothario sees this as part of a patriotic endeavour: he wishes to contribute towards the formation of a nation rather than a provincial system of local rights and dues. He is not only concerned for those within his own social *Stand*, but for all *Stände* throughout the country. Dieter Borchmeyer describes Lothario as an opponent of certain noble privileges — especially exemption from taxation — and an advocate of a more equal distribution of property rights between the aristocracy, *Bürgertum*, and farmers (pp. 886-87). In his dealings with Werner, Lothario shows that he is not afraid to co-operate 'mit einem Bürger'. Borchmeyer considers the nobleman's interaction with a social 'inferior' proof of his evolution from a feudal landlord to a modern, rational landowner.[60]

Lothario is an aristocrat prepared to embrace capitalism and rationalism in the management of his estates, and hopes that this will lead to better 'Bürger' (p. 887). Here,

[59] Beddow, *Fiction of Humanity*, p. 115.
[60] Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, p. 169.

Lothario exemplifies the changing connotation of *Bürger* against the backdrop of political upheaval. It does not simply refer to town residents, nor to members of a specific social rank. Through greater financial independence and private property, Lothario wants to give his subjects a bigger stake — and, therefore, more influence — in the running of society, as Justus Möser advocated. This reinforces his status as a driver of reform, and sensitivity to a changing world.

However, Borchmeyer also notes the irony of the meeting between Lothario and Werner. Lothario, like Werner, attaches much importance to capital and trade. Yet Wilhelm does not sneer at Lothario's ambitions.[61] This, Borchmeyer argues, is due to Lothario's altruism, as opposed to Werner's avowed self-gratification.[62] Werner admits that he has never thought about the state in his life, and that he has only paid his taxes and dues out of compulsion. Lothario, then, combines being a burgher with patriotism: just as a father has a duty to care and provide for his children, a burgher has the same duty towards the state (p. 887). This example suggests that *bürgerlich* attributes are not inherently bad. In the right hands, they can serve a noble cause. Lothario sympathises with the commercial drive of many burghers, and wants aristocrats to embrace it without stooping to crude individualism — without becoming like Werner. Beddow reinforces the point that Lothario offers Wilhelm essentially the same commercial undertaking as that offered to him by Werner. Yet Lothario's venture contributes to Wilhelm's *Bildung* in way that Werner's could not, as it satisfies 'the essential spirit of the aspirations which lay beneath his theatrical ambitions'.[63] Thanks to his relationship with Lothario, Wilhelm now has a more durable stage on which to enrich the lives of others financially and spiritually. Indeed, this example supports Beddow's view of the *Lehrjahre* as a 'modern' text, as Wilhelm performs a social function which he

[61] *Ibid*., p. 166.
[62] *Ibid*, p. 187.
[63] Beddow, *Fiction of Humanity*, p. 115.

also finds rewarding. This, too, might strengthen the case for seeing Lothario as a reformer — and moderniser?

It must be remembered, however, that the *Adel* is, like the *Bürgertum*, diverse. Nicholas Boyle emphasises the significance of Lothario's 'aristocratic' status. As the grandson of a stipendiary official, he does not represent the politically autonomous feudal nobility, but the *Beamtenadel.*[64] He fought on the side of the colonists in the American Revolution, which dealt a severe blow to aristocracy, and the notion of a 'natural' feudal hierarchy. It was also founded on the belief in the essential link between private wealth and liberty — or capitalism — which Lothario's reform agenda supports. He aims to transform his estate into a microcosm of the newly-independent colonies: '*hier, oder nirgends ist Amerika*!' (p. 808) Krippendorf notes that Goethe's activity as Privy Councillor in Weimar reflected one of the main ideals of the American Revolution: he wanted to provide people with the means to secure their own happiness by helping them to help themselves.[65] Attracted by maxims such as 'the pursuit of happiness', Goethe found such a cause a worthy antidote to an aristocracy that he branded wild, stupid and foolish.[66] It may be that some of the capitalist and liberal principles of the American Revolution influence Lothario, but this should not eclipse his attachment to the nobility.

Although he advocates reform in the name of a 'patriotism' which surpasses the interests of a particular social rank, there is also evidence that Lothario cherishes his aristocratic status. He reveals to the *Turmgesellschaft* that he fears the rumoured global revolution, which threatens to obliterate aristocracy, and is part of an international consortium to protect major landowners from it. Bruford claims that this is 'clearly a veiled reference to

[64] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, p. 424.
[65] Krippendorf, *Politik gegen den Zeitgeist*, pp. 9-10.
[66] Goethe to Charlotte von Stein, 10. March 1781, *Werke*, vol. 29, (1997), p. 333.

the plight of aristocratic refugees from the French Revolution'.[67] Lothario may admire his former American comrades, but rejects the republican constitution that was forged by their triumphant compatriots.

The French Revolutionaries' attack on private property strengthens the case for seeing the revolution in the novel as its fictional equivalent. The contrast in Lothario's attitude towards this rumoured conspiracy and towards the American colonists also highlights the differences between the French and American Revolutions. The American Revolution strove to prevent the centralisation and state-ownership of property. Its French counterpart seized and nationalised land and estates which had formerly belonged to aristocrats and clergymen (and, eventually, the monarchy). This does not mean a simple distinction between a pro- and anti-private property revolution, for the wealth of the French aristocracy and clergy was founded mainly on taxation of subjects and tithes. However, it represented a division of ownership (and, therefore, power) that the Revolution eradicated by transferring all noble and ecclesiastical property to the National Assembly.

Lothario, therefore, opposes two forms of monopoly: that of the aristocracy (as in the *ancien régime*) and that of the state (as in the Revolution). Lothario appears to share the view that governing should be directed towards the welfare of the whole country, and not to the particular interests of different 'orders'. The *Etats Généraux* were dissolved on 27 June 1789, and replaced by a National Assembly which amalgamated the once separate orders involved in the governance of France — the nobility, the clergy, and the *Tiers Etat* — to form a truly 'national' government. Yet Lothario's patriotism is based on the creation of a fairer taxation system and greater economic independence of the individual beyond his immediate feudal realm. It is not about conceding all land and property to the state, or 'la Nation'. On 19

[67] Bruford, *Tradition of Self-Cultivation*, p. 52.

January 1790, the National Assembly abolished all hereditary nobility, titles, and coats of arms, reflecting their belief that one had to be a patriot *instead* of an aristocrat. Lothario appears to believe that one can be a patriot *and* an aristocrat.

According to T.J. Reed, Lothario embodies a decent and effective nobility, which could stave off revolutionary threat. Reed argues that Lothario's reforming measures exemplify Goethe's attempt, common in many of his works in the 1790s, to ensure that the aristocracy was not portrayed as irredeemable, and that Goethe retrospectively included characters like Lothario in response to the French Revolution. Lothario's plans constitute a 'utopian' alternative programme to address the grievances of feudal absolutism, delivered by an aristocrat, but with the interests of the *Bürger* at its heart.[68] Similarly, Karl Otto Conrady describes Lothario and his closest associates as representative of a political movement that Goethe had yearned for, and thought could resolve the basic conflict between the nobility and *Bürgertum* that had come to the fore in 1789 without violent upheaval.[69] Boyle claims that, in sacrificing some of his own power to give his tenants more freedom, Lothario 'noticeably resembles' Carl August.[70] Lothario does, indeed, aim to consolidate, not undermine, his social status, but this does not stop him from helping the likes of Wilhelm.

There are certainly parallels between Lothario and Carl August. Goethe played a significant role in the young Duke's political education, and from 1776 to 1786 was part of the four-man Privy Council that governed the duchy of Weimar. The Privy Councillor emphasised the importance of magnanimity and self-restraint in positions of power. This would even give Weimar the chance to become a model for other German states, a project in which the Duke would be pivotal.[71] Carl August heeded this advice. Under the Duke, the

[68] Reed, 'Revolution und Rücknahme', 27-30.
[69] Karl Otto Conrady, *Goethe: Leben und Werk*, 2 vols (Königstein: Athenäum, 1982-85), vol. 2: *Summe des Lebens* (1985), p. 155.
[70] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, p. 370.
[71] Friedrich Sengle, *Das Genie und sein Fürst* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1993), pp. 58-9.

Duchy became the cultural and intellectual centre of Germany. Goethe was given the freedom to organise the *Freitagsgesellschaft* in 1792, which took place in the official town residence of the dilettante Duchess Anna Amalia. The society allowed eminent writers, artists, and thinkers to gather and discuss the pressing issues of the day. Further evidence of Carl August's drive to foster intelligence and creativity among his subjects was his financing of the *Fürstliche Freie Zeichenschule Weimar*, set up in 1776, and the court theatre. At Goethe's request the Duke also called Herder to the Duchy to reform its educational system, a decision which saw the University of Jena reach the zenith of its fame.

In theory, and, to some extent, in practice, Carl August was an absolute ruler. As Boyle notes, 'Weimar was a sovereign and autocratic state and the Duke was its monarch'.[72] All decisions on matters affecting the duchy, from the banal to the essential, were made at court, within its ruler's select Privy Council. However, Boyle argues that Carl August's government cannot be described as oppressive or even autocratic, as the Duke relied heavily on his advisors. Boyle also mentions Goethe's resistance to the Duke's attempts to accelerate decision making by simplifying Chancery documents. He also warned the Duke not to view himself as a civil servant, like Frederick the Great of Prussia or Joseph II of Austria, who treated their courts with disdain.[73]

Wilson, however, dismisses this rosy view of Carl August and his duchy, arguing that Weimar was not the reformist, humanistic, and relatively peaceful — albeit absolutist — state depicted by many scholars. Wilson claims that many critics, especially those writing in the nineteenth century, were deceived by Carl August's religious toleration (which did not always extend to political freedoms), and by his appointment of reputedly humane, enlightened thinkers and notable cultural figures — not least Goethe — to his Privy Council.

[72] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 1: *The Poetry of Desire 1749-90* (1991), p. 238.
[73] *Ibid*., p. 237.

Added to this is the fact that most official publicised documents of Council proceedings were rather sanitised: they often implied a false consensus among the Council members, concealing internal discord and initially draconian responses to problems in the Duchy, such as dissent among the Duke's subjects. By analysing previously neglected manuscripts, including those of Privy Council meetings, Wilson uncovers what he deems more uncomfortable truths about the Weimar regime.

Wilson claims that discontent and uprisings were more widely spread in the Duchy than previously acknowledged, and that its ruler was too deferential towards the interests of the *Pächter*, the large freeholding farmers — to the detriment of the smaller farmers and peasants. Wilson describes how the local ruling elite could be callous towards the lower *Stände*, noting how their *Wildpreth* caused great distress for many subjects and were a major source of conflict.[74] The *Wildpreth* were especially ostentatious and leisurely hunts organised by the nobility, which often rode roughshod over peasants' land. Wilson also dilutes the reformist image of the Duchy administration by suggesting that punishment of dissenters was more important than efforts to respond to their concerns. He also argues that most grievances in the Duchy in the 1790s were not inspired by 'Revolutionary' ideas of equality or the Rights of Man. Instead, they were traditional frustrations which the subjects had greater courage to express.[75]

Testing the validity of Wilson's claims far exceeds the scope of this chapter, and this thesis. It is an important factor, nonetheless, in considering Goethe's portrayal of Lothario. It should make the reader wonder to what extent Lothario and his intended reforms are meant to reflect the duke under whom Goethe had lived and served, or to provide an 'ideal' contrast to him. According to Sengle, the Duke was a pragmatic ruler, not prone to idealism ('ein

[74] Wilson, *Goethe-Tabu*, pp. 97-8.
[75] *Ibid*., pp. 108-16.

realpolitisch denkender Fürst').[76] Carl August was also a member of the Freemasons. Lothario is a member of a mysterious organisation, too, but one which seems to embrace a pragmatism that would, perhaps, meet the Duke's approval.

The Society of the Tower has, for good or for ill, a significant impact on Wilhelm's *Bildung*, and even marks a watershed in it. Its members try to moderate Wilhelm's individualism by making him accept his inevitable dependence on society. As Jarno says, there comes a point at which the individual, having struggled to forge his own path in life, must temper his own will with a sense of duty to others. It is only then that he will truly discover himself (p. 871). This seems to work, as Wilhelm concludes, 'es ist vergebens, in dieser Welt nach eigenem Willen zu streben' (p. 976). In Ernest Schonfield's words, Wilhelm realises 'that the whole world doesn't revolve around him'.[77] Schonfield also points out that Wilhelm starts the novel with a monologue, but ends it in a verbal exchange, as proof of his increased appreciation of 'human interconnectedness'.[78] In the *Sendung*, the narrator explains how Wilhelm set up puppet-shows as a child, and developed a passion for theatre (pp. 14-20). In the *Lehrjahre*, Wilhelm spends nearly six chapters talking about this, and fails to notice Marianne's waning attention, and even that she eventually falls asleep (pp. 367-84). Goethe deliberately gives Wilhelm a monologue in the later version, therefore, to emphasise the extent of his early egoism and lack of social awareness. This contrasts sharply with Wihelm's many brief verbal exchanges in the final chapter, which signify an acceptance that he is dependent on others.

It must be emphasised that Wilhelm is not made to sacrifice his individuality. Jarno is acerbic when he tells Wilhelm that he considers the latter's theatrical efforts to be futile. He

[76] Sengle, *Genie*, p. 143.
[77] Schonfield, 'Compromise and Collectivity', 18.
[78] *Ibid*., 13.

deems it a sinful absurdity that Wilhelm wastes his time with the uncouth actors, whom Jarno refers to as 'Affen' and 'Hunde'. He does not, though, encourage Wilhelm to turn his back on the theatre, but to find a better company and to work according to his own talents. Jarno also introduces Wilhelm to the works of Shakespeare — an antidote to the Prince's preference for French theatre (pp. 539-40). His derogatory comments are ultimately vindicated, and should not overshadow the constructive criticism and valuable advice that he gives Wilhelm.

Jarno exemplifies the society's general characteristics. In some ways a parody of the Illuminati, it also differs significantly from that secret organisation. There may be a few allusions to Illuminati ritual, but the *Turmgesellschaft* has no abstract, universal, and utopian agenda to spread pure truth and virtue. Instead, it has pragmatic aims, focused on the skills and needs of the individual rather than the fulfilment of a doctrine. The narrator mentions that Wilhelm has acquired all the virtues of a burgher after his encounter with the society. This confirms that the *Turmgesellschaft* have not sought to transform Wilhelm by denying his *bürgerlich* origins. Their approach seems to have some success, for Wilhelm, as he himself remarks, is eventually made to feel like a social being (p. 881).

In a broader sense, the *Turmgesellschaft* opposes what Schiller called the 'Diktatur der Aufklärung': the purest, most radical form of the Enlightenment, most devastatingly enacted in the Terror. Reed argues that it rejects Kant's theory of *Mündigkeit*: the individual's ability to use his own reason without deference to authority.[79] This fits in with Reed's conception of *Bildung* in the novel as the preparedness to renounce a futile endeavour.[80] Wilhelm practically echoes this sentiment in Book Seven, when he reflects on how he has wasted much of his life looking for an elusive form of *Bildung*, and convincing himself that he could pursue a profession for which he had no aptitude (p. 873). The Society rejects the

[79] Reed, 'Revolution und Rücknahme', 40.
[80] *Ibid*., 39.

absolutism of individuality in moulding its pupils. It operates, as Reed says, within a practical hierarchical structure, rather than subverting it. Just as Goethe seeks to portray the aristocracy as corrigible, he gives a redeemable image of secret societies, which he had also previously criticised, in the *Turmgesellschaft*.

If Wilhelm is to be used as an example, it may be concluded that the Society does not seek to deceive its pupils by instilling them with grandiose aspirations. In contrast to societies portrayed in other Goethe works — particularly *Der Groß-Cophta* — the *Turmgesellschaft*, although secret, is hardly mysterious. It does not claim to have access to otherworldly knowledge or powers, and endeavours to deal with reality.

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The theatre is another avenue for investigating the extent of co-operation and division between the *Adel* and the *Bürgertum*. As well as revealing how money pervades all levels of society, it both highlights differences between the social ranks and suggests means of reconciling them. In Book One, Wilhelm comments that the simple person is satisfied when he sees something happening, whereas a cultivated person expects to feel emotion, and only the thoroughly cultivated person wants intellectual stimulation (p. 441). Not only is there a difference in taste, but also in how audience members show their appreciation, as shown by the response to a tightrope performance: 'Das Volk jauchzte, und das feinere Publikum enthielt sich nicht des Klatschens' (p. 450).

Wilhelm feels that art can have a deep emotional effect on the beholder, and, if properly exhibited, be socially transformative. The ability of art to affect an individual is exemplified by Wilhelm's reaction to the image of the king's sick son. Although not the best painting in the grandfather's collection, it presents Wilhelm with a character with whom he

can identify: a young man whose lover is in a relationship with his father.[81] The image leaves an indelible impression on Wilhelm, who describes how it evokes the 'burning flame' in his breast, and crushing pain eats away at his soul (pp. 422-23). It is through the theatre that Wilhelm initially believes that he can not only conduct himself with the ease and grace befitting a nobleman, but also express his creative energy to change society. As Beddow says, Wilhelm sees the theatre as a 'means of awakening this dormant capacity for powerful feeling in the mass of mankind'.[82]

According to Steiner, art and theatre are integral parts of the *Lehrjahre*. Theatre provides a middle-point between the two 'extremes' of Mignon and the harpist, and Wilhelm's uncle and the *Turmgesellschaft*. The former, Steiner argues, have a naïve and idealistic attitude towards art as a purely aesthetic and spiritual concept. Their death represents how anachronistic and untenable this belief is. The latter either disregard art, or see it through a commercial prism. For the *Turmgesellschaft*, art is not something that one performs, but merely observes.[83] It is clear from the early chapters that Wilhelm's father views art with contempt, with his frustration at his son's puppet shows. The selling-off of the grandfather's paintings also emphasises the father's indifference to art in the pursuit of capital. It is symptomatic of the marginalisation of art in a world of economic profit-seeking, and a similar trend is shown to be affecting the theatre. Serlo and Melina are bent on staging lucrative performances, such as light operas, despite Wilhelm's wish to put on more challenging and educative plays (pp. 720-21).

Steiner also argues that theatre has a reduced role from the *Sendung*, providing only a means to the end of Wilhelm's self-realisation. Theatre only helps Wilhelm's *Bildung* by

[81] The image has roots in a story in *Plutarch's Lives*. Antiochus is made ill by his love for his stepmother, Stratonike. When the king, Seleukos, eventually discovers the cause of his son's illness, he allows Antiochus to marry his former wife. Stadler, 'Wilhelm Meisters unterlassene Revolte', 360.
[82] Beddow, *Fiction of Humanity*, p. 88.
[83] Steiner, '*Lehrjahre*', p. 148.

making him realise what he is not capable of doing, and encouraging him to do something else. It is not the culmination of his efforts and experiences. Equally, the theatre is no negligible detail, as exemplified by Wihelm's perception of aristocrats and his dealings with them. The cultural dominance of the aristocracy is represented by their theatrical tastes, and Wilhelm's staging of *Hamlet* takes on much more significance than in the *Sendung*.[84] As a Shakespearean work, it challenges the courtly preference for classical French plays by dramatists such as Racine and Voltaire. Shakespearean plays were considered more realist, more evocative of emotion, and to have more developed characters. Lukács refers to Goethe's perception of Shakespeare as the epitome of fully developed humanity and personality. He also notes, however, that the compromised performance of *Hamlet* in the *Lehrjahre* (between Serlo's will to have a shortened version and Wilhelm's resolve to preserve the essence of the play) shows that theatre is only a part of the great conundrum of self-cultivation, development of one's personality, and humanity.[85]

Although the *Volk* and more refined audience members respond to the tight-rope performance differently, they are united in their liking of it. Wilhelm also believes that all 'Ständ[e]' can find theatre useful, hence his efforts to stage universally appealing plays. He claims that any worthwhile statesman should endeavour to look beyond petty social divisions, and help a playwright who aspires to reconcile them (p. 448). Yet the notion of a 'Nationaltheater', in stark contrast to the *Sendung*, does not play a major role in the *Lehrjahre*. It is briefly mentioned in Book One, when Wilhelm imagines himself as a great actor and creator of a national theatre (p. 386). In Book Four, Aurelie bemoans the lack of cultivation and provincialism of all sections of German society, and admits that this caused her to lose all understanding of the term *Nation* (pp. 622-25). Furthermore, when the troupe

[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 122-27.
[85] Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit*, pp. 32-3.

decides to improvise a play meant to appeal to the noblest national sentiment, by evoking a medieval, chivalric past, it descends into a drunken farce (pp. 478-80): a metaphor for what Goethe thought would be the fate of German nationalism?

Wilhelm joins a theatre company with the intention of travelling the country, but ends up finding the Count's court a more lucrative source of employment. The failure of his theatrical career extinguishes any hope of creating a national theatre. Reed sees this as part of Goethe's submission, conscious or unconscious, to the pressure of political events.[86] Goethe feared that stoking the idea of a national theatre would be too radical, requiring the kind of political upheavals seen in France, as he expressed in *Literarischer Sansculottismus* (1795): 'Wir wollen die Umwälzungen nicht wünschen, die in Deutschland klassische Werke vorbereiten könnten'.[87] Goethe did not want to be accused of abetting revolution, just as Rousseau and Voltaire had posthumously been in France, and it was in Weimar Classicism that Goethe found the nearest equivalent to a national literature without causing political turbulence.[88]

Even after Wilhelm gives up theatre, he spends much time in courtly company, and shows no interest in pursuing any sort of national venture. Aristocratic abodes are the arena for his personal development — such as the encounter with his grandfather's paintings — and the development of his personal relationships, not least with Natalie. To what extent the *Lehrjahre* reflects Goethe's supposed reluctance to endorse any 'radical' nationalistic projects is debatable, but they are of little interest to Wilhelm.

It is also worth asking whether the workings of the theatre company provide a subtle commentary on the virtues and vices of republicanism and aristocratic rule. In Book Four, the

[86] Reed, 'Revolution und Rücknahme', 42.
[87] Goethe, 'Literarischer Sansculottismus', *Werke*, vol. 18 (1998), pp. 319-24 (p. 321).
[88] Reed, Revolution und Rücknahme', 35.

troupe decides on a 'republican' form of rehearsal and performance, based on the philosophy that this is best suited to 'good people'. When they hear rumours of a *Freikorps*, a group of marauding soldiers, on their return from the castle, they are confronted with a choice between the shorter route, recommended by the Count (and endorsed by Wilhelm), or the safer detour initially favoured by their 'republikanisch' consensus (pp. 582-83). Given the detailed description of the establishment of a 'republican' constitution within the troupe, there is strong reason to suspect a metaphorical implication. The position of the director should circulate, and should be elected with a 'small senate', in which the female members are to have a seat and a vote ('Sitz und Stimme'). Laws are proposed, then either rejected or sanctioned. The narrator also notes the speed with which the group is gripped by this republican idea, and that they wish to enact it immediately (p. 577).

Admittedly, the French Revolution did not start with overtly republican (i.e. anti-monarchical) aims, but it was based on giving a greater political say to a wider populace, creating a more egalitarian system of representation, and being less deferential to traditional sources of authority, particularly the nobility and monarchy. The drastic, hopeful, and confident setting up of the troupe's new constitution should at least suggest loose parallels with the events between 1789 and 1791.

The return journey, then, could represent a conflict between aristocratic autocracy and republican democracy. Had the actors (the demos?) determined their own fate, they would have been better off. The disastrous result of taking the more direct route could allude to the perils of aristocratic hubris and aloofness, as the Count has nothing to lose with his advice.

However, this interpretation ignores one vital detail: the Count is not present when the rumours of the Freikorps circulate. He gives Wilhelm advice on the assumption that the route will be safe. It is Wilhelm who dismisses the rumours, and shows such confidence in

persuading his colleagues. As well as exposing the foolishness of his advice, it is Wilhelm's hubris that the robbery reprimands. Possibly carried away by his noble environment, in trying to imitate the assurance of an aristocrat, Wilhelm has, quite literally, ideas above his station. If the robbery has any metaphorical meaning at all, it is, logically, more likely to show the perils of aristocratic decisions in *bürgerlich* hands.

Analysis of the political implication of the above scene must acknowledge that the actors in the *Sendung* also establish a republican system within their theatre group, and that Wilhelm, as its director, also makes the same disastrous decision to take the shorter route (against most of the actors' initial wishes). The establishment of the 'senate' is not described in as much detail, but its essential features are the same (the position of director is to circulate, for example, and women are able to vote), and it is generally agreed that the republican form is the best, and only, way of running the company for 'good people'. The Count also suggests the shorter route, but nor is he present when rumours of the Freikorps emerge (pp. 292-93). The reference to republicanism in the *Lehrjahre* is not, then, directly inspired by the French Revolution. Instead of being a subtle way to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of aristocratic and more popular government, Wilhelm's bad judgement may just reinforce the impression of his unsuitability for a theatrical career.

Yet it would be wrong to dismiss the political significance of the company's republican experiment entirely. To the contemporary reader of the *Sendung*, it is most unlikely that the republican references would have had the same radical and anti-monarchical connotations as they would to anyone reading the *Lehrjahre* in the mid-1790s. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, at the time of the *Sendung*, republicanism was broadly seen as compatible with monarchical and aristocratic government. When the *Lehrjahre* was published, the term would have evoked the destructive king and nobility-ridden regime in France. By leaving this passage in the *Lehrjahre*, Goethe allows republicanism to be seen in a

different light, but complicates the wisdom of Wilhelm's opposition to the company's 'democratic' consensus.

The previous examples may show that Wilhelm's preconception of art as a 'pure' form of expression, free from social and commercial concerns, is false. It might seem that the latter are gradually overshadowing, or controlling, art. However, the re-appearance of the grandfather's art collection in Lothario's castle indicates that this need not be the case. The *Turmgesellschaft* does not share the philistinism of Werner, and Lothario's financial ventures are shown to be compatible with an appreciation of aesthetics and spiritual nourishment. More broadly, there is hope that art and commercial society can co-exist. Does this hint at reconciliation between the *Bürgertum* and the nobility?

Although money is a common concern for the *Bürgertum* and the *Adel*, there are hints that it could create competition between them, possibly to the nobility's detriment. Werner compares trade with the hegemony of traditional power structures and inherited wealth, mainly in the form of aristocrats and monarchs: as the latter live in splendour and plenty, having conquered vast swathes of the earth, burghers can find a cheaper, less violent form of conquest by providing much coveted luxuries (pp. 390-91). This hints at the emancipation of the *Bürgertum*, which contributed to the weakening of the aristocracy, and caused greater friction between the two ranks. There might, though, be some doubt as to how seriously Werner's remarks should be taken. Wilhelm finds them repulsive, but knows that Werner rarely thinks before he speaks (p. 391). However, in Book Five, Wilhelm acknowledges that his brother-in-law is an astute man of business, for Werner's (well-written) letter contains many economic truths (p. 656). Werner is no scholar, but he is sufficiently schooled in trade and commerce for these comments to be given some credit.

'*Wohl erworben zu haben*, ist hier das gute Äquivalent von dem *Wohlgeboren sein* des ersten Standes'.[89] These words were written by Herder in 1792, but they could also have come from Werner. Such sentiments suggest that the *Bürgertum* was becoming more demanding for material wealth. If this meant gaining more property, and, therefore, a greater 'stake' in society, this would have political implications. However, neither Herder's nor Werner's comments explicitly demand the removal and replacement of the aristocracy, even the *Erbadel*. Bettering the lot of the *Bürger* does not mean that he should aspire to emulate the wealth or leadership role of the traditional ruling elite. The nobility will have to be more attentive to the *Bürgertum*, but this does not prohibit co-operation between the two. If anything, it should encourage it. Lothario surely emerges as a model for an aristocracy seeking to meet this challenge.

As Privy Councillor, Goethe expressed some misgivings about aristocracy, and its impact on its subjects. He described the unrewarded toil of the local rural labourers which supported the luxury enjoyed by their aristocratic masters, and claimed that the nobles could cause an economic crisis, as farmers would eventually be unable to meet their excessive demands: 'und wir habens so weit gebracht, daß oben immer in einem Tage mehr verzehrt wird, als unten in einem Tag beygebracht werden kann'.[90] Ending the aristocratic tax exemption was a major part of Goethe's endeavour to rectify the finances of the petty and impoverished Duchy, as were his (unsuccessful) efforts to make the Ilmenau silver mines profitable. He tried to convince his patron that visible concern for his subjects and shrewd financial administration were essential for an effective and respected ruler. The Revolution laid bare a potential fate for aristocrats who ignored such advice.

[89] J.G. Herder, *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität*, *Werke*, ed. Martin Bollacher and others, 10 vols, (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985-2000), vol. 7 (1991), pp. 13-806 (p. 412).
[90] Goethe to Karl Ludwig von Knebel, 17. April 1782, *Werke*, vol. 29 (1997), pp. 418-19.

It is not possible to measure the amount of interest the aristocrats in the Count's castle have in their subjects' welfare, for it is never discussed (as is the case with the nobles in *Der Groß-Cophta*). However, the novel portrays Lothario as very proactive in alleviating the type of economic imbalances that Goethe witnessed in Weimar, which reinforces the impression that Lothario personifies the author's image of an 'ideal' aristocrat. The *Lehrjahre* may allude to several of Goethe's own criticisms on the aristocracy, but Lothario addresses many of them.

The German nobility, then, is not beyond hope. If it can encourage its members to follow Lothario's example, it does not deserve to suffer the same fate as its French counterpart. If this is the message that Goethe wishes to convey, it might strengthen the argument that the author is using the benefit of hindsight. By 1795-96, when the *Lehrjahre* was published, the Revolution had not just destroyed the concept of nobility in France, but also caused many nobles to flee, and led hundreds to the guillotine. By including Lothario, Goethe is suggesting how his noble compatriots can avoid a similarly terrible end. However, his relationship with Carl August shows that Goethe was keen for aristocrats to be more sensitive to the concerns of the wider polity long before the storming of the Bastille. Reed's accusation that the *Lehrjahre* represents Goethe's surrender to political events is unfair. Lothario gives a sharper focus to reforms that Goethe had long deemed necessary, and an increased sense of urgency to implement them for the German aristocracy's survival.

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Despite his best efforts, Wilhelm neither becomes a noble, nor gains the appearance of one. His interaction with the feudal aristocracy is awkward and lacks etiquette. His relinquishing of a life in theatre, and a return to the *bürgerlich* commercial world of his father and Werner, indicate a failure to cross the 'Grenzlinie' that has haunted him since childhood. That

Wilhelm seems unaware of his social faux pas, such as boring the Prince on Racine, seems to vindicate Knigge: Wilhelm does not even manage to pass himself off temporarily as an aristocrat, let alone to become a permanent member of the aristocracy. It makes his attempts to transform his social rank seem futile, and plays into Pamela Currie's description of the 'traditional' society in which the individual seldom breaks from his social circumstances, and normally takes up the patriarchal occupation. However, this interpretation is complicated by the nature of the father's occupation: finance is an increasingly significant factor in current social and political developments, as characters like Lothario concede. The Meister family's livelihood does not depend on feudalism or agriculture, and not, therefore, on their local community. Success in trade may lead to an improvement in material wealth, but not to a rise in social standing. It is arguable that Wilhelm's frustration with his situation does not come from a will to go from a 'traditional' to 'modern' lifestyle, but to find a balance between the two.

Conclusion

The novel does not offer an unequivocal message as to whether personal relationships can transcend social distinctions. Finding personal happiness is a significant part of Wilhelm's *Bildung,* and probes the flexibility of the social hierarchy. Therese generally condemns marriages between people from different levels of this hierarchy as 'Mißheiraten', believing that people from different social stations have distinct aproaches to life which even love cannot reconcile (p. 839). However, she concedes that very happy exceptions are possible. Does Wilhelm end up in this category?

Wilhelm's eventual partnership with Natalie, and the other 'mixed' marriages, might suggest so. However, this 'Happy-end', as Reed says, is completely unrealistic, and should

not automatically be treated as a symbol of Wilhelm's acceptance into the nobility, for Wilhelm might always face an inferiority complex.[91] Nicholas Boyle stresses that the conclusion of the novel is inconclusive; Wilhelm might believe that he has found a priceless, irreplaceable happiness, but there is no guarantee that he will marry Natalie. Could it be that Wilhelm will be deceived yet again, just as he was with Mariane and the theatre?[92] It should be remembered that a marriage with Natalie would not mean a bond with the hereditary aristocracy. Like Lothario, she is a member of the *Beamtenadel*, and not quite, then, the embodiment of aristocratic purity that Wilhelm initially imagines. This might temper Reed's accusation that their relationship is far-fetched. Nonetheless, she still enjoys a superior social status to Wilhelm, and is, ultimately, part of the nobility. Even if Wilhelm does not manage to bridge the social chasm fully in marrying Natalie, she is, surely, an improvement on a *bürgerlich* alternative.

The sequel to the *Lehrjahre*, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden*, emphasises the renunciation of personal ambitions in the interest of a collective endeavour. Wilhelm is no longer the main character, but forms part of a group of travellers, including some members of the *Turmgesellschaft*, who plan to establish a colony in America. He trains as a surgeon, and develops a strong bond with his son, Felix, and deepens his love for Natalie. Ehrhard Bahr describes the representation of renunciation (*Entsagung*) in the *Wanderjahre* as an initial sacrifice which is compensated for, or even surpassed, in a different context.[93] The *Wanderjahre* emphasises the need to compromise one's personal desires in order to realise *Bildung*.

[91] Reed, 'Revolution und Rücknahme', 29.
[92] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, pp. 391-92.
[93] Ehrhard Bahr, '*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden*', *Handbuch*, vol. 3 (1997), pp. 186-231 (p. 203).

Bildung is not the only theme of the *Lehrjahre*. The place of art and culture in society, the role of theatre, the social hierarchy, the relationship between father and son, are just as valid themes for analysing the text. Yet all these themes partly affect Wilhelm's personal development, and concerns about *Bildung* accompany Wilhelm from the early to late stages of the novel. *Bildung* is, therefore, a significant, if not *necessarily* the dominant, consideration in the *Lehrjahre*. Nor is it explicit that the work conveys a broader commentary on the nobility and *Bügertum*, but it features a range of figures from both social ranks. Even if Wilhelm's *Bildung* is not supposed to have a wider social significance, his discovery of a very personal form of happiness provides a valuable lesson for all members of the *Bürgertum*: there is no single recipe for realising one's potential, and the journey towards self-fulfilment depends largely on individual character and attributes, as well as one's social interaction. Not all *Bürger* who strive for self-cultivation will end up in a similar situation to Wilhelm, but may reach an equally satisfying one which is compatible with their talents. The individualistic nature of Wilhelm's *Bildung* has, then, a liberating political implication. It recognises the diversity of the *Bürgertum*, and the variety of opportunities and outcomes for its members.

However *Bildung* is to be interpreted, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* suggests that the happiness of the individual should be its ultimate aim. In the meeting between Wilhelm and Werner towards the end of the novel, the former is strong, healthy and vivacious, whereas the latter is weary, haggard, and balding (p. 877). Is Werner's frailty symptomatic not just of personal decline, caused by his rigorous pursuit of capital, but also of a generally declining *Bürgertum*? If so, does this vindicate Wilhelm's initial belief that he must escape the *Bürgertum* to realise his *Bildung*?

In a dismissive appraisal of the *Lehrjahre*, Novalis described the novel as a thorough endorsement of the nobility, and an attempt by Goethe to curry favour with it: 'Wilhelm

Meisters Lehrjahre, oder die Wallfahrt nach dem Adelsdiplom'.[94] The author undoubtedly presents the aristocrats as an important part of Wilhelm's self-cultivation, but his portrayal of their many flaws does not indicate a servile flatterer. The text also acknowledges the virtues of the *Bürgertum*, and its contribution to Wilhelm's *Bildung*.

The *Bürgertum* leaves a considerable, maybe indelible, imprint on Wilhelm's character, manners, and outlook on life. This is, perhaps, inevitable, given Wilhelm's own admission that his orderly surroundings were indispensable in his younger years. He may leave the physical confines of house and home, but does not — and cannot — leave his social roots. The narrator's claim that Wilhelm has gained 'alle Tugenden eines Bürgers' proves Wilhelm's attachment to his original social station (p. 881). However, it also suggests that Wilhelm has come to embrace this fact, rather than shun or reluctantly bow to it. For this, Wilhelm owes much to the aristocracy.

At the end of the *Lehrjahre*, Wilhelm is avowedly happy. As mentioned, when the narrator relates that Wilhelm has found 'ein Glück', he underlines how this happiness is particular to Wilhelm. Yet the core of this happiness is Wilhelm's acceptance of society, and his rootedness in it. For this, the aristocrats, particularly the *Beamtenadel* figures of Lothario and Jarno, deserve most credit. Mainly via the *Turmgesellschaft*, they convince Wilhelm that *Bildung* cannot be achieved through unfettered individualism. Paradoxically, but crucially, this helps Wilhelm to discover himself. This supports Reed's view that Goethe portrays the nobility as fallible, but preferable, social guides.[95]

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[94] Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien II*, *Novalis: Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe*: ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt Aufgabe, 3 vols (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978), vol. 2 (1978), pp. 792-814 (p. 807).
[95] Reed, 'Revolution und Rücknahme', 30.

Lothario's combination of reforming zeal and maintenance of the essential feudal structure also epitomises Reed's theory of 'reform from above'.[96] Just as *Bürger* who mingle with aristocrats will never gain the latter's manners and social ease, increased co-operation between the aristocracy and *Bürgertum* does not set them on an equal political footing. Do the other texts of the 1790s convey a similar message?

[96] *Ibid*., 40.

Chapter Three

Bürger in Politics: 'Democratic' Charlatans and Revolutionary Principles in *Die Aufgeregten, Der Bürgergeneral, Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, and *Herrmann und Dorothea*

Many argue that Goethe opposed popular participation in politics, and that this informed his antipathy towards the French Revolution. The following texts allow us to scrutinise this widely-held view.

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On 29 July 1792, Goethe wrote that he was working again on a couple of plays which the Weimar theatre would not perform, but which would nonetheless help him to engage with the thinking part of his nation.[1] In contrast to many of his other works, *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral* are overtly political, and explicitly refer to the French Revolution (the subtitle to *Die Aufgeregten* is *Ein politisches Drama in Fünf Akten*). Goethe later described the plays as his reaction to current affairs, and claimed that he used certain characters to reflect his views on how to address them.[2] The plays appeared after the Revolution had passed its relatively tranquil period of 1789-91, and when it was turning its attention beyond France. With the nobility abolished, and the monarchy severely weakened by the royal family's failed attempt to flee the country in June 1791, the National Convention decided in April 1792 to declare war on countries thought to be planning to restore monarchical sovereignty in France. Although it is difficult to know when Goethe first conceived of *Die Aufgeregten*, W. Daniel Wilson argues that it could not have been after the autumn of 1792, following the September massacres, the storming of the Tuileries, and the French invasion of the Rhineland, as it is a

[1] Goethe to Johann Friedrich Reichardt, 29.7.1792, *Werke*, vol. 30 (1991), p. 619.
[2] Goethe, *Werke*, vol. 39 (1999), pp. 531-32.

relatively modest work which does not bear the imprint of war or mass killing. *Der Bürgergeneral*, however, appeared at a later stage of the Revolution, by which time, Wilson contends, Goethe's attitude had hardened.[3] Having taken Goethe just five days to write, the play first appeared in the theatre of the Weimar Court on 2 May 1793, several months after the execution of Louis XVI, the French invasion of the Rhineland, and just after the siege of Mainz. Records of its reviews are sparse, partly due to its political nature. Goethe wrote to Jacobi: 'Bey der Vorstellung nimmt sich das Stückchen sehr gut aus'.[4] Adverse criticism came from Friedrich Bertuch, the publisher and patron of the arts who co-founded the *Fürstliche freie Zeichenschule Weimar*, who claimed that the audience remained as silent as during *Der Groß-Cophta*.[5] Other critics saw the play as a poor relation to *Die Aufgeregten*, both in terms of its form and its efforts to tackle a momentous global event.

The *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* and *Herrmann und Dorothea* were written at a later stage of the Revolution, and deal largely with the effects of the war on the German inhabitants of the Rhineland. They are more temporally and geographically precise than Goethe's previous works on the Revolution, thereby more directly reflecting the author's preoccupation with it. Both works were published after the fall of Robespierre and the Jacobin dictatorship in July 1794. The *Unterhaltungen* appeared in 1795 and *Herrmann* was completed in 1797. The Thermidorian reaction saw the Girondins regain control of the Convention from the Jacobins, and persecute even those who had helped to overthrow Robespierre, as well as banning the Jacobin Club. They also held a plebiscite to ratify a new constitution, 'Constitution of the Year III', which came into effect on 27 September 1795. The new government, called the Directory, also distrusted democracy, and used the army to

[3] W. Daniel Wilson, 'Dramen zum Thema der Französischen Revolution', *Handbuch*, vol. 2 (1997), pp. 258-87 (p. 268).
[4] Goethe to F.H. Jacobi, 7. June 1793, *Werke*, vol. 30 (1991), p. 675.
[5] Wilson, 'Dramen', p. 277.

imprison and exile opposition leaders. There had also been changes in the Revolutionary war. In April 1795, Prussia signed a treaty with Revolutionary France at Basel, which left Austria and Britain as the only other major powers in the conflict.

Goethe sent fragments of *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* to Schiller as a contribution to *Die Horen* in January and October 1795. On his return from the French campaign with Carl August in 1792, Goethe stayed with his friend Friedrich Jacobi and his illustrious circle in Pempelfort, when the nearby town of Düsseldorf was inundated with German refugees. Goethe found that nobody was interested in his current literary projects, and felt isolated among many heated political discussions. As Sigrid Bauschinger argues, such an experience is likely to have profoundly influenced the *Unterhaltungen*, as the novella takes place in a highly charged and fearful situation, and features a bad-tempered debate between an advocate of the old regime and a partisan of the Revolution.[6] *Herrmann und Dorothea* was written between 11 September 1796 and 7 June 1797, and Boyle emphasises the political backdrop of the poem: the French campaign of 1796.[7] Peter Morgan notes that the story is set at the end of August 1796, after three years of fluctuating fortunes in the war, with both banks of the Rhine repeatedly changing hands between the French and Allied forces, and argues that 'the banality of the plot contrasts with the complexity of the socio-historical context'.[8] At a time when the fate of the German Rhine territories hangs in the balance, and Napoleon's campaign in Italy is at its height, most of the action of the poem revolves around Herrmann's desire to lead a quiet, provincial life without bowing to his father's wishes. His engagement to Dorothea is arguably the most dramatic event.

[6] Sigrid Bauschinger, '*Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*', *Handbuch*, vol. 3 (1997), pp. 232-52 (p. 236).
[7] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, p. 518.
[8] Peter Morgan, *The Critical Idyll: Traditional Values and the French Revolution in Goethe's* Hermann und Dorothea (Columbia, S.C: Camden House, 1990), p. 103.

It is now time to turn to the reception of the texts. *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral* signal an important literary development. Patrick Fortmann describes how they represent a rejection of the classical conception of the autonomy of art by engaging directly with the main political events of the day. As the spirit of the Revolution had thrust politics to the forefront of public consciousness, Goethe decided that his literature should respond in kind.[9] The performances were not just intended to entertain the court, but also to be politically provocative. Goethe wrote to Bertuch from Marienborn whilst accompanying Carl August's regiment to Mainz, where the Prussian army was besieging the city which the Jacobins had taken over. He hoped that well-disposed people ('Wohlgesinnte') would find a moral and political message in *Der Bürgergeneral*, as the work was an attempt to expose malicious anti-patriots in Germany (Jacobin sympathisers trying to spread Revolutionary principles). He also lamented the physical impact of the political fervour which the Revolution had whipped up: 'Wie schrecklich leidet diese schöne Gegend an den Folgen jenes Schwindelgeistes, wenn er gleich nicht allein Schuld an dem Unglück ist'.[10] Karoline Herder described the play as a satisfying experience, as it captured the foolishness and frailty of the period.[11]

The *Unterhaltungen* was long seen as a secondary work, with more attention paid to the isolated tales than their context. From the late 1950s, however, the focus turned to the Revolution. Hans Mayer contended that Goethe used the text in order not to appear counter-Revolutionary, and placed more emphasis on the creation of social harmony in a period of political turmoil, whereas Wulf Segebrecht argued that it showed how Goethe had taken his anti-Revolutionary stance through his experiences in society, which he thought had become

[9] Patrick Fortmann, 'Miniaturizing the Revolution Political: Fantasy, Theatricality, and Sovereignty in Goethe's Comedies *Der Groß-Cophta*, *Die Aufgeregten*, and *Der Bürgergeneral*', *Monatshefte*, 105 (2013), 1-25 (pp. 1-2).
[10] Goethe to Bertuch, 6. June 1793, *Werke*, vol. 30 (1991), p. 674.
[11] Karoline Herder to Goethe, 2. June 1793, quoted in Dieter Borchmeyer, 'Kommentar', Goethe, *Werke*, vol. 6 (1993), pp. 986-1003 (p. 994).

fragmented ('ungesellig') by politics.[12] Some recent critics see the *Unterhaltungen* as an alternative educative source to Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*. The combination of love and politics represents the demarcation between the private and public sphere. Bernd Witte, for example, argues that Goethe wrote the novel in order to improve, but not lecture, the reader.[13]

Die Aufgeregten and *Der Bürgergeneral* are character comedies, and both were inspired by similar plays performed at the Weimar theatre. *Die Aufgeregten* is based on the play *Der politische Kannengießer* (Den politiske Kandstøber, 1722), by the Danish writer and historian, Ludvig Holberg. Under Goethe's directorship, Holberg's play was performed in Weimar on 17 March 1793.[14] It concerns a Hamburg tinsmith — referred to as Hermann von Bremenfeld or Bremenfeld — desperate, but woefully equipped, for political power. Like Breme, the main character of *Die Aufgeregten*, he sees international affairs in the context of local issues. Holberg's play implies that discussing politics is different to understanding and directing them. After an unsuccessful stint as mayor, Bremenfeld asks his apprentice to throw his political books onto the fire, and concludes: 'Daß sie das Herrscheramt verstehen,/ Das mögen Manche denken;/ Doch eins ist es, am Hafen gehn,/ Und eins das Schiff zu lenken'.[15] As will later be discussed, *Die Aufgeregten* arguably conveys a similar message. *Der Bürgergeneral* originated in *Die beiden Billets* and *Der Stammbaum*, which were performed from the beginning of Goethe's directorship in 1791 until April 1793. *Les Deux Billets* was written by the Frenchmen Jean-Pierre de Florian and first performed by the Comédie

[12] Hans Mayer, 'Das „Märchen'': Goethe und Gerhart Hauptmann', *Gestaltung Umgestaltung: Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Hermann August Korff*, ed. Joachim Müller (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1957), pp. 92-107 (p. 94), and Wulf Segebrecht, 'Geselligkeit und Gesellschaft: Überlegungen zur Situation des Erzählens im geselligen Roman', *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift*, 25 (1975), 306-22 (p. 312).
[13] Bernd Witte, 'Das Opfer der Schlange: Zur Auseinandersetzung Goethes mit Schiller in den *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* und im *Märchen*', *Unser Commercium: Goethe und Schillers Lliteraturpolitik*, ed. Wilfred Barner and others (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1984), pp. 461-84 (pp. 472-73).
[14] Wilson, 'Dramen', p. 267.
[15] Ludwig Holberg, *Der politische Kannengießer*, tr. P.J. Willaßen, *Bibliothek humoristischer Dichtungen*, ed. Gustav Haller, 11 vols (Halle: G. Emil Barthel Verlag, 1868-73), vol. 8 (1871), pp. 25-106 (p. 106).

Italienne in 1779. In 1790, Christian Leberecht Heyne published his German translation, and added his own sequel in the following year entitled *Der Stammbaum*. Heyne's *Die beiden Billets* also featured a character called Schnaps, and *Der Bürgergeneral* occasionally refers to the former work, although Goethe intended it as a stand-alone play. The first performance of *Der Bürgergeneral* took place on 2 May 1793.[16]

Herrmann can be classified as a mock-epic poem, and the *Unterhaltungen* is a seminal work, as it provided the earliest German example of a collection of *Novellen* linked by a frame narrative. Whilst writing *Herrmann* Goethe told Schiller: 'Ich studiere jetzt in großer Eile das alte Testament und Homer'.[17] This would partly explain the many biblical and classical references in the work — typical features of a mock-epic. The hexameters parody the structure of ancient Greek verse, a part of the poem's function of connecting the *bürgerlich* subject with Classical culture.[18] Yahya A. Elsaghe notes that the poem gained the status of a national epic, and was widely interpreted as an elevation of the German *Bürgertum*. In contrast to *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, however, the work served the established order and no longer articulated social conflicts.[19] Ritchie Robertson elaborates on Goethe's fascination with the *Odyssey*, and compares it with the idyllic physical environment and the geniality of the 'neither crude nor courtly' people of *Herrmann und Dorothea*.[20] Goethe's work also owes much to Johann Heinrich Voss' pastoral poem, and contemporary bestseller, *Luise*. First published in 1783-4, *Luise* also contains a small cast of characters whose apparent independence of aristocracy is reflected by the rejection of aristocratic neoclassicism. This includes the appropriation of Homeric hexameters for the description of daily life, and much specific detail.[21] The link between the two works was clear to many

[16] Wilson, 'Dramen', pp. 273-75.
[17] Goethe to Schiller, 19.4.97, *Werke*, vol. 31 (1998), p. 319.
[18] Yahya A. Elsaghe, '*Hermann und Dorothea'*, *Handbuch*, vol. 1 (1996), pp. 519-37 (p. 525).
[19] *Ibid*, pp. 532-33.
[20] Ritchie Robertson, *Mock-epic Poetry: from Pope to Heine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 203.
[21] *Ibid*., pp. 207-08.

contemporaries. Friedrich Sengle describes both texts as steps towards the development of Weimar Classicism, but also argues that they have a distinct form and function.[22] The *rural* idyll is not quite as vivid in Goethe's poem, as a small-town (rather than the village in *Luise*) provides the centre of the action, and the global and historical perspective in *Herrmann und Dorothea* is more acute (not least due to the influence of the Revolution).[23] The *Unterhaltungen*, in which the Baroness pleads to hear a story, contains a limited plot, few characters, and a steady tempo. For this, a major influence was the work of the fourteenth-century Italian author, Giovanni Boccaccio, entitled *The Decameron*. As in the *Unterhaltungen*, *The Decameron* features characters who are brought together in adversity. They shelter in a secluded villa outside Florence to escape the Black Death, and relate a hundred tales ranging from the erotic to the tragic.

Message and Messenger

Central to this chapter is the relationship between the protagonists and the politics they advocate. If Goethe was mistrustful of those championing Revolutionary principles, to what extent was it due to the type of people championing them or the content of the principles themselves (a question already alluded to with Vansen)? Were his misgivings more about the messenger or the message? This chapter investigates the representation of both. Analysis of the messengers primarily considers the representation of the main protagonists of *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral*, Breme and Schnaps, and the first fiancé of *Herrmann*, their personal traits, and their interaction with the other characters. Questions include how they influence those around them, and whether there is any discrepancy between their words and deeds. Analysis of the message reflects on the portrayal of the ideas of *liberté, égalité*,

[22] Friedrich Sengle, *Neues zu Goethe: Essays und Vorträge* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989), p. 62 and p. 51.
[23] *Ibid*., pp. 63-5.

fraternité, of *bürgerlich* attempts to gain and exert political influence, and alternative political arrangements put forward. This approach invites reflection on Goethe's attitude towards democracy, or, at least, popular participation in politics, something which the French Revolution supposedly sought to promote.

Herrmann und Dorothea and the *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* are analysed under the same subordinate themes as *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral*, but are not compared in direct parallel. Whilst seeking similarities and patterns in the texts, as well as nuances, this method also recognises the distinct chronological backdrop against which Goethe wrote *Herrmann* and the *Unterhaltungen*. It acknowledges that a development in political events and personal circumstances may have affected his opinions. The endings of the four main sections of the chapter ('Revolutionary Characters', 'The Revolutionaries: Proponents of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*?', '*Bürger* in Politics', 'Noble Alternatives'), as well as the conclusion, try to address this. More attention is paid to *Herrmann* than to the *Unterhaltungen*. The chapter is mainly concerned with the structure and historical context of the framework narrative, and does not examine the content of the various tales within the collection.

Democracy

Discerning the extent to which the likes of Breme and Schnaps advocate 'democracy', and assessing Goethe's attitude towards the concept, must be tentative. Not only did the eighteenth-century understanding of democracy differ from the modern one, it had come to encompass a range of political and social implications by the time of the Revolution.

In the Middle Ages, democracy was mainly viewed negatively, and understood along the literary and philosophical lines of the ancients. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth

centuries, ‘democracy’ found a broader audience, and started to hint at the representation, and even rule, of the majority. In 1561, it was described in one dictionary thus: ‘herrschung und regierung des gemeinen Volks’. In 1645, it was briefly defined as an all-powerful social rank (‘al-herrschender Stand’).[24] Distinctions also started to be made between different forms of democracy.

The essential distinction was between direct and representative democracy. Direct (or pure) democracy entitled all members of a polity to an equal share of political power, creating a government controlled by the majority and which automatically enacted its will. Rousseau argued that true democracy had never existed apart from in certain city states (such as Athens), and that it was unnatural for the majority to govern the minority.[25] Representative democracy entrusted decision-making to elected officials. Edmund Burke explained this system to the electors of Bristol, saying that the duty of members of parliament was not to slavishly follow the popular will of their constituents, but to use their ‘enlightened conscience’ and ‘mature judgment’ to act in their interest: they were representatives, not delegates.[26]

By the end of the eighteenth century, few intellectuals and politicians advocated direct democracy, except for a small number of radicals. Most preferred its representative form, often within a mixed constitution. Many equated direct democracy with tyranny. Montesquieu argued that political liberty could only be secured by a moderate government (one which was neither fully aristocratic nor democratic).[27] Immanuel Kant argued that, by not separating the legislative and executive powers, a direct democracy (as opposed to a

[24] Hans Maier, ‘Demokratie: Auflösung der Tradition in der frühen Neuzeit’, *Grundbegriffe*, vol. 1 (1972), pp. 839-47 (p. 841).
[25] Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, *Oeuvres*, vol. 3 (1964), pp. 347-470 (p. 404).
[26] Edmund Burke, ‘Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll’ (1774), *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford and others, 9 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981-2015), vol. 3 (1996), pp. 63-70 (p. 69).
[27] Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des Lois*, 11, 4, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1949-51), vol. 2 (1951), p. 395.

republic) failed to provide protection for the individual from oppression by the majority, and was, therefore, inherently despotic.[28] Similarly, Burke branded a 'perfect' democracy 'the most shameless' and 'the most fearless' form of government, as it was not subject to any sense of honour, nor judgment by another political body.[29]

The French Revolution was a crucial period for defining the modern concept of democracy, imbuing a hitherto mainly constitutional term with social, historical, and philosophical connotations, and tightening the link between democracy and republicanism. The constitution of the Jacobin-dominated National Convention called itself 'representative' and 'democratic', and Robespierre's speech of February 1794 made democracy and republicanism seem synonymous. According to Robespierre, the spirit of democracy should be founded on public virtue and love of equality: 'Non-seulement la vertu est l'âme de la démocratie; mais elle ne peut exister que dans ce gouvernement'.[30] Democracy also came to be used as a collective term, which denoted not just a form of government, but social ranks and political powers. In Germany, for instance, people began to speak of aristocratic and democratic social ranks.[31]

The term 'democrat' became more frequent during the Revolution, but was still not as common as words such as 'patriot', 'Jacobin', and 'sansculotte'. It was mostly used as a derogatory term by opponents of the Revolution to describe its supporters (who often referred to counter-Revolutionaries as 'aristocrats'). In Germany, the Revolution was seen largely as a conflict between 'Aristokraten' and 'Demokraten'. Although 'Demokrat' was often used to scold republicans, Joachim Heinrich Campe gave it a broader meaning. He defined a

[28] Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden*, p. 207.
[29] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 191.
[30] Maximilien Robespierre, *Sur les principes de morale politique: Rapport présenté au nom du Comité de Salut Public (18 pluviôse an II. 5 février 1794), Discours et Rapports á la Convention par Robepierre*, intro. Marc Bouloiseau (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1965), pp. 207-41.
[31] Hans Maier, 'Demokratie', p. 856.

'Demokrat' as: 'Volksfreund oder Freund der Volksregierung'. The democrat did not want to rule himself (which was the mark of a demagogue), Campe wrote, but wanted the people to rule through their representatives.[32]

Goethe wrote *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral*, then, at a time when the term 'democracy' had penetrated the public domain. However, whether in its pure or tempered form, democracy did not mean mass political participation. In Britain, for example, the franchise was restricted to men of property over twenty-one. Britain was never described as a democracy either, due to the negative connotations of the term.[33] Politics was still an elitist activity, even if the elite was now larger and more meritocratic. The French constitution of 1791, supposedly inspired by the Rights of Man, discriminated between active and passive citizens, setting real estate ownership as a criterion for membership of the electoral college and eligibility as a deputy, resulting in, as Simon Schama notes, a '*narrower* electorate at the levels where it really counted'.[34] Even the elections for the National Convention in September 1792, just after the official founding of the French Republic, were only based on manhood suffrage, with only about 6% of the estimated eligible voters voting.[35] Analysing Goethe's attitude towards 'democracy', therefore, is not an investigation of his thoughts on universal suffrage or even mass political participation. It is an attempt to gauge his attitude towards the extension of political participation beyond the traditional ruling elite: the aristocracy and monarchy.

[32] *Ibid*.
[33] William Wordsworth, for instance, defiantly wrote, 'You know perhaps already that I am of that odious class of men called democrats, and of that class I shall for ever continue'. William Wordsworth to William Mathews, 23.5.1794, *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805)*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 115-16.
[34] Schama, *Citizens*, p. 576.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 646.

Bürger and *Weltbürger*

The theme of this chapter also calls for a revision of the meaning of *Bürger*. The previous chapter has already illuminated the slipperiness of the term. By the 1790s, the impact of the French Revolution had politicised the word by linking it with a person who could influence the government of his polity, or 'la Nation': it became associated with the concept of a *citoyen*. Robespierre excused the Terror by enacting it in the name of virtue: a quality which he thought had eluded the monarchs, aristocrats, and clergymen of the *ancien régime*, and could only be found in *citoyens*. The Revolution introduced a cosmopolitan element, too, linking the word with the notion of a *Weltbürger*. The Revolutionary war was, in part, waged with the intention of making all peoples 'citizens of the world'. However, analysis of the texts (particularly *Herrmann*) will show that these connotations did not erase the more traditional understanding of a *Bürger*, either as an inhabitant of a town (burgher) or as a hierarchical term which denoted somebody who exercised a specific occupation and held specific legal rights and privileges. The 1790s saw tensions emerge between these notions of the old German *Bürger* and the new *Weltbürger*.

Unless otherwise indicated, this chapter uses *Bürger* to refer to those outside the traditional ruling elite. The 'traditional ruling elite' means the aristocracy and monarchy. The chapter essentially asks to what extent the texts suggest that *Bürger* should control the ruling elite, or even become part of it. Put otherwise: how far do the texts support the transformation of the traditional *Bürger* into a *citoyen*?

Revolutionary Characters

There is much to suggest that Breme and Schnaps are pompous and deluded narcissists. Breme is a barber-surgeon, and former soldier. Schnaps is a local vagabond, but pretends to

be an important Jacobin emissary. Both try to manipulate and subvert those whom they encounter. In *Die Aufgeregten*, this includes Breme's fellow burghers, and a high-ranking scholar who has recently served at the noble court. In *Der Bürgergeneral*, Schnaps tries to convert an affluent but credulous farmer, Märten, to Jacobinism, but must withstand the hostility of the more cynical famers, Peter and his lover Röse. In Act I, scene 4 of *Die Aufgeregten* Breme leaves no doubt that he is aware of his own benevolence and desire for recognition. Although he has no formal training, the barber describes the medication he is making for the young duke as excellent, and hopes that the latter will always remember Breme von Bremenfeld (referring to himself in the third person). Breme is also very proud of his abilities as a barber-surgeon. Although it is much lower than a physician, he describes it as one of the noblest professions.[36] On his first appearance in *Der Bürgergeneral* Schnaps responds to Märten's observation that he is careful (as Schnaps checks that the farmer is alone in the house) by saying that it is the first of all virtues.[37] This is an early sign that Schnaps wants to present himself as a prominent Jacobin sympathiser persecuted by counter-Revolutionary German officials, whereas he is merely frightened that Märten's son will catch him. The name 'Schnaps' evokes either an alcoholic drink or even something mad (such as a 'Schnapsidee' or 'übergeschnappt'): it indicates somebody who is spirited, does things to excess (such as drinking), and is prone to crazy ideas. Schnaps also has an inflated sense of his own importance. When Märten compliments Schnaps on his modesty, Schnaps replies that this is a feature of all great men, and claims that his reputation transcends the Rhine, with Jacobins craving his sense, judgment, and dexterity (pp. 120-22).

Although Breme and Schnaps claim that they are engaged in benevolent causes to help and improve humanity, this is not evident in their influence on their immediate circles. It

[36] Goethe, *Die Aufgeregten*, *Werke*, vol. 6 (1993), pp. 153-206 (p. 160).
[37] Goethe, *Der Bürgergeneral*, *Werke*, vol. 6 (1993), pp. 111-49 (p. 119).

is ironic that Breme's political engagement indirectly causes the accident of the young count, who suffers a head and eye injury after falling onto the edge of a table in a room which the Countess's servant should have kept illuminated. It is due to Breme's and the Magister's arguing over the content of the newspapers and monthly periodicals that the child goes to bed later than usual, and a sleepy Georg inadvertently extinguishes the flame (p. 157). In coming up with a potion, Breme is not displaying altruism, but trying to fix a problem partly of his own making. Märten tries to discourage Schnaps from demonstrating a revolt, which the latter compares to the preparation of a breakfast, using a large jug of milk (pp. 133-37). In ignoring his advice, Schnaps not only shows himself to be inconsiderate, but also spoils the labour of somebody in whose interest he claims to be acting (Märten says that it is his daughter's best milk: p. 137). Schnaps eyes a theoretical and utopian goal, but ignores or disrupts the practicalities of everyday life around him.

Breme's and Schnaps' attempts to coerce fellow *Bürger* have mixed results, meeting with scepticism and dissent. In Act 1, scene 7 of *Die Aufgeregten* Breme insists that the time to rebel has come. Albert agrees, but Peter respectfully questions the barber's conclusion and his authority over other clever people. Peter Demetz argues that the difference in Albert's and Peter's vocabulary to describe the Revolution reflects different dispositions and possibilities for political behaviour. The credulous Martin reveals that he is fascinated by the prospect of rebellion by saying that everybody knows that a remarkable ('wunderliches') event is underway in France, without explaining what he means by 'remarkable'. Albert's positive words ('Wunderliches und Gutes') portray him as the most passionate rebel, whereas Peter's ('Wunderliches und Abscheuliches!') present him as someone with rebellious sympathies but who seeks legitimate change.[38] Nor is Peter seduced by Breme's answer that he comes from a

[38] Peter Demetz, *Goethes 'Die Aufgeregten': Zur Frage der politischen Dichtung in Deutschland* (Munich: Franz Nowack Verlag, 1952), pp. 29-30.

line of ancestors with great political insight. He responds to the picture of Breme's grandfather — the supposedly unrivalled political and military expert — just by saying that he looks like a handsome and well-nourished man (p. 169). This is an ironic metatextual reference to Holberg's Breme, which indicates that Goethe's Breme is just the latest in a long line of deluded narcissists. It also reinforces the impression that Peter is reluctant to believe anything he hears, preferring to judge only on what he can see for himself.

In order to gain the support of the Magister, a scholar, priest, and recently dismissed private tutor of the young count, Breme uses flattery and emotional manipulation. Breme envisages the Magister as the intellectual underpinning of the movement, and wants him to provide the power of the pen to help promote freedom and fuel antagonism towards the aristocracy (p. 188). He implies that the Magister would be an ideal addition as a free-thinking, spiritual, and honourable man, and plays on his clear resentment at his former noble employees: 'Zwar verhöhnt von Leuten die selbst Hohn verdienen […]' (p. 190). Demetz remarks that the Magister's separation from the Countess is not politically, but psychologically, motivated, as he wounds her mother's pride by laughing at her son's accident.[39] The Magister is persuaded to join a political movement through a personal experience, and by a character who preys on his wounded pride and burning sense of injustice. Although his remarks also sound melodramatic and self-pitying, Breme senses that this pathetic character can be exploited for more dangerous political purposes. It is not clear that the Magister would enter revolutionary politics of his own accord, but is drawn in by an individual who articulates his anger, and suggests a way of channelling it.

Although Märten mostly comes across as credulous and deferential towards Schnaps, he is not always impressed by him. He listens attentively to him, and begs to know how to

[39] *Ibid*., p. 36.

become a man of influence (p. 120). When Schnaps tells him that an emissary from the Jacobin Club accepted him into his society, the farmer admits that he would like to know about the initiation ceremonies (p. 121). However, he also describes Schnaps as prickly and all-knowing (p. 119), and wonders whether Schnaps is demonically possessed when he forces open Röse's locked clothes chest in an attempt to hide from Görge (p. 132). Breme and Schnaps are both able to seduce some of their prospective fellow-travellers with their rhetoric, but have greater difficulty with more enquiring minds. This suggests that, although they partly threaten society, they are not impossible to resist. It also indicates that they do not speak for their entire social rank.

Neither Breme nor Schnaps deals with disagreement gladly, and their ways of doing so are particularly unpleasant. Breme belittles Peter, claiming that, as he is not proud, he would gladly have Peter as his brother-in-law (p. 172). When he discovers Caroline's continued affair with the Baron, he seizes her and threatens to lock her up (pp. 197-98). Unable to accept Märten's indifference to freedom and equality, Schnaps repeatedly questions the farmer before drawing a sword and threatening to stab him (pp. 133-34). This response typifies the recourse to violence common with the main agitators: where persuasion fails, force steps in. It is difficult to see how such intolerance of dissent could be compatible with a commitment to liberty and equality.

The characters of Dorothea's first fiancé in *Herrmann und Dorothea* and the Baroness's cousin in the *Unterhaltungen* are more difficult to assess, but their enthusiasm for the Revolution is clear. The deceased first fiancé is unable to speak for himself, and others relate his tragic fate of imprisonment and death (presumably by the guillotine) in Paris, and give small clues as to his personality. The Baroness' cousin speaks too much. He causes the Privy Councillor (*der Geheimerat*) and his wife to leave the group after an argument with the Privy Councillor on the Revolution, creating tension and upsetting the Baroness, who is an

old friend of the Councillor's wife. However, the novel does not portray him as entirely unsympathetic.

The first fiancé's decision to leave Dorothea out of passion for the Revolution straddles the boundary between selfishness and selflessness, and focuses the dilemma between domestic loyalty and political commitment. That he is prepared to sacrifice marriage for the chance to spread liberty suggests that he 'loves' politics more than personal relations, and his tragic end leads the onlooker to question the wisdom of his decision. The Judge describes the fiancé as a noble young man acting for noble reasons, but Dorothea claims that she foresaw his demise, and that he acted too rashly. This does not make the fiancé much different from the many Germans who, as the Judge remarks, were inspired by the early stages of the Revolution ('wir waren als Nachbarn lebhaft entzündet').[40] Dorothea's continued affection for him suggests that she does not regard his decision as selfish, and just regrets his loss. This is highlighted by the engagement ring which keeps the fiancé as a spiritual presence in her life and the poem. It must also be assumed that the fiancé does not seek to be permanently estranged from Dorothea, but intends to return as soon as he has fulfilled his political aims. Gustav Seibt describes the fiancé as one of the most sympathetic representatives of the Revolution in Goethe's works.[41] The outcome of events reveals him as naïve and deluded, but not necessarily selfish.

In terms of his political activity, the first fiancé appears a nobler figure than either Breme or Schnaps. He is not reported to have committed any misdeeds during his time in France, or to have sought fame or material gain under the pretext of political engagement. His only 'crime' is to end up on the wrong side of history, by falling victim to the radical Revolutionaries who turned on their former supporters. The fiancé seems to act out of

[40] Goethe, *Herrmann und Dorothea*, *Werke*, vol. 8 (1994), pp. 802-83 (p. 848, 'Klio: Das Zeitalter', line 200).
[41] Seibt, *Art von Wut*, p. 144.

principle: by travelling to Paris, he adds action to his rhetoric, thereby showing more conviction (and bravery) than Breme and Schnaps put together.

The Baroness's cousin, Karl, does not disturb the group's tranquillity, for they are already discussing contemporary events before his argument with the Privy Councillor. However, their row marks a turning point in the frame narrative, as it forces the Baroness to encourage the group to refrain from political discussion, which enables the telling of the stories. It also allows the Baroness to impress upon the group the importance of certain morals, such as renunciation ('Entsagung'), as well as basic civility. It could be argued, therefore, that the noble cousin represents the catalyst of the work, and helps as much as hinders the group.

Karl may come across as arrogant and insensitive, but is not without redeeming features. Believing that his noble status gives him a greater right to air his opinions, Karl praises the progress of the French Revolutionary army (showing no regard for Luise, whose fiancé is serving in the Allied army), and claims that their cause will benefit the world.[42] However, he reacts remorsefully to the departure of the Privy Councillor and his wife, and subsequently insists on obeying the Baroness (p. 1005). Karl also inspires some of his social inferiors: the chambermaids enjoy listening to him, not only out of physical attraction, but because they feel vindicated by his views (p. 998). It is possible that Karl does not mean to offend anyone, but that he is overcome by his enthusiasm for the Revolution. Nor is the Revolutionary of the novella the only character who lacks discretion when it comes to political discussion. A staunch counter-Revolutionary, the Privy Councillor, shares this fault.

The Privy Councillor and Cousin Karl have opposing views on the Revolution, but put forward equally drastic proposals to deal with their political foes. Whereas the Privy

[42] Goethe, *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, *Werke*, vol. 9 (1992), pp. 993-1114 (pp. 997-98).

Councillor defends the *ancien régime*, Karl sees the Revolution as an opportunity to heal and renew a 'sick' old system. As the discussion moves to the blockade of Mainz and the fate of the Clubbists, the Councillor describes the Revolutionaries as mad and deluded, and denies that the new nation will prove any better than the former one (pp. 1001-02). Karl argues that the Revolutionaries are justified in their rebellion, as they are not used to the sort of privileges that the prince's servant enjoys, and wish to see labour and pleasure ('Mühe und Genuß') more evenly distributed. The Privy Councillor accuses Karl of childish idealism, whilst Karl accuses the Privy Councillor of old-fashioned and narrow-minded thinking (p. 1003). They both advocate vengeful and violent treatment of their opponents, though, with a high degree of relish and self-righteousness. The Privy Councillor hopes that the German Clubbists will all be hanged in the event of an Allied takeover of Mainz, whereas Karl hopes that the guillotine will spare no guilty head in Germany (p. 1004). Neither party refrains from attacking the other, nor shows much inclination to reflect on the other's arguments.

The intensity of the Privy Councillor's and Karl's situation — they have spent much time together under one roof, and received constant updates on the progress of the Revolution — may make their argument particularly heated. If emotion does take over the characters' reason, though, the confrontation reveals the burgher and the aristocrat as equally susceptible. If anything, the Revolutionary Karl comes off worse: his behaviour entirely contradicts a movement supposedly promoting reason.

Even if the Privy Councillor's and Karl's behaviour and desired punishment for their opponents are equally irresponsible, this does not mean that the contents of their arguments are equally faulty — a point reinforced by historical hindsight. Firstly, Karl's hope for a more egalitarian society seems ridiculous when juxtaposed with his prediction that the Revolutionaries will bestow honours and riches on their German supporters (p. 1003). It conceals a hope for social distinction and greater wealth, albeit of a meritocratic rather than

hereditary kind. This has a sinister undertone for the future in the event of a successful French occupation, as it implies that Revolutionary sympathisers would enjoy a superior status to counter-Revolutionaries: supporters of the regime would be considered more valid *Bürger* than its opponents. Second, the Privy Councillor's accusation that Karl is idealistic and mistaken in his belief that the French forces will show gratitude towards German sympathisers is born out by the facts of the brutal Revolutionary occupation of the Rhineland. There also seems to be an underlying irony in Karl supporting a movement which promises the destruction of his social rank and personal prosperity. That he is fleeing his home, rather than staying to welcome his apparent fellow-travellers, implies not only hypocrisy, but also that he is in denial, and supporting the Revolutionaries out of blind faith — another example of his failure to use 'enlightened' reason.

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Patrick Fortmann argues that Goethe regarded revolutionary zeal as a character flaw, and used comedy to immunise the audience against it.[43] Dorothea's first fiancé may prove otherwise, as he is both revolutionary and admirable. However, even admirable individuals have their weaknesses. The relationship between Schnaps and Märten represents what Fortmann views as Goethe's distinction between confused enthusiasts of the Revolution and charismatic demagogues claiming to be the 'invisible hand' guiding the people's will.[44] The next part of this chapter shows how enthusiasts and demagogues deploy political rhetoric to justify their actions and seduce fellow travellers.

[43] Fortmann, 'Miniaturizing the Revolution', 10.
[44] *Ibid*., 19.

The Revolutionaries: Proponents of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*?

Breme and Schnaps claim to act according to principles of freedom and equality, but are given little opportunity to explain their understanding of them. In the *Bürgergeneral* Schnaps is prevented from elaborating on the supposedly core values of the Jacobin movement by the arrival of Görge (p. 126). The aristocratic, and some of the *bürgerlich*, characters in *Die Aufgeregten* dismiss freedom and equality. Luise (described by Goethe as one of the 'good' figures of the play) associates many of their advocates with selfishness and hypocrisy: 'So viele nehmen sich der Sache der Freiheit, der allgemeinen Gleichheit an, nur um für sich eine Ausnahme zu machen, nur um zu wirken es sei auf welche Art es wolle' (p. 180). Did Goethe want the reader to interpret Breme's and Schnaps' commitment to freedom and equality as vacuous, or did he avoid discussion of these principles in order to evade scrutiny of them?

Nicholas Boyle and Tim Blanning explain how the distinct social and political culture of France complicated efforts to replicate Revolutionary principles in the Holy Roman Empire. France had a much larger commercial and property-owning *bourgeoisie*, and a greater urban population, with cities generally much larger than those in Germany. With Paris at the heart of the country's industry and commerce, France was also much more centralised, making it easier to draw the power of the crowd.[45] Moreover, Boyle argues that, although both France and the Holy Roman Empire had essentially been despotic regimes before the 1780s, the former's despotism had not been 'enlightened'. France was deprived of an equivalent to Frederick the Great or Joseph II, who understood the need to introduce rationalising reforms such as the codification of law, the abolition of guilds and ancient customs, and the secularization of ecclesiastical property.[46] Blanning adds that it was not just German burghers who insufficiently appreciated such differences, but intellectuals, too.

[45] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, pp. 23-4.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 25.

When the French invaded the Rhineland in 1792, German radicals quickly discovered that 'liberté' and 'égalité' did not equate to 'Freiheit und Gleichheit'. The French saw the Revolution essentially as a quest for 'popular sovereignty, participatory politics, egalitarianism, nationalism, and the collective power of the nation state'. For their German counterparts, however, it was founded on 'individual autonomy, individual self-determination, individual self-cultivation (*Bildung*), and the paramount claims of morality and the law'.[47] Whereas many assumed that 'liberation' would mean freedom of choice in their political opinions, Revolutionary occupation revealed that it meant subscribing to a fixed 'French version' of liberty.[48]

If Boyle's and Blanning's comments on the futility of transposing the Revolution to Germany are accurate, it would be expected that Breme, Schnaps, and the fiancé misinterpret Revolutionary principles, and fail to see that their environments are ill-suited to the adoption of them.

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Schnaps' demonstration of his interpretation of freedom and equality with the milk jug may be an honest attempt to explain a complex concept to a (self-confessed) poorly educated farmer. However, it is portrayed comically, and baffles rather than enlightens Märten. When Schnaps puts the ladle into the urn in order to gather the inhabitants of the fictional town, the farmer muses that Schnaps has lost the plot ('Nun ist's aus'), and says he cannot see the secret fermentation which Schnaps claims is happening in the jug (p. 135). Schnaps makes connections and explains problems which Märten has never encountered. This does not mean

[47] T.W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland 1792-1802* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 261.
[48] *Ibid*., p. 257.

that Märten is a fool, but shows that he is less deluded than Schnaps. He deals with concrete realities rather than indulging in theoretical pontification.

The most ridiculous aspect of the scene is Schnaps' reduction of a political project to a mere theory (i.e. a recipe). By comparing people to milk, Schaps assumes that they will react predictably, with unquestioning conformity and in perfect harmony. At the end of the demonstration, he concludes: 'Und so ist die sauersüße Milch der Freiheit und Gleichheit fertig' (p. 137). The expression 'Und so' makes it sound rather whimsical, and the word 'fertig' gives an air of finality. Schnaps seemingly expects society to return to eternal tranquillity after the Revolutionaries have stirred it up. By explaining a political theory, Schnaps not only does practical damage (by ruining Röse's best milk), but also reveals himself as laughably naïve.

Schnaps' emphasis on equality in the demonstration appears highly ironic when compared with his self-portrayal as a 'Bürgergeneral'. The term is oxymoronic, and possibly alludes to Molière's comedy ballet *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. As Molière's comedy played on the contradiction between a member of the bourgeoisie and a (necessarily) aristocratic gentleman, Goethe's comedy plays on the juxtaposition of a civilian rogue in a position of military authority. More ridiculous still is Schnaps' insistence that Märten should not refer to him as 'Herr General', but as 'mein General', claiming that no 'citizen' is master to another (p. 125). These egalitarian sentiments are not reflected by the dynamics of their relationship.

Despite professing commitment to liberty and equality, Schnaps wants to establish a strict hierarchy in his relationship with Märten, and place himself firmly at the top of it. He does so through verbal and physical intimidation. As well as pointing a sword at Märten after the farmer's unimpressed reaction to liberty, equality, fraternity, Schnaps says: 'So wißt […] daß Ihr frei werden mußt, daß Ihr gleich werden mußt, Ihr mögt wollen oder nicht'. Schnaps

superficially presents Märten with a choice, but the presence of a sword and his persistent, almost persecutory, tone makes it sound like a command —and a threat (p. 134). Other examples of Schnaps' assertion of dominance over Märten tacitly appear in the stage directions, such as when Schnaps goes to the window and leans on him (p. 137), or holds the farmer back when Görge arrives (p. 138). These examples support Wilson's argument that Schnaps (and Breme) do not actually want to overturn a hierarchal order, but to put themselves and their comrades ('Genossen') in a position of regal power.[49] To do so, they are prepared to use violence.

Nicholas Boyle and Simon Schama agree that the Revolutionaries deemed violence a legitimate means of pursuing change.[50] Both Breme and Schnaps resort to violence against their perceived opponents — or even enthusiastically promote it — to enforce their principles. Breme agrees with Albert's callous sentiment that those who use violence cannot afford weak nerves (pp. 170-71), and states that what cannot be gained in riches should be taken with force (p. 168). When Görge starts to attack Schnaps, Schnaps first appeals to 'holy' freedom and equality for protection, but then appeals to the force of the Revolution ('Revolutionsgewalt') as he draws his sword (p. 139). For Breme and Schnaps, freedom, equality, and universal brotherhood fall by the wayside when it comes to dealing with their antagonists**.** With them, they need not practise what they preach.

Breme's planned siege of the castle invites comparison with the invasion of the Palace of Versailles on 6 October 1789. According to Boyle, the latter event exemplified how the Revolution was, from its early stages, 'at the mercy — or in the service — of a modern mass society, and of its executive arm, the crowd'.[51] Breme plans to imprison the noble family and

[49] Wilson, 'Dramen', p. 279.
[50] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, p. 8, and Schama, *Citizens*, pp. 859-60.
[51] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, p. 8.

compel the Countess to sign the document and swear an oath to remove all burdens on the burghers and peasantry. The invasion of Versailles also had some specific aims. It was mainly women angered by insufficient bread supplies following a good harvest, and members of the National Guard, who decided to march on the Palace to demand that Louis agree to allow them to protect his person, to guarantee food for Paris, and to consent to reside in the capital. Just as Breme's agitators intend to use violence, intimidation, and even emotional blackmail to achieve their aims, the armed Parisians broke into the Palace (causing a panic-stricken Marie Antoinette to dash barefoot across the building to find the rest of her family, and parading the heads of two slaughtered royal bodyguards around on spikes), and eventually forced the King to appear on the balcony, and promise the crowd that he would go to Paris. The siege on the Countess's castle is an attempt to suspend and reverse the system of deference: the rebels plan to assert authority over the noblewoman, treating her like a captive and making her bow to their demands. On the same day of the invasion of Versailles, the National Assembly agreed to change Louis' official title from *roi de France et Navarre* to *roi des Français*.[52] The power of a crowd forced a king to permanently vacate a palace which had symbolised the apogee of monarchical absolutism and to consent to a new — and diminished — constitutional position. As Simon Schama notes, Louis was made King of the Free French on condition of his 'own virtual imprisonment'.[53]

Although *Der Bürgergeneral* was written before the Terror, Schnaps' compulsion to make Märten accept the creed of freedom and equality evokes a major tenet of Robespierre's speech to the Committee of Public Safety in February 1794. Linking democracy and equality with virtue, Robespierre argued that the Revolutionary government should act as the despotism of liberty against tyranny (the latter being represented by all counter-

[52] Schama, *Citizens*, pp. 463-70.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 470.

Revolutionaries): people should be forced to be free, and to accept the 'virtuous' principles of the Revolution. Just as Schnaps frightens Märten by drawing his sword to make the farmer adopt his principles, Robespierre argued that Terror was a natural consequence of virtue, and that it should be used on all enemies of the Republic.[54] Robespierre's version of equality, therefore, did not mean equal treatment of those who questioned it. Nor, it seems, does that of Schnaps.

The effect of these reflections of large-scale events in provincial settings is twofold: they both ironize high politics, and suggest that the village disturbances are more sinister than they initially appear. The invasion of Versailles is made to look little better than a peasants' revolt, and the eloquent rhetoric of the indisputably erudite Robespierre is undermined when expressed by a greedy vagabond.[55] On the other hand, the historical events indicate the amount of damage that Breme and Schnaps could wreak if unimpeded. Could small-scale violence lead to the mass killing and destruction of the Revolution?

Another parallel to the French Revolution in *Die Aufgeregten* may lie in the depiction of the nobles and the monarch, particularly by the rebels. Whereas the nobility is the target of their ire, the sovereign is treated more sympathetically. Breme blames the plight of the people ('das Volk') on an unjust nobility, but claims that the Prince is on the rebels' side: '[…] es wissen's diese Leute, daß der Fürst selbst eine Revolution wünscht'. According to Breme, the ruler shares the disposition of Frederick the Great and Joseph II, figures whom all true democrats should praise, and is angered by the plight of the burghers and peasantry (p. 192). Breme's rebellion is not conspicuously anti-monarchical, therefore, and even welcomes the idea of monarchical assistance.

[54] Robespierre, *Morale Politique*, p. 222.
[55] Ruth Scurr describes Robespierre's education at the elite Collège Louis-le-Grand in Paris. When he left, the College's administrative board awarded him a prize of 600 *livres* for 'outstanding' academic achievement. *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2006), pp. 19-31.

Frederick II, King of Prussia, and Emperor Joseph II were seen as reforming 'Enlightenment' monarchs who tried to address similar abuses to those which would later cause the downfall of the *ancien régime*. Joseph II abolished serfdom in 1781 and abolished the death penalty in 1787, and Frederick reformed the judicial system, making it possible for men not of noble stock to become judges or bureaucrats. Although they were despots, they presented themselves as servants of the state by acting in the general interest. Many French and German Revolutionaries even saw Joseph II as the monarch who paved the way for the Revolution.[56] This did not mean that they thought Joseph supported his own overthrow, but that he would act with the majority of the populace to reduce the influence of the nobility and the church, and to provide a new constitutional arrangement for his territory.

Nor did the Revolution immediately seek to abolish the monarchy, but to reform it. Despite their attack on the nobility, most members of the National Assembly hoped that the King would consent to the constitution and willingly represent the new nation.[57] In *Die Aufgeregten* the ruler's sympathy towards revolution is based on pure hearsay, and comes from a highly partisan source in Breme. As Breme claims that the ruler is on the side of the oppressed, many Revolutionaries believed — before the monarch's ill-fated flight to Varennes in 1791 — that Louis was also keen on reforming a decrepit regime, and that an essentially decent man had been hampered by power-hungry but incompetent nobles. It may be argued, then, that the context and desired outcome of Breme's planned rebellion are more akin to the Revolution of 1789/90 than that of 1792 and 1793, the years in which the French monarchy was abolished and the former royal couple were guillotined.

Yet comparisons of both *Der Bürgergeneral* and *Die Aufgeregten* with the Revolution must be treated cautiously. Despite the references to the French Revolution, it is doubtful that

[56] Borchmeyer, 'Kommentar', p. 1021.
[57] Furet, *Revolutionary France*, pp. 95-100.

Goethe intended to portray Breme and Schnaps as serious reflections of the French Revolutionaries (particularly the Jacobins), either in terms of their competence or their politics. It is questionable, for example, whether they want to transform the hierarchical structure and power relations in their societies, a suspicion which would undermine their self-identification as democrats.

It must be asked whether Breme is truly Revolutionary, even by the standards of 1789-91. Breme criticises the aristocracy, but does not seek to eradicate, or even reduce, their rights or privileges. In wanting the Countess to sign a document or swear an oath, Breme does not want her to agree to anything radical, but to rectify a long-standing grievance. Like Vansen in *Egmont*, Breme apparently seeks a restoration of freedoms which a negligent incumbent regime has ignored. He does not oppose aristocracy per se, but an aristocracy which is abusing its power. His hope that the Countess will return from Paris with a more temperate disposition ('mildere Gesinnungen'), having witnessed what people who have been oppressed for too long will finally do for their 'rights', might show him drawing inspiration from the Revolution (p. 171). However, these are not the Revolutionary universal Rights of Man, but rights for a particular group of men. Breme's remark also implies that he wants to pressure the aristocracy into self-reform rather than replace it.

Fortmann and Wilson agree that neither *Die Aufgeregten* nor *Der Bürgergeneral* promotes radical politics. Fortmann describes *Die Aufgeregten* as 'fundamentally backward-looking' in basing a rebellion and its resolution on a long-lost historic document. If there is a revolution, it is according to the 'old European semantics of the notion': a restoration to the original condition.[58] Far from undermining the existing social order, Wilson argues that the texts convey a strengthening of it. By giving aristocrats a leading role in resolving problems,

[58] Fortmann, 'Miniaturizing the Revolution', 8.

the plays temper a defence of a patriarchal system with a recognition of its need for self-reform.[59] Borchmeyer adds that the rebellion is presented as unnecessary, as the peasants could have achieved their aim through sensible negotiation with the Countess.[60] Even if Breme's and Schnaps' actions do result in little more than a preservation of the status quo, however, it must not be assumed that this is their aim.

Breme and Schnaps are certainly influenced by the French Revolution. They use Revolutionary rhetoric, and may even consider themselves bringers of great change in a new dawn for humanity. Breme shows that he is at least partly aware of the scale of recent events by remarking that the world is moving forward, and things are possible today which were not ten years ago (p. 168). He also claims that his fellow rebels will be able to write themselves into history as crusaders for eternal freedom against tyranny, rivalling the three great Swiss: William Tell, Walther Staubbach, and the Prince of Uri (p. 188). This comment not only makes Breme's ambitions sound laughably grandiose, it also exposes his ignorance. There was no Walther Staubbach involved in the fight for Swiss freedom, but a *Werner Stauffacher*. He contradicts this brave talk, too, by giving a more sober view of history: 'Es ist immer einerlei; es passiert in der Welt nichts Neues' (p. 189). Behind the radical bravado, Breme reveals more modest ambitions within a relatively conservative outlook. He may not intend to deceive people with his Revolutionary rhetoric, but simply does not understand its implications. 'Freiheit, Gleichheit, Brüderlichkeit' is a good rallying cry for a revolt, but is not a genuine call to change the world.

While Breme and Schnaps have many similarities, there are differences in their aims and their behaviour. Breme strives for honour and recognition, whereas Schnaps is ultimately content with a breakfast. Breme's endeavour is, arguably, nobler. Despite his vanity and

[59] Wilson, 'Dramen', p. 281.
[60] Borchmeyer, 'Kommentar', p. 1023.

arrogance, he seeks to address a genuine grievance which affects most of the villagers: he acts in a wider interest, if not quite that of humanity. *Der Bürgergeneral* does not show Schnaps performing any remotely altruistic deeds. He just talks about them. Even if his attachment to the Revolution appears false, his political imagination is greater than Breme's. His image of the villagers dancing around a liberty tree and Revolutionary soldiers cavorting with young women exceeds anything imagined by the barber-surgeon (pp. 137-38).

If *Die Aufgeregten* reflects the Revolution of 1789-90, it would indicate that Goethe had some sympathy for it. The legitimacy of the peasants' cause (their exemption from burdensome fees and taxes) is recognised by members of the aristocracy (i.e. the Countess), and the reconciliatory conversation between the Countess and the Court Counsellor. That Goethe gave the play a peaceful conclusion, however, suggests that he still deplored the violence which accompanied the early stages of the Revolution, and wanted to portray how events should have unfolded. An aristocracy which (at least partly) recognises its subjects' plight, and is aware of the need for self-reform and sympathetic governance, can prevent political upheaval. The peasantry can also express their discontent and assert their rights without attacking the nobility. That many of the French aristocrats failed to fulfil their responsibilities meant that they could not pre-empt the popular violence like those in the play.

That Schnaps' cause lacks legitimacy, and is based on vacuous rhetoric and greater violence, suggests a later stage of the Revolution to which Goethe was more hostile. There is no attempt to address a concrete grievance, but to spread abstract principles through plunder and violence, all this underpinned by a far more rugged egoism. This reflects Goethe's feelings after the invasion of the Rhineland in 1792, which brought the Revolution's violence to Germany and energised German Jacobin sympathisers whom he regarded as hypocritical and unpatriotic. *Die Aufgeregten* depicts a society in which the Revolution is mentally present, but physically distant. The appearance of Schnaps in Jacobin dress, however,

represents the reality of the Revolution on German soil. Although Schnaps, like Breme, is largely treated with comedy, and mocked by many of the other characters, he embodies a more repulsive and sinister time.

Even if Breme and Schnaps are serious about replicating Revolutionary principles, the provincialism of their campaigns makes this seem ridiculous. They do not boast the mass support which characterised the Revolution, which renders them relatively powerless. When Schnaps promises Märten that thousands of right-minded and spirited villagers will start a revolution, Märten comically shows his incredulity: 'In unserm Dorfe? Hier, in unserm Dorfe?' (p. 124). The support he enjoys is dubious, as no other character conspicuously backs his opinions. He may play on the fear caused by the infiltration of Jacobin sympathisers throughout Germany, as exemplified by the Judge's scolding of Schnaps: 'In diesem Hause ist also der Club der Verschwornen, die Zusammenkunft der Verräter, der Sitz der Rebellen?' (p.143). However, Görge and Rose do not find Schnaps frightening but contemptible. If they do fear anything about him, it is his ability to disturb their domestic happiness, not to implement dangerous politics.

The establishment of a 'Nationalversammlung' in *Die Aufgeregten* may epitomise the farce of trying to imitate the French model. Whereas the actual *Assemblée Nationale* was a momentous constitutional undertaking, the apparent replica does not reflect this. The scene occurs sporadically, with no detail as to the set of events leading to it, and Goethe only fleetingly describes it in prose. It is also sprinkled with irony, as the narrator points out that its deadly seriousness is diluted through the sealing of romantic relationships, such as between the Court Counsellor (*Hofrat*) and Luise. This is not the only amusing juxtaposition of private and political concerns. The whole idea of forming an assembly stems from a conversation around a tea table, and, when it comes to fruition, Luise worries only that it

might shatter her domestic bliss (pp. 184-85). The most comical aspect of the *Nationalversammlung* is that there is nothing national about it: it is a glorified parish council.

The parochial nature of *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral* contribute to making the main characters, and their attempted revolutions, look absurd. In *Herrmann und Dorothea*, however, we learn that Dorothea's first fiancé was fatally attracted by the original attempt to realise *liberté, égalité, fraternité.*

As he relates the story of Dorothea's first fiancé, the Judge in *Herrmann und Dorothea* refers to the ideas of freedom and equality which inspired many other contemporaries to support the Revolution as enthusing and praiseworthy ('Klio', 20). As the Judge comes across as one of the most temperate and philosophical characters of the poem, his remark suggests that the principles for which the fiancé rushed to Paris were understandable and noble. It must be asked how far the Judge's assessment is presented by Goethe as defensible, as well as what the fiancé understood by the promise of 'freedom' and 'equality' which caught his imagination.

Dorothea's first fiancé is not unique as a German heading to France to realise his Revolutionary dream, and to see it end in disappointment and personal harm. Certain critics argue that he represents the humanistic and cosmopolitan ideals of the early Revolution, and cannot be associated with its bloodier, authoritarian, and nationalistic phase. Charlton Payne describes the fiancé's main character trait as a revolutionary battling arbitrary rule on behalf of the humanistic principles of the Revolution.[61] Peter Morgan argues that the fiancé typifies the German intellectuals who had 'no conception of the everyday reality of the Revolution', and that he finds the difference between the ideal of revolutionary enlightenment and its

[61] Charlton Payne, 'Epic World Citizenship in Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*', *Goethe Yearbook*, 16 (2009), 11-28 (p. 21).

political enactment 'problematic and contradictory'.[62] Morgan concludes that the fiancé is not a Revolutionary enthusiast ('Schwärmer'), but an idealist who supports the Revolution on the basis of a 'radical democratic enlightenment'.[63] There is much consensus that the fiancé's legacy is crucial to Herrmann's character development, with some arguing that it transforms the provincial and politically apathetic town-dweller into an engaged citizen of the world.

It has also been debated whether the fiancé is based on a historical figure, and, if so, whom. The two most likely candidates are Adam Lux and Georg Forster. Both were ardent Revolutionaries who played an active political role by travelling as part of a three-man delegation to Paris to demand the annexation of Mainz by the French Republic. Their admiration of the Revolution waned, to differing extents, after the atrocities of 1793. Adam Lux was sent to the guillotine for praising Charlotte Corday's assassination of the radical Jacobin pamphleteer and propagandist, Jean Paul Marat, and attacking the Jacobins for their annihilation of the Gironde. Forster joined the Jacobin Club in Mainz, and publicly supported the Revolution until his death. Considering whom the fiancé may represent helps to analyse to what extent he holds authentic Revolutionary principles.

Recent scholarship has been divided over the fiancé's identity. Thomas P. Saine contends that Adam Lux is more likely to have inspired his portrayal.[64] Gustav Seibt also suggests this comparison, and does not even consider Forster.[65] Peter Morgan takes a more ambivalent position: although conceding that the fiancé is most probably an amalgam of Forster, Lux, and other German Jacobins known to Goethe, Morgan contends that the fiancé has more in common with Forster's experiences and attitude towards the Revolution.[66] Saine

[62] Morgan, *Critical Idyll*, pp. 112-14.
[63] *Ibid*., p. 133.
[64] Thomas P. Saine, 'Charlotte Corday, Adam Lux, and *Hermann und Dorothea*', *Exile and Enlightenment: Studies in German and Comparative Literature in Honor of Guy Stern*, ed. Uwe Faulhaber and others (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 87-96 (pp. 91-2.)
[65] Seibt, *Art von Wut*, pp. 142-45.
[66] Morgan, *Critical Idyll*, pp. 122-35.

argues that Dorothea's description of her first fiancé's terrible end, which links his death with his imprisonment (like Lux), 'convincingly' excludes the possibility of Forster (Forster was never in danger of being jailed, and died of illness in bed in January 1794).[67] Seibt mentions that Lux's death shook the German public, and that this sentimental spirit is encapsulated in Dorothea's report of her first fiancé's words: 'Heilig sei dir der Tag; doch schätze das Leben nicht höher […]' ('Urania', 288).[68] Morgan, however, argues that the different circumstances surrounding the fiancé's death and Forster's does not rule out the latter, and points to a letter showing that Goethe contemplated Forster's execution: 'So hat der arme Forster denn doch auch seine Irrthümer mit dem Leben büßen müssen! wenn er schon einem gewaltsamen Tode entging!'[69]

Asking whether the fiancé resembles Forster or Lux helps to locate him ideologically, and raises the question whether he could be seen more as a Girondin or Jacobin. Adam Lux's defence of Corday, and excoriation of the Jacobins for their purge of the Girondins from the National Convention in 1793, put him firmly in the former camp. His attraction to Corday, and his defence of her assassination of Marat, associated him with a more moderate form of the Revolution, as reflected by the ideals of 1789-91. Fearing that Paris was monopolising and subverting the direction of the Revolution, the Girondins saw the decentralising force of federalism as a more effective means of delivering freedom and democracy. Although republicans, they opposed the execution of the King. The Jacobins held that it was essential that the axis of the Revolution remain in the capital, and reversed the liberalisation of the French economy with centrally planned grain prices and protectionist measures. Whereas the Girondins wanted to realise liberty and equality through democratic legitimacy and party politics, the Jacobins argued that a single, authoritarian voice was needed to realise their

[67] Saine, 'Corday, Lux', p. 93.
[68] Seibt, *Art von Wut*, p. 145.
[69] Goethe to Sömmerring, 17.2.1794, *Werke*, vol. 30 (1991), p. 714.

purest form. This led the Committee of Public Safety to declare that Terror was the order of the day. Despite lamenting the carnage unleashed by the Terror and the Revolutionary wars, Georg Forster remained a Jacobin apologist until his death, and subscribed to Robespierre's argument that the violence of the Revolution was a necessary phase for the triumph of liberty and equality, and the emergence of an improved humanity.[70]

Morgan is right to argue that Goethe's depiction of the fiancé derived from a combination of Germans who were inspired by the Revolution. The work clearly and repeatedly refers to the Revolution, and contains vivid clues as to its geographical and chronological setting. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that Goethe intended to portray the fiancé as a completely autonomous character, and more probable that he wanted to use the young man's fate as a generic criticism of the initial lure of the Revolution, as described by the Judge ('Klio', 20). The superficial similarities with Lux, as well as the content of the political message, means that Lux would have had a greater influence on Goethe's portrayal of Dorothea's former lover.

Regardless of whether the fiancé had more Girondin or Jacobin sympathies, he would have headed to Paris in the 'pre-1792' belief that the Revolutionaries' conception of liberty, equality, and fraternity was able to withstand dissent and that they should not use violence against their opponents. This does not mean that Goethe subscribed to the fiancé's view of the Revolution before 1792. In comparison to subsequent events, and the situation in the Rhineland in 1796, however, he would have seen the fiancé as embodying a more palatable form of it.

[70] Georg Forster to Therese Forster and Ludwig Ferdinand Huber, 28.12.1793 (Paris), *Georg Forsters Werke Sämtliche Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe*, ed. Gerhard Steiner and others, 18 vols (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1958-2003), vol. 18 (1989), p. 498.

A point of comparison between the fiancé's and Herrmann's relationship to Revolutionary principles is their sense of identity. The National Convention declared war on the European monarchies in 1792 in order to realise the 'universal' values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Judge relates how all peoples sought inspiration from Paris as the global capital of freedom in the early days of the Revolution: 'Damals hoffte jeder sich selbst zu leben; es schien sich/ Aufzulösen das Band, das viele Länder umstrickte,/ Das der Müßiggang und der Eigennutz in der Hand hielt' ('Klio', 11-3). The Revolutionary army invaded the Rhineland with the maxim 'war on castles, peace for cottages' ('guerre aux châteaux, paix aux chaumières'). However, many Germans came to see the French forces less as liberating cosmopolitans and more as national oppressors. Schama casts doubt on the 'enlightened' pretext for the Revolutionary war, and regards it more as the expression of France's need to reassert her dominance following humiliating military defeats in the Seven Years' War and the fiscal crisis which emerged from it: it was nationalism clothed as universalism.[71]

Whereas the fiancé is often perceived as the embodiment of the cosmopolitan phase of the Revolution, Herrmann is frequently depicted as a defensive nationalist. Morgan argues that Herrmann represents an 'unenlightened nationalism', as he acts as the spokesman for an armed and aggressive future Germany, and remains a 'provincial and inexperienced youth', untouched by the first fiancé's idealism.[72] However, Saine credits the cosmopolitan memory of the first fiancé with transforming Herrmann from a provincial German into a citizen of the world ('Weltbürger'), which resists the purely national interpretation of Herrmann at the end of the poem.[73] Payne situates Herrmann somewhere in between these two interpretations. Herrmann's closing speech presents him as neither as a militant nationalist nor a rootless

[71] Schama, *Citizens*, p. 643.
[72] Morgan, *Critical Idyll*, p. 133 and p. 120.
[73] Saine, 'Corday, Lux', p. 94.

citizen of the world, but as an individual 'marked by the fissures within the political ideology of his time'.[74]

Herrmann is determined to defend his homeland, but to label him a nationalist is, by modern standards at least, simplistic. The English Dictionary defines a nationalist as either someone with a belief in the superiority of his country or a supporter of national independence.[75] George Orwell also associated the nationalist's cause with the desire to gain 'more power and more prestige' for the nation (or any other source of allegiance) 'in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality'.[76] None of these apply to Herrmann. His reference to 'the German' ('dem Deutschen') implies a sense of belonging which exceeds his immediate environment, and distinguishes his 'nation' from the French. However, he supports a defensive and 'conservative' war, not (as Morgan argues) an aggressive and ideological one to assert a sense of national superiority. Herrmann only wants to use violence if provoked ('Und drohen diesmal die Feinde/ Oder künftig, so rüste mich selbst und reiche die Waffen'), and to protect his town and domestic peace ('Urania', 313-14). He subtly associates himself with a concept of German-ness not out of inherently strong intellectual or emotional attachment —he previously admits to his mother that he has no desire to live and die for his fatherland ('Euterpe', 137-39) — but in response to the practical effects of the French Revolution on his native soil: Herrmann's patriotism is, to quote Orwell, 'of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally'.[77]

Saine is not entirely wrong in saying that Herrmann adopts aspects of enlightened cosmopolitanism, but his contention that he undergoes a transformation is exaggerated. What

[74] Payne, 'World Citizenship', 22.
[75] *Collins*.
[76] George Orwell, 'Notes on Nationalism' (15 May 1945), *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison, 20 vols (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986-98), vol. 17: *I Belong to the Left 1945* (1998), pp. 141-57 (p. 142).
[77] *Ibid*.

Herrmann wants to defend may sound parochial: 'Die für Gott und Gesetz, für Eltern, Weiber, und Kinder/ Stritten' ('Urania', 309-10). However, these could also be interpreted as universal concerns. Gerhard Kluge admits that Hermann may give the impression that he has a politically conservative, or even reactionary, view of life and society, pointing to his emphasis on resilience and longevity, and his resolve to defend the status quo against the French forces ('Urania', 312-14). However, Kluge also mentions that Herrmann chooses 'abstract and general' words in his vision for the future, which include references to God, law, and power, and interprets this as Goethe's effort to evade political and partisan affirmations.[78] Kluge notes a sense of community ('Gemeinschaft') in Herrmann's final hope for general peace.[79]

But which community does this refer to? Herrmann advocates neither provincialism nor the continuation of the *ancien régime,* but does not fully reject them either. The name 'Herrmann' evokes the Germanic chieftain, Arminius (who many nationalists claimed equated to 'Hermann'), who led a coalition of Germanic tribes to victory against three Roman legions in the Battle of Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD. Exposure to the effects of the Revolution makes the fictional Herrmann more patriotic, as he also wants to resist an invading force in his homeland. His final remarks are not an outright rebuttal of the first fiancé's principles per se, but a suggestion as to how they may be better fulfilled: through non-violence, order, and evolution rather than revolution. Herrmann's hope for peace is a universal plea, but he realises that the German example could be a stepping stone for it. He inadvertently suggests a way for his country to improve the world.

[78] Gerhard Kluge, '„Hermann und Dorothea'': Die Revolution und Hermanns Schlußrede – zwei „schmerzliche Zeichen?'', *Goethe Jahrbuch,* 109 (1992), 61-8 (p. 65).
[79] *Ibid*., 66.

Payne is right to argue that Herrmann is neither a complete provincial nor a complete cosmopolitan, but is wrong to say that he sets out an 'ideology' in his closing speech. It is more an instinctive reaction to a specific problem. Herrmann does not deal in abstractions, but in the actual, thus providing an antidote to the Revolutionaries who are led astray by nebulous principles.

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Breme's and Schnaps' efforts to bring the Revolution to Germany are portrayed as absurd, and the fiancé's fate shows the danger and hopelessness of such an attempt. The texts do not simply imply, however, that the implementation of Revolutionary principles is impracticable; they also present those principles as inherently bad. Any regime which condemns the noble intentions of the fiancé to death, presumably via the guillotine, cannot represent a sound or laudable philosophy. Does the 'Revolutionary' characters' adoption of such principles, or (as is more likely in the fiancé's case) their failure to appreciate their nebulous and pernicious content, suggest that people of their social rank are not fit for political participation?

Bürgerlich Politicians

In his *Reflections* Edmund Burke wrote the following of people who performed menial occupations: 'Such descriptions of men ought not to suffer oppression from the state; but the state suffers oppression if such as they, either individually or collectively, are permitted to rule'.[80] Although he claimed there should be 'no qualification for government, but talent and wisdom', he added: 'Woe to that country too, that passing into the opposite extreme of things, considers a low education, a mean contracted view of things, a sordid mercenary occupation,

[80] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 138.

as a preferable title to command'.[81] Breme and Schnaps ply modest trades, as do other characters in the texts. The occupation of the first fiancé in *Herrmann* is unknown, but it is known that he is not a noble. To what extent do the works suggest that society would suffer if 'such as they' were to have political influence?

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Peter Demetz underlines Goethe's view of politics as a profession ('Metier') as evidence that he did not support modern democratic principles. Goethe could never see beyond the divide of subjects and state power, and failed to see that the nurturing of democracy demanded that even the likes of Breme be given a fair chance to develop from a subject to a citizen of the state ('Staatsbürger').[82] Breme is presented as an unattractive figure, largely because he wishes to exceed his natural limitations ('Begrenzung').[83] This is exemplified by the barber's comparison of his trade to political leadership: 'wer [..] den spröden Bart zahm zu machen versteht […] das ist kein gemeiner Mensch, sondern er muß alle Eigenschaften besitzen, die einem Minister alle Ehre machen' (p. 193). According to Demetz, then, Goethe's basic message was that if the likes of Breme were to stick to what they know, the polity would be the better for it.

The intervention of certain *Bürger* in political affairs is portrayed negatively. The Judge deals heavy-handedly with the capture of Schnaps, and it takes the Nobleman to give a more measured assessment of the situation and recommendation for Schnaps' punishment. The Judge presumes that Märten's family have been hiding Schnaps out of sympathy for Jacobinism, and accuses them of plotting to hang him (the Judge) from a liberty tree (p. 143). When the Nobleman arrives, he appears a more competent judge than the Judge himself. He

[81] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[82] Demetz, *Goethes ,,Die Aufgeregten''*, pp. 34-5.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

establishes a proper enquiry by calmly posing a series of factual questions ('Diese Sachen?', 'Wo ist er?', 'Wie kam er in's Haus?'), and logically concludes that the trio are not guilty (pp. 145-46). The call for Schnaps to be put on a rack so that he will expose other conspirators epitomises the Judge's hysteria, for judicial torture had been abolished in Prussia in 1740 and was gradually outlawed in other German states. By contrast, on discovering that Schnaps just stole his uniform from the corpse of a French general, and that they consequently have nothing to fear from this imposter, the Nobleman demands a low-key response in the interest of local order and harmony (p. 148). Although the (*bürgerlich*) Judge and the Nobleman have the same attitude towards Revolutionary sympathisers in Germany, they are not equally qualified to address the problem. Were the likes of the Judge to deal with Revolutionary traitors, it seems, injustice and chaos would ensue. People like the calm and methodical Nobleman are better suited to tackle this (political, as well as legal) issue.

Die Aufgeregten and *Der Bürgergeneral* present a spectrum of *Bürger*. There are farmers and artisans, like Märten, who are not naturally rebellious, and would do better to concentrate on their day jobs, but are corrupted by more pompous and subversive figures. Such figures include Breme and Schnaps, who would also do better to concentrate on their day jobs, but consider themselves political experts despite not having any experience in the field. Then there are the better educated *Bürger*, who may have been close to a centre of political power, but feel anger and frustration towards it. The Magister of *Die Aufgeregten* epitomises this group. These three categories of *Bürger* have a distinct relationship towards revolutionary politics.

There are suggestions that the uneducated *Bürger* should not only be excluded from politics, but not even be aware of it. Demetz notes that Breme (as well as the more erudite Magister and priest) is affected by the newspaper frenzy ('Zeitungsfieber') which had gripped

the German *Bürgertum* by 1790.[84] An increase in literacy meant that, between 1780 and 1790, the number of periodicals in Germany rose to 114, which led to an unprecedented level of general political discussion, debate, and reading.[85] Breme and Märten avidly read the newspaper, but do not seem to benefit from it emotionally or intellectually. Märten frets over the newspaper reports on the Revolution (p. 115), and Breme's perusal of the papers and journals lead him to argue with the Magister over their content (p. 157). In the hands of *Bürger*, we are encouraged to view any contact with written documents with suspicion. It is not that Breme and Märten are ill informed of *what* is happening by reading the newspaper, but do not understand *why* it is happening. They know more about the events of the Revolution than many of the less engaged burghers, but it is possible that they are only partially informed. They can absorb information, but lack the discerning mind to question it.

The plays also feature *Bürger* who do stick to parochial concerns, and meet with aristocratic approval. In her first utterance, Luise says: 'Was die französische Revolution Gutes oder Böses stiftet, kann ich nicht beurteilen; so viel weiß ich, daß sie mir diesen Winter einige Paar Strümpfe mehr einbringt' (p. 155). Luise's remark may typify Burke's reference to those with a 'mean contracted view of things'. However, it also implies a degree of humility, admitting that she is aware of her own ignorance, and limiting herself to a purely factual, 'tangible' assessment of it. In *Der Bürgergeneral* Röse and Görge lament their father's fretting over the Revolution, and respond to his inability to grasp how the French nation is going to pay off its debts by ensuring that they do not accrue any themselves (p. 115). For this, the Nobleman describes Röse and Görge as wise young people (pp. 115-16), and later advises them to concentrate on sowing crops and producing a good harvest (p. 148). In *Die Aufgeregeten,* Luise's criticism of Breme as the embodiment of the recent tendency

[84] *Ibid*., p. 23.
[85] *Ibid*., pp. 22-3.

for everybody to think that they have a right to meddle in global affairs receives praise from the Countess, who also admires Luise's domesticated nature (p. 179). It may be assumed, then, that the likes of Luise, Röse, and Görge represent a healthy antidote to self-described political experts such as Breme and Schnaps. They appear wiser and more responsible *Bürger*, as they are intelligent enough to realise their ignorance.

The more educated *Bürger* may be better informed than the likes of Luise and Görge, but are no wiser (and are arguably less so). *Die Aufgeregten* suggests that the Magister poses a greater threat to the aristocracy than Breme, and that he would be a much more brutal Revolutionary. The rebels' discussion of their plans to seize the castle expose the depth of the Magister's antipathy. Not only does he accuse the nobility of treating their fellow human beings like cattle, he warns that this arrogant race ('übermütige Geschlecht') will not escape punishment for their misdeeds. Claiming that the signing of an oath will just add to the aristocracy's deluded sense of their own grandeur, he tells the rebels to surround the Countess, and force her to swear an oath on her son's life. Not content merely to have a grievance redressed, the Magister wants to emphasise his contempt for the noblewoman through physical intimidation: he wants to impinge on her space, and make her feel vulnerable through the numerical superiority of her subjects (p. 191). The Magister fits into what Burke called 'Men of Letters': a group of scholars, philosophers, clergymen — and former employees of aristocrats — who 'rendered hateful, by every exaggeration, the faults of courts, of nobility, and of priesthood.'[86] His grievance over his dismissal, allied to his intellectual credentials, indicate that he (unlike Breme) would not just want to use the revolt to restore the villagers' traditional rights, but as a catalyst for further weakening, humiliating, and eventually eradicating, the nobility.

[86] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 214.

The Magister's avowed commitment to humanity and freedom also seems more theoretical than actual, as he excuses misdeeds (presumably including violence) in the name of a greater cause. He tells the Countess: 'Wer aus großen Absichten fehl greift handelt immer lobenswürdiger als wer dasjenige tut was nur kleinen Absichten gemäß ist' (p. 178). Such an argument was used to defend the Reign of Terror. Robespierre declared that the creation of a virtuous and democratic society necessitated the elimination of suspected counter-Revolutionaries: 'Il faut étouffer les ennemis intérieurs et extérieurs de la République, ou périr avec elle […]'.[87] For Robespierre, the cause of humanity justified the killing of human beings. By asking what the peasants, who have been treated like slaves, have to do with freedom, the Magister creates a similar distinction between his immediate fellow men and the abstract vision of mankind (p. 190). The same might be said of the Magister as Burke said of Rousseau: he is a 'lover of his kind, but a hater of his kindred'.[88] He exemplifies how certain educated *Bürger* will use their knowledge to malevolent ends, and indicates that they are the most dangerous potential revolutionaries.

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Although *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral* allude to the prospect of *Bürger* in political power, the *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* and *Herrmann und Dorothea* show it as a vivid reality, via the effects of the French Revolutionary army's invasion of the Rhineland. The Revolutionary wars were driven not by a monarch, but by a nation of allegedly equal *citoyens* — *Bürger* — to empower previously 'oppressed' subjects. However, the French occupation of the Rhineland proved as brutal as any territorial or dynastic war waged under the royal banner. To assert their dominance, and sustain themselves when

[87] Robespierre, *Morale Politique*, p. 221.
[88] Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 8 (1989), pp. 294-335 (p. 315).

supplies ran short, the French soldiers pillaged and plundered the local inhabitants. They also administered harsh punishments on those who refused to comply with the new regime. When the Allied armies expelled the French forces, a temporary state of lawlessness led certain *Bürger* to exact retribution on others who had colluded with the occupation. The desperate state of destruction and shortage of food and clothes also caused the inhabitants to fight over material and perishable supplies. The Revolutionaries' attempt to liberate fellow 'citizens' turned into hostile occupation of them, and led German *Bürger* to attack one another.[89]

The Privy Councillor's fear in the *Unterhaltungen* that the new regime will prove no better than the *ancien régime* resonates with Burke's fear of the politically inexperienced in government. How far do the *Unterhaltungen* and *Herrmann und Dorothea* reflect Blanning's depressing depiction of the French attempt to extend the Revolution to Germany, and what does this say about the role of *Bürger* in politics: do the Revolutionary wars allow pernicious people like the Magister to come to the fore?

Herrmann and the Judge describe the destruction, brutality, and confusion brought by the Revolutionary war. Herrmann calls the war an all-corrupting ('allverderblich') twist of fortune which is destroying the whole world, banishing princes and kings, and spreading poverty and misery ('Polyhymnia', 96-9). The Judge reflects on how the early optimism in the Rhineland caused by the humanly, materially, and economically draining Revolutionary war soon turned into disillusionment, and how a corrupt race of men ('ein verderbtes Geschlecht') began to violate those they were meant to free ('Klio', 41-4). After describing the vengeful reaction of the inhabitants after the dismissal of the French (a clear reference to the siege of Mainz), the Judge says that he hopes never again to see people fall into such

[89] A substantial account of the brutality of the French armies in the Rhineland features in the chapter 'Military Exploitation' in Blanning, *Revolution in Germany*, pp. 83-134.

despicable folly (‘Klio’, 76-7). In this context, the Privy Councillor’s misgivings about the popularisation of government seem justified.

The war also reduces its victims to a state of near anarchy: the implementation of the ‘enlightened’ principles from France proves politically and socially regressive. This is most apparent in the Germans’ reaction to the French departure. Instead of encouraging a return to decency, the Judge claims that it provoked widespread anger and an urge for revenge on those who had colluded with the Revolutionary regime (‘Klio’, 66-7). The Judge emphasises the descent into lawlessness in the vacuum of clear authority, and a people’s return to an almost bestial condition. As well as stating that an angry animal is a preferable sight to an uncontrolled populace, he adds that the removal of all restraints gives rise to the worst of human nature (‘Alles Böse’: ‘Klio’, 77-80). Gustav Seibt focuses on the concept of fury as a driving force of the Revolutionary war, and as a reason for Goethe’s opposition to the French Revolution. Seibt refers to the previous quotation by the Judge, and argues that Goethe saw this popular war (‘Volkskrieg’) as unleashed by the tender rage (‘zarter Wut’) of an oversensitive feeling for justice which overrode any notion of order.[90] These examples suggest that subjects need the discipline of authority more than they may think, and that attempting to realise equality is not liberating, but socially and morally degrading.

The effects of political and social upheaval are also apparent among the émigrés. Their plight creates not only incivility but also short-termism and selfishness. Dorothea has to fetch drinking water from a local spring, as the refugees have ruined the water in the village by letting their horses and oxen wade through it, and using it to wash their clothes. She describes how this epitomises their inconsiderate behaviour: ‘Denn ein jeglicher denkt nur, sich selbst und das nächste Bedürfnis/ Schnell zu befriedigen und rasch, und nicht des

[90] Seibt, *Art von Wut*, p. 150.

Folgenden denkt er' ('Erato', 35-6). The Baroness of the *Unterhaltungen* despairs at the émigrés' inability to get along even in their common plight (pp. 1005-06), and remarks on how civil relations ('die bürgerliche Verfassung') are tested in traumatic times. Such times distinguish those who can cope and those who crack under the strain. She also mentions that some refugees expect servants even when reduced to beggary, and hope to find their deserted homes in the same condition on their return (p. 998-99): extraordinary circumstances make some émigrés prone to self-delusion.

The émigrés' incivility exemplifies how the Revolutionary war disrupts private lives. Herrmann links the effects of a political event to his intimate affairs, as he says that a globally destructive conflict has also driven his 'poor' prospective bride out of her home ('Polyhymnia', 96-8). He hopes that he can find Dorothea among the many refugees, and asks: 'Sollte nicht auch ein Glück aus diesem Unglück hervorgehn' ('Polyhymnia', 100-05). Herrmann seeks personal consolation from a political and social disaster, as he hopes that marriage will give him some stability in the chaos of the Revolution. The Revolution also intrudes into the conversation of the émigrés in the *Unterhaltungen*. After the departure of the Privy Councillor and his wife, the Baroness asks the group to refrain from voicing contentious opinions, not for the sake of virtue, but for that of common courtesy (p. 1008). With this request, she rejects the language of the Revolution ('Tugend'), and uses that of the old 'courtly' order ('Höflichkeit'). This implies that political innovation is threatening the traditional values which have provided the thread of the social fabric for centuries. It is ironic that a war designed to help *Bürger* deprives them of intimate relationships. In terms of the private sphere, at least, a war waged mainly by *citoyens* for other *Bürger* does not seem liberating, but invasive.

A more peaceful way of enacting Revolutionary principles may be found in the *Bürgertum*. Although the fiancé directly experienced the Revolution, certain scholars have

argued that Herrmann and Dorothea represent a more authentic version of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The first fiancé's idealism affects them both. Kluge argues that, by keeping his engagement ring, Dorothea shows an essential enthusiasm for the original ideas of the Revolution, and aligns herself with the spirit in which the first fiancé lived and acted.[91] Like the fiancé, Dorothea does not shirk danger or misery, and is open to novelty and uncertainty. This is epitomised by her protection of some young girls against rape by a group of French marauderers. The Judge describes how she seized the leader's sword and killed him with it, wounded four others, and, once they had fled, guarded the house until help arrived ('Klio', 104-18). By helping the émigrés, Hermann shows a gesture of fraternity, which Kluge argues has a philosophical underpinning, as he points to Hermann's remark: 'Daß sie fühlen die Not, die dem armen Bruder bevorsteht' ('Terpsichore', 45). That Hermann is prepared to share his possessions with the needy not only indicates a sense of fraternity, but demonstrates a sense of equality, too. It distinguishes him from his fellow *Bürger*, including his father, who laments the loss of the Indian dressing gown donated to the émigrés, and the apothecary, who signals a desire to be free from worldly cares: '[…] der einzelne Mann entfliehet am leichtsten' ('Terpsichore', 96). By resisting his father's advice to marry one of the affluent factory owner's daughters in favour of Dorothea, Herrmann shows a streak of independence and rejection of social barriers that represents an urge for freedom.

However, although Revolutionary *terms* may be ascribed to Herrmann, their *content* is not necessarily the same. Hermann demonstrates a more practical form of the main precepts of the Revolution, whereas the fiancé seems to perceive them in a politically abstract sense. Once these ideals are reduced to a provincial level and given a concrete form, they achieve one of the professed aims of the Revolution: helping humanity.

[91] Kluge, 'Hermanns Schlußrede', 63.

It is unlikely, though, that Herrmann sees his actions and thoughts in terms of a set of principles. He is not sufficiently educated or conversant with international affairs to form a rationale to his deeds, nor to associate them with a social and political movement. His fleeting reference to the broader impact of the Revolutionary war ('Polyhymnia', 96-9) shows some knowledge of its practical consequences, but does not reveal a conceptual understanding of the causes behind it. Herrmann's benevolent and self-assertive acts and words, like his response to the threat of French invasion, seem to be instinctive. Just as Egmont and Götz administer justice without a fixed code, Herrmann practises Revolutionary principles without knowledge of the French constitution.

There are also more responsible *Bürger* in *Herrmann* and the *Unterhaltungen*. Boyle notes that, as the plight of the émigrés draws Herrmann into the Revolutionary war, he encounters figures who alert him to the forces which threaten to shatter his *bürgerlich* idyll. These include the Judge and the Priest, as well as the legacy of the fiancé. Boyle describes them as the 'voices of officialdom and the intelligentsia'. The Judge's assessment of the Revolution, and his intervention to restore calm and order, present him as better qualified to handle major decisions than other *Bürger*. He echoes some of the fraternal principles of the Revolution by asking the fighting men whether their recent suffering has not taught them to stop arguing with their 'brother', and that times of hardship call for mutual understanding, toleration, and support ('Polyhymnia', 201-04). The Priest is an 'emissary from a different world', with a strong philosophical and intellectual background, and is politically and morally idealistic.[92] Like the Magister of *Die Aufgeregten*, the Priest is a scholar, but does not turn against the traditional order. His advice to Herrmann that men should always strive for better, but should not go too far, suggests how the Revolution went awry ('Polyhymnia', 6-9). This analogy is strengthened when the Priest mentions the lure of novelty (a point on which the

[92] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, p. 524.

clergyman in the *Unterhaltungen* elaborates: pp. 1012-13) and his reminder of the value of conserving what one already has: 'Gab die Natur uns auch die Lust zu verharren im Alten/ Und sich dessen freun, was jeder lange gewohnt ist' ('Polyhymnia', 10-1). The Priest argues that desire for improvement must be tempered with caution and consolidation: it is a warning against excessive ambition. This may apply to Herrmann on a personal level, but is also relevant to any polity which may be tempted to imitate the French 'Nation'. The Priest and the Judge would be more credible political participants. They show much education, perspective, wisdom, and a grasp of human nature and current affairs. They would probably be able to act as representatives for the likes of Herrmann, Dorothea, the townspeople, and the émigrés.

The portrayal of the Revolutionary war may seem a damning verdict on *bürgerlich* participation in politics, but its many consequences are not uniquely those of a conflict waged by *citoyens*. Destruction, carnage, and the separation of families and friends also characterised most conflicts under the old regime. However, the Revolutionary wars of 1792 and 1796, with their attempt to spread universal values, had even greater ambitions and further reaching consequences than most dynastic or territorial campaigns. The *levée en masse* of 1792, which introduced conscription to the Revolutionary army, gave 'La Nation' unprecedented military force, and thereby increased its destructive potential. *Herrmann* and the *Unterhaltungen* indicate that the absence of aristocratic or monarchical influence creates a no more humane and 'enlightened' war than those of the *ancien régime*, but proves more brutal still. The war does not appear to unite the German *Bürgertum*, but causes it to fragment and harm its own members. The occupation, and the retribution of Revolutionary sympathisers which follows, features the very arbitrary rule which the war is meant to oppose. The gap between the Revolutionary principles of fraternity and equality and the reality of war is evident in the occupiers' harsh treatment of the Germans, and the dominance

they try to establish over them. It is a much larger and more violent extension of the hierarchical relationships between Schnaps and Märten, and Breme and his fellow villagers.

The Judge in *Herrmann* casts doubt on the notion of personal autonomy, which the Revolution initially promised ('Klio', 24-5), with his experiences of the war: 'Sprech' er doch nie von Freiheit, als könn' er sich selber regieren!' ('Klio', 78). The Judge implies that a movement which aims to enable *Bürger* to govern a polity cannot work if they are unable to govern themselves. His remark may vindicate Alba's theory in *Egmont* that subjects cannot be trusted with self-rule, as they will use it to harm others, and that they need, therefore, a firm hand to hem them in ('sie einzuengen': p. 525). The similarity between Alba and the Judge is surprising given that the former is a brutal sixteenth-century aristocratic courtier, and the latter a benevolent eighteenth-century *Bürger*, but their views do correspond.

The vengeful and violent response of the German inhabitants and the émigrés in the aftermath of the French withdrawal also seems to reflect Vansen's and Metzler's drastic proposals for countering the oppression and injustices of the Spanish occupation and the territorial princes. Vansen and Metzer belong to a similarly 'corrupt race' of people ('verderbtes Geschlecht') whom the Judge blames for perverting the superficially noble aims of the Revolution. Such people constitute the biggest threat to *bürgerlich* rule: it is, perhaps, necessary to separate them from better educated and more temperate *Bürger*.

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The 'verderbtes Geschlecht' is not a reference to all those outside the traditional ruling elite, but to a subset of them — and to other social ranks. Scoundrels and hotheads may exist in the aristocracy and monarchy, too, but they cannot wreak as much damage as those from the numerically superior *Bürgertum* (or peasantry). The latter are particularly dangerous in time of war. Instead of administering justice, they seek to create anarchy for their own material

gain. *Bürger* are not necessarily incapable of moderate self-rule, provided that a strong source of authority prevents it running to excess. When 'corrupt' *Bürger* assume power, though, they have no interest in upholding that authority, and create conditions so deplorable that they reduce the populace to barbarity.

Such reflections may support the view that Goethe's attitude towards popular participation in government was rooted more in a suspicion of its most active supporters rather than of the concept itself. However, this creates a false distinction, as a system which gives decent and/or educated people the same political influence as malevolent and/or uneducated people must be inherently flawed. Would sensible *Bürger*, therefore, do better to let sensible aristocrats govern and initiate reform?

Noble Alternatives

The conversation between the Countess and the Court Counsellor (*Hofrat*) in the third act of *Die Aufgeregten* is often interpreted as Goethe's preferred response to one of the main questions raised by the Revolution: how to attend to the failings of the *ancien régime* without overturning the social order. The Countess acknowledges the suffering of many of her subjects, and promises not to tolerate any further injustices or deluded grandeur. Such is her determination to do this, she does not care if people wrongly brand her a democrat: '[…] wenn ich auch unter dem verhaßten Namen einer Demokratin verschrieen werden sollte' (p. 183). In the Countess, the Court Counsellor sees someone with a grasp of the major events of the age, and to whom any right-minded citizen of the state ('Staatsbürger') should listen. So convinced is he of this, he is prepared to be branded an aristocrat: 'Das will ich sagen […] und wenn man mir auch den verhaßten Namen eines Aristokraten zueignete' (p. 184). The terms 'Aristokrat' and 'Demokrat' were both mainly used pejoratively during the Revolution.

An ‘Aristokrat’ (or *aristocrat*) denoted not only — or necessarily — a noble, but also a defender of the *ancien regime*.[93] A ‘Demokrat’ was seen as subversive, and most members of the political elite refrained from it. The Countess argues that vice is an inherent part of human nature. By juxtaposing the terms ‘Aristokrat’ and ‘Demokrat’, the exchange signals a commitment to preventing excessive vice in the *Adel* and the *Bürgertum*. The tension between the two *Stände* at their worst should cause them to restrain and regulate each other, and themselves.

The Countess and Court Counsellor are critical of their own social rank, but are not blinkered: they recognise the importance of other *Stände*. The aristocrat shows this by resolving to stamp out injustices and to address her subjects’ grievances. The burgher professes his veneration of the social elite: ‘[…] weil ich ein Bürger bin der es zu bleiben denkt, der das große Gewicht des höheren Standes im Staate anerkennt und schätzt’. The Counsellor condemns those spiteful and narrow-minded *Bürger*, who bemoan any semblance of grandeur, and fail to see their own vanity and hypocrisy in deriding it (p. 184). Unlike Schnaps, the Counsellor does not advocate ingratitude towards the nobility. Whilst accepting the Countess’ misgivings about the aristocracy, he argues that this should be tempered with recognition of its benefits.

The scene calls neither for a continuation of the status quo in the relationship between the aristocracy and its subjects, nor for the usurpation of the former by the latter. It is a constructive and moderate exchange, which aims to avoid the twin evils of aristocratic arrogance and *bürgerlich* rancour. More broadly, the conversation seeks a compromise between despotism and democracy. The Countess implies that the nobility should be attentive to the condition and mood of those it governs, and refrain from arbitrary power, and the

[93] Schama, *Citizens*, p. 493.

Counsellor implies that the governed should not be insolent in their demands of the powerful. In rejecting injustice, and listening to the populace, aristocrats should rule in the interest of the majority. In seeking to understand and respond to political affairs, the majority should respect the education and wisdom of aristocrats.

Goethe later emphasised the importance of the Countess as an expression of his political philosophy: 'Als Repräsentanten des Adels hatte ich die Gräfin hingestellt und mit den Worten, die ich ihr in den Mund gelegt, ausgesprochen, wie der Adel eigentlich denken soll'.[94] Under her leadership, it certainly seems unlikely that there will be any cause for a local imitation of the Revolution. Dieter Borchmeyer notes that she resembles Lothario as an enlightened and reforming aristocrat.[95] She is compassionate and proactive, wishes to ensure that her subjects receive fair treatment, and shuns self-aggrandisement through burdensome taxation. Through benevolent reforms, she seeks to forestall revolt. If this scene is meant to present Goethe's views on the appropriate response to the Revolution, the main message is that the avoidance of small-mindedness in each rank of the social hierarchy is crucial for improving a regime while maintaining political stability.

The Nobleman of *Der Bürgergeneral* strikes a similarly reconciliatory tone. In the final scene, he warns: 'Unzeitige Gebote, unzeitige Strafen bringen erst das Übel hervor'. This is in direct reference to the fate of Schnaps, but it has a wider social implication, too. Had the Revolutionaries not preceded so drastically with forming a new constitution and punishing their former oppressors, much violence and upheaval would have been spared. The Nobleman prescribes a country in which the monarch is always visible to his subjects, all *Stände* treat each other respectfully, and pursue their own business, and where insight and knowledge is spread throughout. On perhaps the most conciliatory note of all, the Nobleman

[94] Goethe, Conversation with Eckermann, 4.1.1824, *Werke*, vol. 39 (1999), p. 531.
[95] Borchmeyer, 'Kommentar', p. 1024.

concludes: ‘da werden keine Parteien entstehen’. The Nobleman associates this reconciliatory approach with the preservation of order: while global events will attract attention, rebellious sympathies will not seize entire nations (p. 149).

The Nobleman’s reference to a society free of ‘Parteien’ may seem the strongest rebuke of the factional nature of the Revolution, particularly under the guise of Jacobinism. It may also be seen as opposition to democracy, as it advocates a political system in which there are no opposing forces. This, however, is possibly a too modern interpretation. In the eighteenth century, most thinkers, such as David Hume, assumed that everyone should work together for the common good, and that factions were only self-interested groups: ‘Factions subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance and protection to each other’. Hume saw parties as a yet ‘more odious’ extension of factionalism, and compared them to ‘weeds’ which were particularly difficult to remove once they had ‘taken root’ in a polity.[96] Describing parties of *principle* as ‘the most extraordinary and unaccountable *phenomenon*, that has yet appeared in human affairs’, Hume argued that they often outlived the real differences on which they were founded.[97] Burke was careful to distinguish party from faction. He argued that party could counter the influence of selfish politicians (‘When bad men combine, the good must associate […]’), and serve an altruistic purpose as a ‘body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed’.[98] Partisanship should not, though, supercede patriotism. Burke urged the Whigs and Tories to unite to defend the British constitution against the ‘general evil’ of militant Jacobin factionalism, which had corrupted the soul of

[96] David Hume, ‘Of Parties in General’, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), pp. 54-63 (p. 55).
[97] *Ibid*., p. 60 and p. 58.
[98] Burke, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* (1770), *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 2 (1981), pp. 241-323 (p. 315 and p. 317).

France and threatened to destroy European civilisation.[99] In opposing 'Parteien', therefore, the Nobleman may be seeking to uphold the common interest of his subjects against the influence of a pernicious (Jacobin) minority.

Aristocrats are conspicuously absent from *Herrmann und Dorothea*, and the burghers appear remarkably self-sufficient. Herrmann's father talks of how they successfully rebuilt the town after the fire under his direction, and how he received acclaim from his fellow residents ('Thalia', 31-6). The project created none of the animosity within the community which marks the partisanship of the Revolution. The only reference to aristocrats is when the Judge mentions the kings and princes in exile ('Polyhymnia', 100), and the Priest briefly mentions his period as a private tutor to a young baron ('Klio', 307). Nor is there any sign that the burghers reject all aspects of the French Revolution; rather, they offer an alternative version of it. As he reflects on the rebuilding of the town, Herrmann's father shows some awareness of external events, and the desire for improvement which propelled them: 'Jeder gedachte mit Lust zu erhalten und zu erneuern/ Und verbessern auch, wie die Zeit uns lehrt und das Ausland!' ('Thalia', 7-8) Moreover, he recognises the importance of leadership when heading a major reconstruction project. A dilapidated town reflects poor governance, and lowers the expectations and standards of the burghers ('Thalia', 19-20).

The successful reconstruction of the town resists both the noble dominance of the *ancien régime* and the centralising authority of the Revolution. Boyle correctly perceives an increasingly prosperous *Bürgertum* in the poem, which is influenced by the capitalistic tendencies of the age — much like the *Bürgertum* in the *Lehrjahre*. This is depicted by the affluent factory owner, and the father's determination for Herrmann to be upwardly mobile

[99] Burke, *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1797), *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9 (1991), pp. 296-386 (pp. 326-27) and Burke, *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9 (1991), pp. 264-96 (p. 265 and p. 264).

('Thalia', 5). Some of the characters may embody and evoke (perhaps unthinkingly) certain aspects of the French *bourgeoisie* in the eighteenth century, and may, particularly as provincials, have some sympathy with the Girondin faction of the Revolution (as Boyle implies).[100] It should not be assumed, however, that the poem supports a *bürgerlich* revolution to rival that of France. Many free imperial cities in the Holy Roman Empire (including Goethe's native Frankfurt) were governed by affluent *Bürger*, not aristocrats, and several small towns were self-governing, as the local ruler was remote. Mack Walker points out that 'territorial towns held rights and immunities of their princes much as imperial towns held of the empire'.[101] The depiction of the town in *Herrmann* may, then, be more a validation of the traditional German approach to empowering *Bürger* than a call to adopt the Revolutionary method.

The brief mention of aristocrats in *Herrmann* is not a sign of their political irrelevance, but subtle praise of their light-handed governance. As the Baroness in the *Unterhaltungen* practises what she preaches about the importance of self-denial ('Entsagung': p. 1006) by not ordering, but politely recommending that the group ceases to discuss politics (p. 1007), the provincial rulers in *Herrmann* refrain from unnecessary interference in the affairs of the town. It is logical, therefore, that none of the townspeople criticise the nobility. The political participation of *Bürger* put forward in *Herrmann* extends to that of burghers, not *Weltbürger*: they may run the town, but should not presume to extend this influence much beyond their immediate sphere. The construction of a highway linking the small town with the nearest city exemplifies the *bürgerlich* council taking a practical measure to meet a specific, concrete need ('Thalia', 37-9). They do not presume to know or fulfil people's abstract needs — and rights. Their assistance of the émigrés shows fraternity towards fellow

[100] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, p. 522.
[101] Mack Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State, and General Estate, 1668-1817* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 21.

human beings, but it is also a practical response to a local problem: some desperate people passing by their town. This does not imply that the burghers should engage in some far-flung venture with the abstract aim of liberating other *Bürger* (as undertaken by Dorothea's first fiancé). The self-sufficiency of the *Bürgertum* in *Herrmann* is not, then, a proposal for the usurpation of aristocrats by *Bürger*, but for *Bürger* to improve their economic and cultural condition under lenient aristocratic government.

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Not all the aristocrats are as level-headed and responsible as the Countess, the Nobleman, and (presumably) the absent nobles in *Herrmann*. Friederike of *Die Aufgeregten* initially shows little interest in politics, cursing the French Revolution as it has reduced her opportunities to go hunting. She also comes across as rash and vindictive. On hearing of the peasants' rebellion, she proposes that the perpetrators be shot in the head (p. 182). This does not necessarily mean, though, that her political future is without promise. Friederike's determination to secure the document indicates a commitment to serving her subjects. When the Court Counsellor produces it, she resolves to show it to the township and say that she regained it for them (p. 203). Friederike may be determined to retrieve the document for selfish reasons, as she fears the consequences for herself and her family if it is not found. Looked at from another perspective, she may recognise its political importance as a means of appeasing the crowd, thus avoiding the disorder that would ensure from an attack on the castle. With some sound advisors, and a gradual introduction into political leadership, Friederike may be able to calm her erratic nature. Without these, the play indicates that her polity may 'suffer oppression' if she is permitted to rule.

Friederike exemplifies the Countess' remarks on human nature in her conversation with the Counsellor. Experience has taught the Countess that an inclination to injustice

accumulates down the generations: 'Seitdem ich aber bemerkt habe, wie sich Unbilligkeit von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht so leicht aufhäuft […]'. She implies that aristocrats and burghers are equally capable of virtue and vice, and that the replacement of a political regime will not remove human imperfection: it is possible to tamper with human nature, but not to oppress or destroy it (p. 183). Such a philosophy supports reform of a flagging regime, rather than its abolition. In the context of the plays, this might mean a small step towards wider participation in politics.

Conclusion

Luise's despair that everybody currently wants to meddle in politics is not a rejection of *all* politically active *Bürger* (p. 180). It is just a criticism of people like Breme. The texts reveal some burghers to be better suited to politics than others, with the essential dividing line falling between decent and moderate burghers, and selfish and zealous ones. Decent and moderate burghers may share some of the grievances against the ruling elite, but do not seek to rebel against their hierarchical superiors, nor, ironically, show much appetite for political involvement. Their selfish and zealous counterparts, however, are desperate for political engagement, but are primarily motived by personal interests and experiences rather than genuine altruism.

Within both the 'decent and moderate' camp and the 'selfish and zealous' camp, some burghers are more perceptive than others. Märten is harmless, but succumbs to Schnaps' wiles until the arrival of Görg and Röse. The first fiancé of *Herrmann und Dorothea* has noble ideals, but falls victim to the reality of the Revolution. By contrast, Luise and the Court Counsellor of *Die Aufgeregten*, and the Judge and Priest of *Herrmann und Dorothea*, have a firmer grasp of the state of society and human nature (here, it pays to note the Countess'

remark that Luise could not have had a clearer insight into current events if she had accompanied her to Paris: p. 180). Among the selfish and zealous, Breme and Schnaps have little understanding of the significance of their rhetoric or the absurd parochialism of their political activity. On the other hand, the Magister, once provoked by Breme, sees a way to transform his personal fury and thirst for vengeance into a political cause.

Apart from Luise, the more responsible burghers − the Court Counsellor, the Judge, the Priest − presumably have a strong formal education. This cannot mean, however, that education equates to political literacy: The Magister is just as scholarly, but has dangerous intentions. For Goethe, temperament is more important in assessing a character's political credentials.

If the likes of the Court Counsellor and Judge are to exert political influence, what form is this to take? The works do not entertain direct democracy: the idea of the mass of people determining the laws of their polity is a recipe for disaster if it involves the likes of Breme, Schnaps, and the Magister. They do allude, however, to aspects of representative democracy (according to the eighteenth-century understanding). Burke argued that a representative should be in 'the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents'.[102] The Countess expresses similar sentiments. Aristocrats should show awareness of their subjects' concerns, and respond to them. They should not, though, be their delegates (as Burke also said of MPs): burghers have no right to tell nobles how to address *bürgerlich* problems. Unlike Burke, however, the Countess cannot be elected or removed by (some of) those she serves, and this is where the comparison with representative government falls short: the texts do not suggest direct accountability between ruler and subjects. The closest form of accountability to a populace

[102] Burke, 'Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll', p. 68.

lies in the subjects' right to express their grievances: if a regime is failing, popular discontent should suffice for it to introduce reforms. The works evoke, then, a spirit of representative democracy, as they imply that the elite should rule in the interest of the majority, and that there should be some interaction between the governors and governed, but they do not show any need to establish a *system* of representative democracy.

According to Goethe, the most plausible political future for *Bürger* was not at the apex of power, but in an advisory and intermediary role between aristocrats and their subjects. The position of the Counsellor in *Die Aufgeregten* largely reflects that of the author as a non-noble (albeit an affluent one) in service to an aristocratic court. He acts as a spokesman for his social rank, and communicates popular grievances to the Countess. He may wish to contribute towards political decision-making, but shows no inclination to be ultimately responsible for it: he does not want to replace the aristocrat. Goethe's ennoblement in 1782 thrust him into the *Beamtenadel*, and the texts point towards a continuation and extension of what may be called an 'aristocracy of *Bürger*': the most knowledgeable and talented burghers should have access to the court, and be able to influence, if not necessarily direct, politics.

This prescription for appointing burghers to positions of political influence appears far from democratic. It does not rely on popular choice, but on a discerning nobility. Luise of *Die Aufgeregten* praises the Countess's ability to distinguish loyal servants from mere flatterers, and to detect inept and troublesome courtiers (hence her dismissal of the Magister), but this talent cannot extend to all aristocrats (p. 174). It is impossible to know, for instance, whether the Nobleman in *Der Bürgergeneral* is right to tell Görge and Röse to stick to their agricultural occupation, although his competent handling of Schnaps suggests that his judgement is sound. He may not be inherently opposed to *bürgerlich* intervention in politics,

but does not consider these *Bürger* to be suitable. In any case, relying on aristocrats to introduce the most judicious burghers to political power seems an unstable practice.

Such a practice is not, however, as unstable as overturning the nobility. The sudden transfer of power from the traditional elite to political novices exposes it to the potential tyranny of the masses, who may have conflicting views as to how to use it, or use it to punish and oppress their former rulers. The elite may inflict oppression, too, but the effects are not as perilous as in the hands of the multitude. By slowly increasing the number of burghers around centres of authority, the ruling elite should gradually become more sensitive to the experiences and needs of the ruled. This would also reduce the likelihood of popular revolt, and certainly the sort of upheaval seen in the Revolution. The creation of an aristocracy of *Bürger* approaches the spirit of democracy — trying to discern and enact the general good — by incrementally changing the composition of the political hierarchy, whilst avoiding the turbulence caused by the formation of a democratic government.

Attempting to distinguish Goethe's view of the messengers and message of democracy is futile. The works show that the message of democracy mainly attracts vain and self-righteous characters who do not practise the liberating and fraternal values that they preach. The few benevolent individuals who try to pursue democratic principles, such as the first fiancé, perish. Goethe's works suggest that the Revolution ignored the fact that people come up with principles, and people enact them. This allows principles to be selectively interpreted, or discarded once they are deemed politically inconvenient.

One of the greatest criticisms which the texts level at democracy, then, is that it fails to do in practice what it promises in theory: represent the interests of the majority. The self-styled democratic leaders do not seek a popular mandate for their actions: in their hands, an altruistic cause becomes a veneer for the assertion of individual will. Goethe had a different

conception of how to represent the interests of the majority. It did not mean all members of society (or even a wider spectrum of society) having an equal say in the direction of their polity, or the right to elect their political leaders. It entailed co-operation and compromise between the aristocracy and *Bürgertum*, with the most temperate burghers voicing the concerns of their social rank. This would yield undramatic and sensible policies, and subdue the shrill and facile promises of 'democratic' charlatans.

Chapter Four

Court and King: Goethe's Representation of the Traditional Ruling Elite

'Goethe war ein Stabilitätsnarr, und die Bequemlichkeit war seine Religion'[1]

Goethe's rejection of the French Revolution led many contemporaries, and more recent scholars, to portray him as a staunch defender of the status quo and even an apologist for tyranny.[2] Several friends and literary enthusiasts were dismayed by his decision to become a court poet, as they detected in his earlier literary works a rebellion against the constraints of the social hierarchy and courtly custom. This was true of *Götz* and *Egmont*, but also of the much lauded *Werther*, in which the *bürgerlich* hero caricatures a noble family who look at him contemptuously ('machen en passant ihre hergebrachten hochadlichen Augen und Nasenlöcher'), is asked to leave the premises by the Count during an aristocratic gathering, and apparently justifies a people's right to rebellion against a tyrant.[3] By accepting the patronage of Duke Carl August, Goethe appeared to surrender artistic integrity for social and political status.[4] His immediate opposition to the French Revolution defied contemporary mainstream opinion, as did his later admiration for Napoleon during the French occupation of Germany.[5] This strengthened suspicions that Goethe unconditionally supported the

[1] Ludwig Börne, quoted in Thorsten Unger, *Fürstenknecht und Idiotenreptil: Goethes Kritiker* (Erfurt: Sutton Verlag, 2012), p. 68.
[2] Wolfgang Rothe says the following of Goethe: 'Er stand ohne Wenn und Aber auf Seiten des monarchischen Systems, der Feudalordnung und der überkommenen Ständegesellschaft'. *Der politische Goethe*, p. 103.
[3] Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, *Werke*, vol. 8 (1994), pp. 10-267 (p. 140, p. 142 and p. 96). Werther's defends a people's right to rebellion during a debate on suicide with Albert: 'Ein Volk, das unter dem unerträglichen Joche eines Tyrannen seufzt, darfst du das schwach heißen, wenn es endlich aufgährt und seine Ketten zerreißt'.
[4] Wolfgang Leppmann and Ekkehart Krippendorff explain that many contemporaries felt that Goethe made a poetically damaging decision by accepting a position at the Weimar court. Leppmann remarks how they sensed that Goethe's administrative responsibilities put a 'straightjacket' on the former *Sturm und Drang* author. *German Image of Goethe*, pp. 24-8 (p. 26), and *Politik gegen den Zeitgeist*, pp. 44-5.
[5] See Leppmann, *German Image of Goethe*, p. 34, and Wilson, 'Goethe and the political world', pp. 213-18. Wilson explains Goethe's defence of Napoleon partly as 'an admiration for an unabashed representative of autocratic power' at a time of diminishing monarchical authority (p. 215).

established order, and was hostile to any attempt to change it: the former rebel was now a reactionary. This chapter does not assess the interpretation of the pre-Weimar Goethe as a rebel nor his post-Revolution attitude towards Napoleon. It does investigate, however, the charge that servile conformism determined Goethe's critical response to the Revolution.

This chapter analyses four texts which were written long after Goethe's arrival in the Weimar court: *Torquato Tasso*, *Der Groß-Cophta*, *Reineke Fuchs*, and *Die natürliche Tochter*. It comprises three main sections. The first concerns the representation of the court, the second the portrayal of the monarch, and the third considers the role of courtly rivalry and deception. The first and second sections are closely linked. The first analyses the depiction of the courtiers, and focuses on their attitude and conduct. The second considers the courtiers' relationship to the monarch, and treatment of him, as well as studying the words, deeds, and psychology of the monarch himself. The third part analyses the role of conspiracy and intrigue, and the effect of plots, internal conflicts, fraudsters, and mysterious, impersonal forces on the regimes depicted. Such analysis will help to answer the main questions of the chapter: what do the texts suggest about Goethe's attitude towards the traditional ruling elite, and why did he, ultimately, continue to support it? This will then clarify Goethe's response to the demise of the *ancien régime* caused by the Revolution.

Although the chapter treats all the texts under the same overarching themes, *Tasso* is not compared in direct parallel with them, and receives less attention. In the context of the other works, *Torquato Tasso* has a distinctive background and content. Although it was published in 1790, Goethe conceived of the work during the 1780s, and had completed it before the Revolution. Despite its setting in sixteenth-century Italy and basis in historical fact, many critics see the play as a reflection of Goethe's disenchantment with the political duties of the Weimar court, as well as his subsequent journey through Italy, which he undertook to rediscover his artistic inspiration. *Tasso* acts as a contrast and springboard for

analysis of the texts with more direct relevance to the Revolution and the fall of the *ancien régime*. *Der Groß-Cophta, Reineke Fuchs,* and *Die natürliche Tochter* are analysed alongside each other, but the analysis takes into account that *Der Groß-Cophta*, unlike *Reineke* and *Die natürliche Tochter*, was published before the abolition of the French monarchy in November 1792 and the execution of the King and Queen in 1793. It seeks, therefore, a shift in emphasis and tone in the treatment of the court and monarchy in the later texts, and acknowledges *Die natürliche Tochter* as a product of the latest stage of the Revolution to be featured in this thesis. The previous chapters include analysis of aristocrats and royalty, but this chapter primarily focuses on the individuals closest to the pinnacle of political power. It is less interested in their cultural contributions than in their conduct, as well as their relationship to the monarch and their subjects.

From Torquato Tasso to Die natürliche Tochter

Tasso is a multifaceted and much-debated work. Some critics see it primarily as an artist's individual struggle against the conventions and restrictions of society, hence as a *Künstlerdrama*, while others see it more as a response to political, social, cultural, and historical developments; theirs is referred to here as the 'political' interpretation.

Critics from the *Künstlerdrama* school present a variety of interpretations, but all reflect on Tasso's relationship with society, and himself. Elizabeth Wilkinson epitomises the *Künstlerdrama* school by entitling her chapter on the text '*Torquato Tasso*: the tragedy of the poet'.[6] According to Wilkinson, the tragedy stems from Tasso's 'clash of genius with the conventions of society'. She also describes how the play takes on the ambitious task of giving

[6] Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, *Goethe: Poet and Thinker* (London: Arnold, 1962), p. 75.

the reader (and audience) an insight into the poet's creative process.[7] Angelika Jacobs, however, argues that the play focuses less on the creative process of the artist than on the poet's struggle for identity. It exposes Tasso's emotional turmoil and desire to assert his individual happiness against the harsh limitations imposed by civilised society.[8]

The 'political' critics do not prioritise Tasso's individuality, but do not exclude it either. They are more inclined to see Tasso as accepting social conventions and courtly culture, and to blame his poetic failure on the courtiers rather than on the poet himself. Hans Vaget describes the drama as an expression of Goethe's irritation at the failure of literature to influence society.[9] Vaget contends that the courtiers are the real dilettantes, whereas Tasso shuns purely autonomous art, and wants his poetry to have a wider social impact.[10] Rosa Mucignat sees Tasso's story as 'primarily the investigation of the cultural and historical crisis of modernity'.[11] This includes the discontinuity between ancient and modern culture, and the post-1789 debate on the pursuit of individual happiness and creativity against the advance of civilisation. T.J. Reed's interpretation of *Tasso* straddles both the artist-centred and the political side of the argument. Reed attacks the 'conformist' interpretations of the drama which portray Goethe as a 'conservative' stickler for custom and order by unduly criticising Tasso and overestimating the civilised pretensions of court society.[12] His argument presents the work as a product of the Enlightenment by acknowledging Tasso's personal development ('Mündigkeit') but also focuses on society's inability to value the artist properly.

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[7] Wilkinson, *Poet and Thinker*, pp. 76-7.
[8] Angelika Jacobs, '*Torquato Tasso*: Goethes Antwort auf Rousseau', *Klassik und Anti-Klassik: Goethe und seine Epoche*, ed. Ortrud Gutjahr and Harro Segeberg (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), pp. 35-62 (pp. 50-9).
[9] Hans Rudolf Vaget, 'Um einen Tasso von außen bittend: Kunst und Dilettantismus am Musenhof von Ferrara', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 54 (1980), 232-58 (p. 258).
[10] *Ibid*., 243.
[11] Rosa Mucignat, 'Tasso and the Quest for Modern Epic: Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* and Leopardi's *Operette morali*', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 85 (2016), 28-39 (p. 29).
[12] T.J. Reed, 'Tasso und die Besserwisser', *Texte, Motive und Gestalten der Goethezeit: Festschrift für Hans Reiss*, ed. John L. Hibberd and H.B. Nisbet (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989), pp. 95-112 (p. 110).

Both the artist-centred and the political interpretations emphasise the biographical aspect of *Tasso*. Reed argues that Goethe's initial period in Weimar contained a 'pre-echo' of *Tasso,* as it subjected him to a confrontation between poetic talent and political reality. Goethe's arrival in court, and especially his promotion to Carl August's Privy Council, provoked controversy. Carl August's senior minister, von Fritsch, refused to serve with the young and politically naïve Goethe, and tried to resign.[13] Hans Reiss argues that Tasso's attitude towards the court of Ferrara reflects that of Goethe towards Weimar: Goethe accepted courtly conventions, but found them restrictive and creatively stifling.[14] Vaget highlights a letter which Goethe wrote to Carl August in 1787, in which he described *Tasso* as a recapitulation of his life and art.[15] He argues that the drama is shaped by the author's new understanding of himself after his Italian journey, which led Goethe to conclude that it was a fallacy that one could write without heed to the audience.[16]

Some scepticism is needed when comparing the experiences of Tasso, either the fictional or the historical one, with Goethe's time in Weimar. Each had a different relationship to the court. Whereas the Duke of Ferrara merely envisaged Tasso as a court poet, Carl August intended to put Goethe's poetic genius to practical use in the administration of Weimar. Whereas the Duke of Ferrara was a senior and wiser figure than Tasso, Goethe went to Weimar to tutor and mentor the young Carl August. Like *Tasso*, *Der Groß-Cophta* draws on historical reality, and alludes to an event which affected Goethe.

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[13] Reed, *Classical Centre*, p. 55.
[14] Hans Reiss, 'Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*: Poetry and Political Power', *Modern Language Review*, 87 (1992), 102-11 (p. 110)
[15] Goethe to Carl August, 11.8.1787, *Werke*, vol. 30 (1991), p. 312.
[16] Vaget, 'Tasso von außen', 237.

In his *Tag- und Jahreshefte 1789,* Goethe reflected on how the Diamond Necklace Affair of 1785 had made an unspeakable impression on him.[17] The Marquise's historical counterpart, Jeanne de la Motte-Valois, forged royal insignia to lure the Cardinal de Rohan into believing that he was acting with the Queen's blessing, and to convince the almost bankrupt court jewellers Boehmer that the Queen had commissioned de Rohan to buy the necklace on her behalf.[18] Goethe also wrote that he had followed the trial of the notorious charlatan, Count Cagliostro (who had been linked to the scandal), with great interest, and tried to obtain news on the Count from Cagliostro's family in Sicily.[19] The play entitled *Der Groß-Cophta*, which first appeared in the Weimar theatre on 17 December 1791, was a commercial and critical flop, and only lasted for three performances before being abandoned in 1792. Goethe later attributed the negative reception of *Der Groß-Cophta* to its merciless treatment of a subject matter which bore an all too direct resemblance to recent events: it disturbed both aristocratic and *bürgerlich* spectators.[20]

Attempting to explain the contemporary reception of *Der Groß-Cophta* provokes discussion of its genre. Its official label as a comedy ('Lustspiel') has proved contentious, as has the precise nature and aim of the humour. Is the play a drama on the Revolution, freemasonry, or the development of individual characters?[21] How seriously should it be taken? Should it be seen more as a social comedy or as political satire?

Earlier critics treated *Der Groß-Cophta* primarily as a social comedy unworthy of Goethe's literary greatness. C.P. Magill argues that Goethe tried to fit the play into the tradition of German comedy despite lacking any comedic talent.[22] Fritz Martini contends that

[17] Goethe, *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, *Werke*, vol. 17 (1994), p. 16.
[18] A detailed account of the Diamond Necklace Affair is provided in Schama, *Citizens*, pp. 203-10.
[19] Goethe, *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, p. 17.
[20] Wilson, 'Dramen', p. 261.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 265.
[22] C.P. Magill, '*Der Groß-Cophta* and the Problem of German Comedy', *German Studies Presented to Walter Horace Bruford* (London: George G. Harrap, 1962), pp. 102-12.

the play fell neither into the category of a comedy or satire, as it lacked the fraught action and exchanges between characters ('Spieldramatik').[23] Lieselotte Blumenthal brands it an artistic failure which represented (along with *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral*) the nadir of Goethe's poetic works. She also dismisses the play as a political and historical commentary: the Diamond Necklace Affair presented a poet with a chance to portray the imminent implosion of the feudal order, but Goethe missed it.[24]

More recent scholars have been inclined to see the play less as a social comedy and more as a satire, and to illuminate its political content. Marlis Mehra argues that the play does not fulfil the requirements of a comedy, as satire and morality are more prevalent than humour and emotion, and that Goethe sacrifices sentimentality (such as a union between the Knight and Niece) in order to sharpen his critique of the nobility.[25] Winfried Schröder also deems it an attempt to orient social and political action: it is a principled criticism of the *ancien regime,* and a call to the German ruling elites to initiate reform.[26] Schröder sees this as consistent with Goethe's later description of himself as a moderate liberal, who endeavoured to reduce public grievances without using drastic and socially destructive measures.[27] R. Hillenbrand agrees that *Der Groß-Cophta* is closer to satire, and argues that its failure as a comedy is due more to the world view ('Weltanschauung') that the text conveys than to its aesthetic shortcomings.[28]

Der Groß-Cophta satirizes the secret societies which aroused such alarm in the late eighteenth century. Wilson describes how their association with the outbreak of the French

[23] Fritz Martini, 'Goethes 'verfehlte' Lustspiele: *Die Mitschuldigen* und *Der Groß-Cophta*', *Natur und Idee: Andreas Bruno Wachsmuth zugeeignet* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1966), pp. 164-210 (p. 192).
[24] Lieselotte Blumenthal, 'Goethes *Großkophta*', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 7 (1961), 1-27.
[25] Marlis Mehra, 'Goethes *Groß-Cophta* und das zeitgenössische Lustspiel um 1790', *Goethe Yearbook*, 1 (1982), 93-111 (p. 98).
[26] Winfried Schröder, 'Goethes ''Groß-Cophta''- Cagliostro und die Vorgeschichte der Französischen Revolution', *Goethe Jahrbuch*, 105 (1988), 181-211 (p.208).
[27] *Ibid*., 184. Goethe's self-description as a moderate liberal is in Eckermann, Conversation with Goethe, 3.2.1830, *Werke*, vol. 39 (1999), pp. 692-93.
[28] R. Hillenbrand, 'Cophtisches bei Goethe', *Neophilologus*, 82 (1998), 259-78 (p. 259).

Revolution contributed to the dominant conservative philosophy of the period.[29] The discovery and banning of the order of the Illuminati in Bavaria in 1785 provoked widespread panic, and the publication of some notable documents of the order two years later became, Schiller observed, the main topic of conversation ('Gespräch der Welt').[30] In 1786 in Leipzig, Ernst August von Göchhausen published another damning document of the Illuminati, *Enthüllung des Systems der Weltbürger Republik*. It cast the Illuminati as a global conspiracy which sought to destroy existing religion, society, and political authority in the belief that contemporary society was morally bankrupt. Literary works attacking conspiratorial organisations were also commonplace. Schiller himself alluded to conspiracies based on a belief in supernatural forces in his unfinished novel *Der Geisterseher* (1787-89). The novel features a Jesuit conspiracy to convert a Protestant prince to Catholicism by promising to secure him the crown in his country of origin, in order that they can build their own power base there. *Der Groß-Cophta* was, then, very much a work of its time. Despite its medieval setting, the same may be said of *Reineke Fuchs*.

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In June 1794, Goethe explained his optimism about the reception of *Reineke Fuchs*: 'Da dieses Geschlecht auch zu unsern Zeiten bei Höfen, besonders aber in Republiken sehr angesehn und unentbehrlich ist; so möchte nichts billiger sein, als seine Ahnherrn recht kennen zu lernen'.[31] Goethe drew inspiration for *Reineke Fuchs* from a long-standing European beast fable, and, not least, Johann Christian Gottsched's 1752 German prose translation of the Low German verse text *Reynke de Vos* of 1498: *Reineke der Fuchs*. Having begun it in January 1793, he took the manuscript to Mainz and worked on it in a tent, as the

[29] Wilson, 'Dramen', p. 264.
[30] Schiller to Körner, 10.9.87, *Schillers Werke*, 42 vols, ed. Julius Petersen and others (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1943-2013), vol. 24 (1989), p. 153.
[31] Goethe to Charlotte von Kalb, 28.6.1794, *Werke*, vol. 31 (1998), p. 10.

Germans besieged the occupied city in order to reclaim it from the French. Surrounded again by the horrors of war, Goethe told Jacobi that writing *Reineke* provided a much-needed distraction from international politics.[32] The completed text appeared in the spring of 1794 in the second volume of his *Neue Schriften*.

Goethe's decision to rewrite *Reineke* should not be seen as a contradiction of his desire to withdraw from worldly events. Hans-Wolf Jäger argues that the combination of art and humour had a soothing effect on the author. The use of satire enabled him to deal with the themes of political arrogance and courtly intrigue indirectly and playfully.[33] By using a medieval setting and a cast of animals, Goethe distinguished *Reineke* from many of his Revolutionary works: unlike *Der Groß-Cophta*, for instance, he could address perennial issues without obviously attacking specific contemporary concerns or individuals. Although Goethe made hardly any alterations to the content and plot of 1498, his reworking did affect the way in which the text could be interpreted. Lothar Schwaß argues that it secularised the text, and turned Reineke from a diabolic figure into a relatively innocuous scoundrel. Instead of dealing in morality, the satirical nature of Goethe's version questions whether things are as they seem: 'eine distanzierte Haltung gegenüber der Wirklichkeit'.[34]

Like *Herrmann und Dorothea*, *Reineke Fuchs* is a mock-epic poem. It reflects the structure of typical ancient epics, as it is divided into twelve cantos and written in hexameter verse. This contributes to the irony, as there is the discrepancy between the implied heroism and Reineke's mischievousness. As Schwaß notes, the apparent incongruity of form and content is not a naïve replication of Homer, but a deliberate parody of it.[35]

[32] Goethe to Jacobi, 2.5.1793, *Werke*, vol. 30 (1991), p. 665.
[33] Hans-Wolf Jäger, '*Reineke Fuchs*', *Handbuch*, 1 (1996), pp. 508-18 (p. 511).
[34] Lothar Schwaß, *Vom Sünder zum Schelmen: Goethes Bearbeitung des Reineke Fuchs* (Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum, 1971), p. 71.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 105.

Most scholarship has focused on the genesis and composition of Goethe's re-working of the Reineke fable, and few have attempted to analyse its political significance.[36] Lothar Schwaß and Helmut Kolb are among the more political critics. They compare Goethe's version with earlier ones, and explains how the continuities and alterations related to the author's own time and society. Schwaß reflects, for instance, on the political and satirical symbolism of the rogue figure of Reineke, and how this exposes an institutionally corrupt world which has strong parallels to the state and social structure of the eighteenth century.[37] Kolb argues that Goethe's political views and outlook on the future reached a nadir following Louis XVI's execution, and points to his reflection in *Campagne in Frankreich* that the chance receipt of 'Reineke Fuchs' provided relief from the horrors of a despicable ('nichtswürdig') world, in which human conduct appeared almost bestial.[38] Goethe manipulated the fox's words and deeds in the traditional tale to deliver a sharp, undiluted criticism of the court and crown without appearing to endorse it himself. The author reworked the role of the narrator, and added the nine lines in which Reineke laments the destructive tendency for everybody to believe that they put the 'mad' world to rights ('es könne jeder im Taumel/ Seines heftigen Wollens die Welt beherrschen und richten') to dispel any notion that he sought to uproot traditional authority.[39] This chapter also attempts to highlight the significance of *Reineke* as a response to the French Revolution.

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[36] Martin Lange and Käthe Scheel analyse the sources and inspiration for *Reineke*, whereas Ulrich Hötzner discusses the uniqueness of Goethe's use of hexameters. Jäger, '*Reineke Fuchs*', p. 517.
[37] Schwaß, *Vom Sünder zum Schelmen*, p. 64.
[38] Herbert Kolb, 'Nobel und Vrevel: Die Figur des Königs in der Reinhart-Fuchs-Epik', *Virtus et Fortuna: Zur deutschen Literatur zwischen 1400 und 1720: Festschrift für Hans-Gert Roloff zu seinem 50. Geburtstag*, ed. Joseph P. Strelka and Jörg Jungmayr (Bern, Frankfurt a.M., New York: Peter Lang, 1983), pp. 328-50 (pp. 330-31), and Goethe, *Campagne in Frankreich*, p. 569.
[39] Kolb, 'Nobel und Vrevel', p. 334. For the additional lines, see Goethe, *Reineke Fuchs*, *Werke*, vol. 8 (1994), pp. 659-806 (p. 743, Canto VIII, lines 152-60).

In his *Tag- und Jahreshefte* of 1799 Goethe wrote that he intended *Die natürliche Tochter* to contain a serious account of the Revolution and its consequences.[40] Since, however, the dramatic form did not allow the author to confront the Revolution, Goethe's literary response to it remained indirect.[41] Goethe also envisaged the play as the first part of a trilogy, which never came to fruition — a sign, perhaps, that the exploration of such a major event exceeded his artistic powers.

Goethe decided on the title of the work in 1799, and completed the fourth and fifth acts in 1803. When the play was first performed in Weimar on 2 April 1803, it was presented as a tragedy. Georg-Michel Schulz argues that, nevertheless, the drama lacks an essential feature of classical tragedy, as there is no sense of guilt from Eugenie when she opens the forbidden jewellery box.[42] Bernhard Böschenstein argues, however, that the play is a tragedy, but of a special kind which was popular at the time, and that the form is appropriate for the subject-matter: the French ruling elite in crisis. Goethe wrote the drama in a conventional late classical style, drawing inspiration from Voltaire's *Tancred* and Humboldt's *Über die gegenwärtige Französische Bühne*.[43] Nicholas Boyle notes a lack of clarity regarding the characters' motivations: the King's intentions are not revealed, and the nature of the party supporting the Duke's son remains obscure.[44]

The exact origins and content of the play are unclear. Despite being written after Napoleon's coming to power, it is not certain that *Die natürliche Tochter* even portrays events after 1789. The play takes place in a fictional kingdom with fictional characters, but bears some relation to pre-Revolution France in the form of a weak king, divided nobility,

[40] Goethe, *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, p. 67.
[41] Georg-Michael Schulz, '*Die natürliche Tochter*', *Handbuch*, vol. 2 (1996), pp. 288-303 (p. 300).
[42] *Ibid*., p. 293.
[43] Bernhard Böschenstein, 'Goethes >Natürliche Tochter< als Antwort auf die Französische Revolution', J.W. Goethe, *Die natürliche Tochter: Mit den Memoiren der Stéphanie Louise de Bourbon-Conti und drei Studien von Bernhard Böschenstein* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1990), pp. 346-63 (p. 351).
[44] Boyle, *Goethe: Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, p. 779.

and a crumbling regime. Two sources of inspiration were the *Mémoires historiques de Stéphanie-Louise de Bourbon-Conti, écrits par elle-même* (1798) and the six-volume *Mémoires historiques et politiques du règne de Louis XVI depuis son mariage jusqu'à sa mort* which appeared in Paris in 1801. The memoirs of Stéphanie-Louise de Bourbon-Conti were written by the illegitimate daughter of Prince Louis François de Bourbon-Conti and the Duchess Mazarin under the reign of Louis XV. Stéphanie was abducted by her governess with the consent of her mother and half-brother, who was in a feud with the Prince, in 1773. In 1774, Stéphanie married a lawyer, and was taken into a nunnery. She later returned to Paris, where she sought recognition as the daughter of her then deceased father, but her efforts were interrupted by the outbreak of the Revolution. Stephanie's story exemplifies the wrongdoings of the French court which would eventually cause its downfall. Goethe described his other source, the memoirs of the reign of Louis XVI, written by Jean Louis-Giraud Soulavie, as a captivating work which featured terrifying imagery of conflicting natural forces giving way to a devastating flood.[45] Böschenstein and Hans-Jürgen Schings both agree that *Die natürliche Tochter* contains subtle references to future events. Böschenstein argues that these foreshadowings are more important than the events portrayed, and Schings describes the sonnet in which Eugenie expresses her loyalty to the King and preparedness to die for him, as well as her 'death' in the third act, as a warning of terrors to come in the Revolution.[46]

Eugenie's fate is a considerable factor in analysing the political significance of the drama, and maybe even Goethe's attitude towards the French Revolution. In 1803, Goethe wrote that he had tried to show a woman's development from childish naivety to heroism.[47]

[45] J.W. von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, Goethe to Schiller, 9.3.1802, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*, ed. Emil Staiger (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1966), p. 942.
[46] Böschenstein, 'Antwort auf die Französische Revolution', p. 347, and Hans-Jürgen Schings, 'Massaker im September, Goethes *Natürliche Tochter* und die Prinzessin von Lamballe', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 82 (2008), 262-90 (p. 286).
[47] Goethe to Marianne von Eybenberg, 4.4.1803, *Werke*, vol. 32 (1999), p. 338.

The term ‘Opfer’ is often associated with her. The English translation for this is illuminating, for it can mean both a victim and a sacrifice. Böschenstein perceives Eugenie as a memorial to the most precious features of the old regime which are soon to be lost forever. Eugenie, he argues, is the victim of a time in which the course of history is hostile to the individual, and that her downfall is necessary and inevitable.[48] According to Boyle, Eugenie reflects Goethe’s relationship to the Revolution, as he experienced it not as an agent but as a victim. The play relates history not from the perspective of the few who make it, but the many who suffer from it, and the frequent leitmotif of violence shows how historical change affects individual lives as an arbitrary, inexplicable, and irresistible force.[49]

Courtly Conduct

Goethe owed much of his literary and artistic development to the patronage of Duke Carl August, but his activity as a member of the Weimar Privy Council between 1775 and 1786 left him disaffected with the way the court operated, and had an adverse effect on his literary work. T.J. Reed writes that Goethe’s poetry lost its ‘colour, vitality, rhythmic authority and intuitive conviction’ during his first decade in Weimar, but also suggests that examining the detail and practicality of political decisions calmed and disciplined Goethe’s formerly ‘over-exuberant’ mind.[50] Goethe also admitted that his ministerial responsibilities had a formative impact on him: ‘Meine Geschäfte […] bilden mich, indem ich sie bilde’.[51] Yet this did not stop him from seeking refuge from onerous courtly duties in Italy. By the time of the Revolution, Goethe had vacated his position as Privy Councillor, and concentrated on cultural and educative projects within the duchy, such as directing the ducal theatre and establishing

[48] Böschenstein, ‘Antwort auf die Französische Revolution’, p. 349.
[49] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, pp. 779-80.
[50] Reed, *Classical Centre*, p. 57.
[51] Goethe to Knebel, 30.12.1785, *Werke*, vol. 29 (1997), p. 616.

the university in nearby Jena. This may not be the reaction of a supposed 'Fürstenknecht', but it reflects Goethe's personal experience when writing the texts: he was conversant with the workings and characters of a court.

In dealing with courtly affairs Goethe was also contributing to a long-established literary theme, and one which was no less prominent in the eighteenth century. The increased political and cultural significance of European courts from the Middle Ages to the French Revolution coincided with considerable literary attention, and criticism of courts as ''hells'' of moral corruption had a tradition stretching back to at least the Renaissance.[52] In 1751, the writer, scholar, and statesman (and Goethe's great-uncle), Johann Michael von Loen, published *Der redliche Mann am Hofe*. Presenting the court as a great arena of the human condition, the work comprised a series of short episodes concerning various noble and *bürgerlich* characters, in which all readers were meant to see aspects of themselves. Seeking to make the text instructive for the present day, von Loen added a final chapter entitled 'Von der Verbesserung des Staats'.[53] In this, he condemned the unprecedented number of courtiers, who included many idle, financially burdensome, and politically disruptive officials: 'Viele Staats-Diener taugen zu nichts, als das sie die Macht eines Fürsten schwächen, den Staat verwirren, allerhand Zwiespalt erregen […]'.[54] He also described the current nobility as a laughing stock, which made their titles, weapons, and insignia look meaningless: 'Alles übrige, womit der gebohrne Adel sich brüstet, ist Wind und Wahn und Einbildung'.[55] In 1784 Schiller wrote *Kabale und Liebe* partly as a rebuke to the arbitrary injustice he had received from his former patron, the Duke of Württemberg. Although Schiller called the play 'ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel', it also focused on the extravagance of the ducal court, the trade in

[52] Helmuth Kiesel, *''Bei Hof, bei Höll'': Untersuchungen zur literarischen Hofkritik von Sebastian Brant bis Friedrich Schiller* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979), pp. 1-20.
[53] Johann Michael von Loen, 'Vorbericht', *Der redliche Mann am Hofe, Deutsche Neudrucke/ Reihe 18. Jahrhundert,* ed. Paul Böckmann and Friedrich Sengle (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1966), p. 4.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 538.
[55] *Ibid*., p. 555 and p. 554.

mercenary soldiers, and despotism (such as punishment without trial). This was followed in 1787 by *Don Carlos*, in which the courtier Posa criticises King Philip's inhumane treatment of the Netherlanders, but falls victim to his tyrannical control of the court.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, most of the early Revolutionaries did not want to attack the monarchy, but directed much of their ire at an aristocratic system which they deemed anachronistic, aloof, and corrupt. In 1785 the Diamond Necklace Affair shook the French aristocracy and monarchy to the core. Not only did the scandal further damage the reputation of the blameless, but already deeply unpopular, Queen Marie Antoinette, it also reinforced the impression of a detached and self-interested court. This part of the chapter analyses the behaviour of courtiers, and asks how far this negative image of court life is reflected in the texts. This will help to answer whether Goethe was as docile to the system which patronised him as his detractors claim.

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Tasso conveys an ambiguous message on aristocratic patronage. It is unclear whether the courtiers want to use Tasso's artistic talent for public enrichment and education or merely for their own enjoyment, or as part of a vanity project to raise the prestige of the court of Ferrara. Tasso also has an ambiguous relationship to the court, as it is uncertain whether he wants to focus solely on his literary works or engage in politics. His yearning for the Golden Age suggests that he wants to flee to enjoy the 'natural' freedom of a rural idyll without the cares of civilisation, but he later pleads to learn from the experienced diplomat, Antonio.[56] Tasso claims to be aware of his immaturity, and wishes to temper his passion for poetry with a broader perspective of life (1266-68).

[56] Goethe, *Torquato Tasso*, *Werke*, vol. 5 (1988), pp. 731-834 (p. 761, lines 978-94).

Tasso evokes a concept which appears in all the texts: 'Nutzen'. The court of Ferrara would like to use Tasso in various ways. His presence, as a successor to Ariosto, gives Ferrara cultural prestige. He enables artistic dilettantes to flatter themselves under the illusion that they are appreciating his poetry.[57] He may also serve some vague practical purpose, as expressed by Antonio. The Duke's patronage of the poet weaves culture with statecraft: the fifth scene exemplifies how Alphons admires Tasso's creative genius, but also regards it as a valuable political asset which should not be lost to a competing aristocratic household.[58] It is this competition, however, which Alphons believes contributes to Italy's greatness (2843-45). His desire to keep Tasso is not merely based on the parochial aim of empowering his own court, but on a broader political — national — agenda. Antonio's attitude towards Tasso appears more utilitarian. He questions whether the courtiers' personal and financial investment in the poet is benefiting their self-interest: 'So ist es billig daß der Eine wieder/ Sich fleißig frage was den andern nützt' (2874). These examples portray Tasso as a pawn of the courtiers' desires, even if those desires may differ. This may disturb his natural creativity, and thereby support the artist-centred interpretation of the play.

However, there are also signs that Tasso's poetry can appeal to an audience beyond the dilettantes of the court, and that Tasso resents being merely an artist, and would like to have some political influence. This is exemplified by his confrontation with Antonio. The hope that Antonio will help to combine mind and action, and his admiration of the diplomat's wisdom and experience, indicate that he is not content to rest in poetic and social seclusion, but is keen to engage in state affairs. Antonio's dismissal of poetry as a guide for statecraft (1489-92) may signify his desire to keep Tasso out of politics. Vaget argues that Antonio is not a hard-headed utilitarian and philistine, but a *greater* dilettante than Tasso, with an old-

[57] Vaget, 'Tasso von außen', 241-43.
[58] Hans Reiss supports this point by describing the Duke's appointment of Tasso as part of his 'official cultural policy'. Reiss, 'Poetry', 104.

fashioned taste which makes him unable to appreciate Tasso's work. It is Tasso who represents a new understanding of poetry which emphasises self-expression and originality, but also seeks to resonate with the wider public.[59]

That Antonio and Tasso are jostling for a noble patron's favour on the basis of poetic and diplomatic endeavours reflects another significant theme of the eighteenth century which directly affected Goethe: whether artistic or political achievements were worthier of social distinction.[60] The tension between the merits of the two disciplines was central to his experiences at the Weimar court. Antonio puts himself between Tasso and the Duke to protect his own privileged status, of which his modest beginnings make him particularly jealous. This erstwhile *Bürger* is a greater obstacle to Tasso's political ambitions than any of the aristocratic courtiers.

Tasso highlights prominent court-related themes such as internal rivalry, competition, manipulation of fellow courtiers, and the freedom of a beneficiary of noble patronage. Moreover, the characters' attitude towards culture and their treatment of Tasso encompass all these themes, and contribute to the overarching focus of the analysis of the court: ambition. The rest of this section of the chapter analyses the different forms of ambition which emerge in *Der Groß-Cophta*, *Reineke Fuchs*, and *Die natürliche Tochter*, as well as the relationship between the courtiers. It mainly seeks to address the question whether courtly ambition is presented as generally selfish or altruistic: are the courtiers more interested in advancing their own interests, or those of their subjects?

The texts include many courtiers whose priority is personal gain. Their actions are driven by a utilitarian philosophy, and the word 'Nutzen' appears in *Der Groß-Cophta* and *Die natürliche Tochter*. The Marquise manipulates her Niece and the Cardinal. On discovery

[59] Vaget, 'Tasso von außen', 249.
[60] *Ibid*., 251.

of their affair, she asks herself: 'Hier ist die Frage, ob du nicht auch diesen Umstand benutzen kannst?'[61] The Cardinal falls prey to her scheming, too, as the Marquise exploits his gullibility and desperation to return to the Princess' favour to use him as a go-between for delivery and payment of the necklace (p. 38). Even as a victim of manipulation, however, the Cardinal also subscribes to selfishness ('Unser eigener Vorteil'), and regards mankind as innately egotistical (pp.63-4). So determined is he to regain royal approval that he neglects his ecclesiastical duties of helping the needy and providing moral guidance.

The Count plays to the ambition of all the courtiers, but it is mainly selfish ambition. The promise of supernatural powers, such as eternal life, infinite knowledge, and sovereignty over oneself seduces most of the characters, who generally show no inclination to use such powers for the greater good. Rostro, like Reineke, knows how to manipulate others to his own ends.

Reineke Fuchs is a somewhat more nuanced satire. Reineke makes no attempt to help the court, let alone a social inferior. He exploits the weaknesses of the court as an institution, as well as individuals within it. Just as Count Rosto tempts the courtiers of *Der Groß-Cophta* with the prospect of supernatural powers, Reineke tempts the other animals by appealing to their basic instincts, such as when he tells Braun the bear of a tree full of honey, or plays on Bellyn the ram's desire for recognition at the court with the prospect of honour and privilege (II, 60-82). Flattery is also a major part of Reineke's devious armoury, as shown by his seduction of Braun and Hinze, whom he refers to as if they were relations (II, 76-7 and III, 22-3). It may be that Reineke knows his punishment is inevitable, but wants to delay it in order to satisfy his lust for trickery. Reineke preys on individual particularities, but also manipulates general ('human') flaws.

[61] Goethe, *Der Gross-Cophta*, *Werke*, vol. 6 (1993), pp. 21-109 (p. 55).

Due to the dominance of the authorial voice, the reader is left in no doubt that Reineke deserves his reputation for deceit and treachery, yet he is relatively tamely referred to as a scoundrel ('Schelm') or liar ('Lügner'). The choice of vocabulary to describe Reineke may, however, indicate sympathy for his argument that he is not the only wrongdoer in a largely immoral world. Reineke considers himself a victim of a pervasively brutal and selfish society (XI, 138-41), as epitomised by the clergy (VIII, 178-82), and believes that his best hope of survival is to follow suit. Lothar Schwaß argues that the narrator does not underplay Reineke's thievery and cynicism, but refrains from overt moralising and condemnation of him, and encourages the reader to admire the fox's physical and intellectual attributes.[62] Reineke is not hypocritical: he is too delinquent and devious to be a victim, but is a conformist in an unscrupulous world.

As well as shunning hypocrisy, Reineke exposes some uncomfortable truths for the court. Jäger and Schwaß compare Reineke's chilling frankness to Mephistopheles, whom God mildly calls a rogue ('Schalk') during the prologue in Heaven.[63] Schwaß argues that Reineke is the only character to tell the truth about the court, albeit through a pack of lies.[64] Reineke resembles Mephistopheles in that he provides the provocation and action necessary for a source of disorder. Like Rostro, he is no worse than the decrepit society of the text, but symptomatic of it. He seeks to promote neither revolution 'from below' nor reform 'from above', but relies on the sordid status quo, the 'Unveränderlichkeit der korrupten Verhältnisse'.[65] The text bears out Reineke's statement: 'Raubt der König ja selbst so gut als

[62] Schwaß, *Vom Sünder zum Schelmen*, p. 61.
[63] 'Von allen Geistern die verneinen/ Ist mir der Schalk am wenigsten zur Last'. Goethe, *Faust*, *Werke*, vol. 7/1 (1994), pp. 11-199 (p. 28, lines 338-39).
[64] Schwaß, *Vom Sünder zum Schelmen*, pp. 42-5.
[65] *Ibid*., p. 65.

Einer, wir wissen's;/ Was er selber nicht nimmt, daß läßt er Bären und Wölfe/ Holen, und glaubt, es geschähe mit Recht' (VIII, 109-11).[66]

Like Count Rostro and the Marquise, Reineke manipulates the credulity of the courtiers in the service of selfishness. Jäger and Schwaß praise Reineke's intelligence and dexterity.[67] Yet a major part of the tragedy behind the fox's triumph is that he does *not* need to be supremely cunning. The courtiers do not force Reineke to provide any evidence for the allegations he makes of others, and are predominantly dim and gullible. The King warns Braun (supposedly one of his brightest courtiers) of Reineke's mischievousness and malevolence, as well as of his use of flattery and deception, and yet the bear succumbs to all of this (II, 269-81). Reineke cons the King with a story of hidden treasure relating to a dynastic conspiracy (V, 68-75), and claims that he wanted to deliver him a ring with mystical powers. That the King does not begin to doubt the truth of Reineke's tale at the mention of magic is a clear sign of courtly gullibility combined with avarice. So determined is the King to increase his wealth and power, he entertains fantasy. Such examples should surely cause the reader to lament the courtiers' stupidity rather than admire Reineke's intelligence.

Die natürliche Tochter sees a court divided against itself, and with conflicting ambitions. Whereas the Duke wishes to continue the King's dynasty, and to introduce his daughter to the court, the jealous and irascible son of the Duke is determined to thwart Eugenie's accession, and plots to overthrow the monarch. The allegiance of his Secretary also draws unwilling participants into the attempt to realise the son's ambitions. Eugenie's governess compromises her loyalty and love for the Duke's daughter out of romantic passion for the Secretary. Like the Niece in *Der Groß-Cophta*, Eugenie becomes the pawn of courtly ambition and dynastic power politics. She is arguably even more innocent than the Niece, as

[66] Jäger, '*Reineke Fuchs*', p. 515.
[67] *Ibid*., and Schwaß, *Vom Sünder zum Schelmen*, p. 43.

she is not tainted by an illicit affair, and decides at the end of the play to stay to help her country through the political turmoil rather than to seek monastic refuge from worldly events.

The concept of self-interest finds clearest expression in the Secretary, who defends the plot by saying: 'Was uns nützt ist unser höchstes Recht'.[68] He reconciles himself to circumstances, and states that a regrettable deed must be done. The Governess's feelings towards the Secretary resemble those of the Marquise towards Rostro in *Der Groß-Cophta*, as they are mixed but include admiration. The Secretary's remark expresses a similar sentiment to Reineke in acknowledging that selfishness pervades society. The other characters show no interest in the wellbeing of the people either, whom they dismiss as the brutal majority ('die rohe Menge': 252). The Governess warns Eugenie that, although the mass of people are naturally passive or hesitant, they are incapable of considered action (253-55). Besides the courtiers and the mass of the people, the *Bürgertum* is represented in the form of the Advocate.

Eugenie's decision to marry the Advocate is often seen as a renunciation ('Entsagung') of her privileged social status, but it may also be perceived as selfless ambition. Realising the absence of leadership in a kingdom threatened by sudden upheaval (2831-36), Eugenie wants to use her temporary retreat to plan a return to help improve a failing social and political system. She evokes the notion of resurrection in her plea to the Advocate: 'Begleitet, mich, in Hoffnung einer künft'gen,/ Beglückten Auferstehung, mich begraben' (2913-14).[69] Borchmeyer notes the paradox that, by giving up her noble status, Eugenie performs an outstanding act of public service — the original reason for the

[68] Goethe, *Die natürliche Tochter*, *Werke*, vol. 6 (1993), pp. 301-93 (p. 329, line 861).
[69] Nicholas Boyle also evokes the notion of a 'resurrection' for Eugenie, whose marriage he describes as 'an act of self-abnegation'. Boyle also links 'resurrection' with Goethe's artistic hopes: Goethe hoped the aftermath of the Revolution would see a gradual return to the ideals of beauty (as personified by Eugenie) in Classical art – ideals which were once fostered and protected by courtly culture. Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, p. 778 and pp. 780-84.

emergence of the nobility.[70] This also strengthens the argument that she is worthier of noble status than the official aristocrats. Circumstances, both personal and general, lead Eugenie towards altruism.

Eugenie's marriage to a *Bürger* may imply forward-looking values to help her to survive the implosion of the established regime. The nature of the marriage, however, contrasts with the hope of a reformed nobility as signified by the union of Wilhelm and Natalie in the *Lehrjahre*. Instead, the future lies with the *Bürgertum*, which provides a sanctuary from power politics, and protects Eugenie from the destructive forces within the aristocracy.[71] Her plea to move into the old, dilapidated house signifies her resolve to rebuild a decrepit kingdom by aligning herself with *bürgerlich* virtues of domesticity and self-sufficiency. Eugenie is, however, not yet able to foresee such a development. Her marriage to the Advocate appears a more tactical rather than strategic move. She temporarily retreats to the countryside to strengthen the aristocracy and traditional order, not to facilitate the political emancipation of the *Bürgertum*.

The structure of *Der Groß-Cophta* reinforces the notion that the aristocrats are unconcerned about their subjects or dependents. The play does not include any scenes beyond the courtiers' residences or the Egyptian lodge (a decidedly esoteric environment), and even the town is only fleetingly referred to in a conversation between the Marquise and her husband. All the action occurs where the aristocrats are situated: the location of the scenes reflects the focus of the work. Admittedly, England is mentioned as part of the Marquise's escape plan, but the reader could often be forgiven for forgetting that an outside world exists. Whereas the setting of *Reineke i*s entirely fictional, the wider world is mentioned in *Die*

[70] Borchmeyer, *Höfische Gesellschaft*, p. 330.
[71] This point is elaborated on by Hans Rudolf Vaget in '*Die natürliche Tochter*', *Goethes Dramen: Neue Interpretationen*, ed. Walter Hinderer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980), pp. 210-25 (pp. 219-22).

natürliche Tochter when Eugenie is threatened with banishment to the West Indies. The court also reveals representatives of the *Bürgertum* through the Secretary and the Governess. The self-obsession of the court in *Der Groß-Cophta* adds to the air of frivolity befitting a comedy. On the other hand, the claustrophobic structure of the play reflects its inherent tragedy: the characters are so self-absorbed that they have no notion of their social duties, and selfishness, naivety, and internal rivalries lead to their own destruction. The upheaval 'from below' mentioned in *Die natürliche Tochter* (362-63) exemplifies the consequences of a self-obsessed and negligent court.

Ambition and selfishness also find expression in the courtiers' materialism and ostentation. Louis XIV established the Palace of Versailles at vast expense as a symbol and instrument of monarchical absolutism.[72] A century later, Marie Antoinette incurred much popular resentment due to her perceived lavishness and extravagance.[73] Seeing this as a source of France's economic woes, many dubbed the Queen 'Madame Déficit'.[74] Courtly events were not only spectacular, but an opportunity for courtiers to gain access to the king in a bid to seek favour or to exert political influence over him. These continued through to the reign of Louis XVI and until the eve of the Revolution. Louis XVI's court gave a semblance of harmony, even when the country he ruled over was crumbling. The spectacle supported the desired image of the monarchy, even if it was a mere exercise in public relations.

The courtiers' materialism and ostentation sometimes reflect an attraction to the trappings of power rather than to its substance: they want the appearance of status but not its responsibility. The Marquise's and her husband's ambition is not to help their polity, but to enrich themselves. At the start of the second act, the Marquis admires himself in an elegant

[72] J. Levron, *Louis XIV and Absolutism* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 133.
[73] Furet, *Revolutionary France*, p. 30.
[74] Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (London: Phoenix, 2002), p. 303.

coat in front of a mirror, and rhetorically asks how birth, rank, and prestige can compare to money (p. 36). The Marquise plans to escape to England after she has sold off a sufficient portion of the necklace to sustain a luxurious lifestyle: she does not even scheme to elevate her position in court.

King Nobel uses grand gatherings to project an image of order, harmony, and strength, but they prove a mere distraction from his own failings and the fragility of his court. Nobel intends to hold court in 'Feier und Pracht' (II, 11). However, news of Reineke's misdeeds provides a timely reminder of the internal division and discontent (VII, 27-9), which is exacerbated by his failure to punish Reineke during the fox's trial: 'es schien der Hof sich zu teilen' (IX, 356). The ceremonies are not an affirmation of a strong court, but an exercise in denial.

Eugenie is seduced by material values, and receives a harsh lesson in learning to avoid them. Although more selfless than the Marquis of *Der Groß-Cophta*, she shares the Marquis' concern about appearing enviable (p. 39), and looks forward to being the centre of attention on her introduction to the court: 'Ich unter diesen Ausgezeichneten/ Am schönsten Fest die Ausgezeichnete!' (II, 1087-88). Eugenie sees, however, a greater political significance in the way she uses material possessions. Not content with letting the courtiers admire her natural beauty, Eugenie claims that embellished beauty has a wider appeal: 'Das einfach Schöne soll der Kenner schätzen;/ Verziertes aber spricht der Menge zu' (II, 1060-61). This remark reflects her consideration for acceptance both at court and by the wider populace. However, Eugenie's material splendour also conceals a dangerous reality, as it reinforces her entrapment in courtly intrigue.[75]

[75] Theo Stammen explains the connection between Eugenie's lavish jewellery and clothing, and her political ambition. Theo Stammen, *Goethe und die Französische Revolution: Eine Interpretation der Natürlichen Tochter* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1996), pp. 189-92.

The texts do feature individuals whose ambitions exceed self-advancement and material gain, but they appear to be marginalised. The Niece and the Knight of *Der Groß-Cophta* are its most innocent and selfless characters. Eugenie of *Die natürliche Tochter* provides the best sign of virtue, although her Governess does not completely lack moral integrity. The Advocate deserves some credit, too, as he is prepared to tolerate a sexless marriage to give Eugenie security.

Neither the Niece nor the Knight had an historical equivalent in the real Diamond Necklace Affair; they are invented characters who provide a positive contrast to the generally corrupt courtiers. Neither shows any inclination towards self-aggrandisement, nor a desire to participate in power politics. The Niece is innocent and virtuous but also too passive and docile, which sees her become a victim of the plot. She imitates the Princess as part of the exchange of the necklace, despite being appalled at the thought of bringing the latter's reputation into disrepute (p. 83), and the admission of her affair with the Marquis weakens any possible resolve she may have to resist her aunt: 'ich bin ganz in Ihren Händen!' (p. 55) The Knight clearly intends to act for the general good, and his association with chivalric virtues, such as servitude, self-sacrifice, and decency (p. 94), makes him appear anachronistic and isolated: '[…] wo wir zu wirken streben, will niemand helfen; wir suchen und versuchen und finden uns bald in der Einsamkeit' (p. 62). The Knight and Reineke give a similar assessment of their respective societies. Whereas Reineke submits to his, though, the Knight wants to redress a morally deficient world. His failure to do so suggests that he is a reminder of past values which cannot be restored. The relative virtue of the Knight and the Niece makes their mutual attraction unsurprising, and the prevention of their long-term union is another tragic aspect of *Der Groß-Cophta*.

Whereas the Niece's virtue is slightly tarnished by her affair with the Marquis, however, the Knight's intervention in the necklace affair also gives him a degree of moral

ambiguity. Despite his desire to thwart the plot for the benefit of humanity (p. 91), it is debatable whether the method he uses results in an act of public service. By banishing the culprits to the frontier, the Knight spares the undeserving courtiers from public humiliation. Wilson interprets this as Goethe's preferred response to the historical Diamond Necklace Affair, and argues that the Knight echoes the author's preference for discretion over publicity, which is based on a suspicion of the public sphere. As the Colonel remarks: '[…] wenn die Geschichte Aufsehn macht, so denken doch die Menschen was sie wollen' (p. 94).[76] History may justify the Knight's (and Goethe's?) decision not to expose courtly wrongdoing to public opinion. The French press lambasted Marie Antoinette for instigating a scandal of which she knew nothing, and Jeanne de la Motte was subjected to brutal punishment, whereas Cagliostro continued to generate public acclaim. Whatever the wisdom and morality of the Knight's actions, he claims no credit for them.

The Niece, the Knight, and Eugenie represent positive values in a largely cynical and selfish environment. Goethe uses the Knight to show how the discovery of the Diamond Necklace Affair should have been managed. Eugenie features both to apply hindsight as to how the French a*ncien régime* could have prevented the Revolution and to propose how the traditional political order in Germany could avoid a similar fate: by aligning themselves and cooperating with the *Bürgertum*. Their examples are, on the whole, inspiring, but they are crying in the wilderness.

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[76] Wilson, 'Dramen', pp. 262-63. Georg Forster interpreted the remark as part of Goethe's desire to protect the monarchy by deflecting criticism onto the nobility. Forster to Jacobi, 6.4.1792, *Werke*, vol. 17 (1989), p. 92. Winfried Schröder sees it as a subtle attack on Baron Breteuil, the minister of the French royal household, whom Goethe met in in 1792 and blamed for the publicity of the historical Affair. Schröder, 'Cagliostro', p. 184.

The texts are not the work of an uncritical courtier. They show the court as a struggling institution, weakened, perhaps fatally, by the prevailing incompetence and indifference of the aristocrats. If their social rank is to collapse, it is more likely to be due to self-destruction than the might of an external force. It is not just by failing to attend to their duties that they weaken their position, but by engaging in internal rivalries. They deprive themselves, therefore, of the unity needed to fend off ideological opponents. Although none of the texts give a flattering portrayal of the courtiers, *Die natürliche Tochter* gives an especially negative one. The courtiers of *Der Groß-Cophta* are generally selfish and vain, and those of *Reineke* are partly divided by the fate of the fox, but they do not seek to harm each other, nor are so cruel as to plan to banish a member to a disease-ridden island. The affairs of the court in the earliest three works are, then, *relatively* frivolous. Once the full effects of the Revolution had become apparent by 1803, and the entire old order had been uprooted, it is unsurprising that Goethe shed a more sinister light on the court. With so many irresponsible and selfish aristocrats, a strong monarch is particularly important for restoring discipline and direction. Do the kings measure up to this task?

Monarchy

The execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793 put the final nail in the coffin of the formerly strongest throne in Europe. Most members of the National Assembly had initially envisaged a future for France with the monarch at its head, albeit in a reduced constitutional role, and in the service of the Nation. After Louis XVI's unsuccessful flight to Varennes in June 1791, however, the crown lost all respect in the eyes of the French public. Furet argues that Louis' flight exposed the constitutional monarchy for the farce it had always been, encouraged small enlightened circles to circulate the word 'republic', and dispelled the notion

of a sacred king: 'the father of the nation had become its executioner'.[77] Following the imprisonment of the Royal Family in the Tuileries, the monarchy was suspended on 10 August 1792. On 21 September the National Convention officially declared France a republic. The Convention's narrow vote to kill Louis enforced the logic of its Montagnard faction, led by Saint Just and Robespierre: in order to eliminate the last traces of kingship in France, the king had to die.[78]

France had flourished under absolutist rule since the reign of Louis XIV, and dominated a continent in which monarchy was the norm, but appeared in different forms. The execution of Charles I in 1649 spelled the end of absolute monarchy in England, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 formally curtailed the royal prerogative, and forced the monarch to cooperate with Parliament. Only a handful of Italian city states, such as Florence and Venice, called themselves republics, but were in effect oligarchies without democratic representation or popular freedom. Established in 1588 under the Union of Utrecht, the confederative Dutch Republic comprised seven largely autonomous provinces, with a prince, or *Stadtholder*, as its unifying protector. Just a few years before the French Revolution, the Republic was also beset by republican (Patriot) revolts against the Stadtholder, and the perceived hegemony of the House of Orange under William V and the aristocratic elites.[79] Goethe grew up in a Holy Roman Empire which had an emperor overseeing a loose collection of self-governing states, principalities, Imperial free cities (such as Frankfurt), and kingdoms (many of which were absolute monarchies). Despite his imposing title, the Holy Roman Emperor was neither all powerful nor ever-present. Emperors were elected by an imperial college which was composed of the leading nobles and seven electors who were

[77] Furet, *Revolutionary France*, p. 96.
[78] Schama, *Citizens*, pp. 651-52.
[79] Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands 1780-1813* (London: Collins, 1977), p. 140.

specific rulers and archbishops, but since the Middle Ages the title effectively had been hereditary.

'Nous voulons substituer, dans notre pays, la morale à l'égoïsme, la probité à l'honneur, les principes aux usages […], c'est-à-dire toutes les vertus et tous les miracles de la République, à tous les vices et à tous les ridicules de la monarchie'.[80] Robespierre's speech to the National Convention in February 1794 made monarchism and republicanism sound like polar opposites, but, even in the run-up to the Revolution, these two concepts were rarely considered mutually exclusive. Monarchy technically meant rule by a single person, whereas republic technically meant government which responded to the will of the people. The reality seldom proved so simple, however, and both terms underwent changes and became associated with various political structures.

The influence of the Enlightenment shook the religious foundation of monarchy, and saw a shift towards a theory of natural right law, mixed government, and rule with popular consent. The rise of Christianity had brought about the notion of the divine right of kings, according to which the monarch was God's earthly representative and solely answerable to him, and was epitomised by the absolutist rule of Louis XIV. Even divinely ordained monarchs seldom enjoyed unfettered power, however, and valued the esteem of their subjects, court, or the clergy. By the eighteenth century, calls for restrictions on monarchs' powers and greater accountability to their subjects became louder. Montesquieu distinguished between a monarch and a despot, and argued that subordinate social ranks (such as the nobility) needed special prerogatives to prevent a monarch having an entirely free rein.[81] On the eve of the French Revolution, monarchy still meant *ultimate* authority residing in an individual, but its political and intellectual underpinning had waned.

[80] Robespierre, *Morale Politique*, pp. 212-13.
[81] Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Lois*, 2, 4, *Oeuvres*, vol. 2 (1951), pp. 247-49.

The eighteenth century saw an increased appetite for limited monarchy, but the term 'republican' was perceived more as an attitude towards governance than as a strict political structure. From the late 1600s, it became associated with constitutionalism and a separation of legislative, executive, and judicial power, as yielded by the Glorious Revolution in Great Britain. John Adams called Great Britain a monarchical republic.[82] Despite arguing that all legitimate government was republican, Rousseau conceded that this could include monarchy, provided that it sought to enact the General Will.[83] Robespierre himself did, too, in the early stages of the Revolution, claiming that monarchical France had more in common with the republic of the United States of America than with the monarchy of Louis XIV.[84] Immanuel Kant even argued that republicanism was more achievable under a right-minded monarch than under a democratic constitution, and noted how Frederick II claimed to exemplify this: 'er sei bloß der oberste Diener des Staats, da hingegen die demokratische es unmöglich macht, weil alles da Herr sein will'.[85] Just two years before the French killed their king, there was still little doubt that monarchy and republic could be comfortable bedfellows.

The start of the Revolutionary Wars and the storming of the Tuileries in 1792 marked a watershed in the relationship of the Revolution towards kingship, and gave republicanism a predominantly anti-monarchical identity. In France, republicanism became synonymous with patriotism, democracy, liberty (the Convention called the advent of the Republic Year I of Liberty), and the renewal of the country's moral character. In Germany, Revolutionary sympathisers were referred to as republicans, and agitation for a democratic republic was most forcible in Mainz. German republicanism nonetheless remained a minor movement, especially as the Revolution entered its most radical phase. The bloodshed and disorder in

[82] Wolfgang Mager, 'Republik', *Grundbegriffe*, vol. 5 (1984), pp. 549-651 (p. 592).
[83] Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, 2, 6, *Oeuvres*, vol. 3 (1964), pp. 347-470 (p. 380).
[84] Robespierre, *Adresse de Maximilien Robespierre aux Français*, Paris, July 1791, www.amis-robespierre.org/IMG/pdf/adr_franc_rob.pdf, p. 5.
[85] Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden*, p. 207.

France and the Rhineland vindicated Kant's fear that political revolution would not facilitate enlightenment, but instil a new despotism with a new dogma.[86] If the Revolutionaries were to end monarchy in the Holy Roman Empire, it was more likely to be through military force than ideological conversion.

When *Tasso* and *Der Groß-Cophta* were published the French monarchy was still intact, but no longer held its former power and prestige. By the time *Reineke Fuchs* and *Die natürliche Tochter* were published, it was gone. This part of the chapter considers the representation of the monarchs in the texts, and how they relate to their courtiers. It asks how Goethe thought a monarch should perform his public role, and exert his power without becoming tyrannical: what, in Goethe's eyes, made a monarch majestic?

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Tasso does not feature a monarch in the form of a king or queen, but the Pope is often referred to as an exemplary leader. Alphons criticises the Vatican for its greed and superciliousness towards even its most illustrious subjects, but Antonio describes the Pope as a measured, methodical, and pacific leader, which enables him to command the willing obedience of his subjects: 'Wo jeder sich nur selbst zu dienen glaubt/ Weil ihm das Rechte nur befohlen wird' (642-43). Antonio also pays tribute to the Pope's pragmatic support of art and learning, saying that he values them so long as they are useful and contribute to the beauty and majesty of Rome: 'Was gelten soll, muß wirken und muß dienen' (671).

Such effusive praise of the Pope must be treated with caution, with regard both to historical reality and in the context of the play. Gregory XIII was an energetic and intellectually curious pope, but also a Catholic supremacist, and presided over a spiritual

[86] Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*, *Werke*, vol. 6 (1964), pp. 51-61 (p. 55).

kingdom which was internally divided and in turmoil.[87] A liberal patron of the Jesuit Society of Jesus and overseer of the construction of the Gregorian Chapel in the Basilica of St Peter, Gregory was determined to stamp out Protestant heresy throughout his spiritual kingdom. The St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of June 1572, in which around five thousand French Huguenots were assassinated by the Catholic crowds at the wedding of Charles IX's sister Margaret to the Protestant Henry III of Navarre, took place during his reign. The fictional pope's desire to make Rome aesthetically stunning may chime with the architectural achievements of his historical counterpart. Yet the Pope whom Antonio describes seems to reign with a control and serenity which belies one of the most tumultuous periods in European religious history. Antonio briefly mentions the Pope's forceful leadership of Christendom, and his determination to eradicate heretics (623-25), but this hardly does justice to the scale and brutality with which the historical Gregory carried this out.

It is also probable that Antonio emphasises, or even invents, the Pope's qualities to highlight the Duke's shortcomings, and to stir him into action. Antonio wants Alphons to put an end to the petty squabbles within the court, and refers to the Pope's wise and confident rule to subtly convey to the Duke the importance of securing the goodwill and obedience of his courtiers. There is also a strong hint that Antonio uses his eulogy to encourage the Duke's favour, as he mentions that the Pope only trusts and patronises experienced and politically conversant figures —people like himself (628-29). Antonio's remarks may communicate more about his vision of a strong monarch than about the true attributes of the Pope.

Antonio paints a picture of a monarch who attracts the voluntary obedience of his subjects. This evokes the portrayal of the Emperor Maximilian in *Götz* and the Emperor Charles V in *Egmont*. They wear their title lightly, and enjoy not only deference from their

[87] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 683.

inferiors but also amicable relations with them. In Goethe's pre-Revolution texts, then, there are already hints of what he perceived as the attributes of a good monarch. As the texts studied in this chapter were published during the decline of the once most powerful throne in Europe, it is expected that they will underline these attributes, and elaborate on them.

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'For arbitrary power's so strange a thing/ It makes the tyrant, and unmakes the king'[88]

Louis XVI objected to the French Constitution as it stripped him of many powers. As early as September 1789 the National Assembly made it clear that full sovereignty had been delegated to them by the nation to create a constitution. Once the constitution had been created, the legislative power would embody national sovereignty, with the king, as head of the executive power, merely acting as a figurehead. The Constitution of 1791 declared that the King was sacred and inviolable, but forced him to swear an oath to the Nation, and asserted that he was not above the law. It was largely due to Louis' political conduct before 1789 that the King found himself in this position. Although most contemporaries agreed that Louis was an essentially decent man, he was widely regarded as a weak, indecisive, and reluctant monarch.[89] Unlike the illustrious Louis XIV, the king failed to assert his authority over the nobility, and their undue influence at court prevented Louis XVI from introducing considerable fiscal reforms to reduce the national debt, and from curbing aristocratic privileges.[90]

Burke associated monarchy with the sublime: 'The power which arises from institutions in kings and commanders, has the same connection with terror'. This enabled

[88] Daniel Defoe, *The True-Born Englishman, The True-Born Englishman and Other Writings*, ed. P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 26-58 (p. 46).
[89] Even Thomas Paine acknowledged Louis's 'natural moderation', but emphasised that the French nation had not revolted against his person, but the 'despotic principles' of his government. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, intro. Eric Foner (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 47.
[90] Furet notes that Louis no longer reigned over his nobles, but 'obeyed' them. *Revolutionary France*, p. 31.

sovereigns to intimidate their subjects, and often saw them addressed as '*dread majesty*'.[91] However, there was also a case for monarchy to be 'beautiful': to inspire affection.[92] This balance is evoked in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Despite conspiring against the King, the Earl of Cambridge flatters Henry: 'Never was monarch better feared and loved/ Than is your majesty […]'.[93] Louis failed to use his theoretically supreme power judiciously and secure the obedience and goodwill of his subjects. How far do the fictional kings reflect this?

Some of the monarchs display the political impotence of which Louis XVI complained. The King of *Die natürliche Tochter* laments that events are spiralling out of his control, and does not feature in the play after the first act. In *Der Groß-Cophta* the monarch does not appear at all (although the Colonel briefly mentions that he has received orders from the *Fürst* to deal with the conspirators swiftly and discreetly: p. 94), and *Reineke* portrays a king who brings the fox to the brink of death but ends up making him one of his closest advisors.

The absence of a monarch in *Der Groß-Cophta* may signify a deteriorating throne, but it also reflects historical reality. The main courtiers show as little concern for the unnamed monarch as they do for their subjects. Yet the Marquise is prepared to ruin the reputation of the monarchy to fulfil her ambitions. She does not invoke the monarch himself, but manipulates the prestige of the royal family by mentioning the Princess to secure the Cardinal's assistance. The extent of the courtiers' shenanigans also suggests a sovereign who is not in control of his court. Louis XVI was as unaware of the Diamond Necklace Affair as his wife. By pre-emptively intervening in the scandal, however, the Knight ensures that the details of the affair remain behind closed doors, and prevents the fictional monarchy from the

[91] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1 (1997), pp. 185-320 (p. 238).
[92] *Ibid*., p. 255.
[93] William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, *Four Histories*, ed. A.R. Humphreys (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 731-865 (p. 761).

public wrath endured by Louis and Marie Antoinette. Goethe's decision not to include a monarch in the play, and to replace the role of the historical Queen with that of the fictional Princess, dissociates the monarchy from the corruption of the aristocracy.

Der Groß-Cophta joins *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral* as a text which emphasises the failings of the aristocracy as the major cause of the downfall of the *ancien régime*. It also corresponds to the course of the Revolution until 1791: the aristocracy is under attack, but the monarchy is still intact. At this point, it is unlikely that events in France would have provoked Goethe to scrutinise the role of kingship too closely.

In Count Rostro, the courtiers have a figure whom they deem far more powerful than any mortal being. As with Breme and his followers in *Die Aufgeregten,* the Count advocates egalitarian principles, but his relationship towards the courtiers is decidedly hierarchical. By convincing most of them of his supernatural powers, the Count conquers their minds, and flaunts his supposed omniscience to intimidate them into obedience. The Niece cries that Rostro makes her knees tremble in terror (p. 49), and even the more sceptical Knight admits that the force of the Count's presence makes him feel enslaved (p. 45). The Count creates an aura of sublime power, which allows him to exercise a psychological tyranny over his followers. He is the closest thing to a monarch in the play, but, from the courtiers' perspective, his authority makes him more 'terrifying' than any earthly king.

As a lion, it may be expected that the king in *Reineke* would be strong, courageous, and dominant — such attributes explained the appearance of lions on much royal insignia. There is, however, much reason to argue that King Nobel fails to live up to this imposing image. He may be physically strong, but often appears intellectually and morally weak. In the seventh canto, he swears to punish Reineke if it's the last thing he does: '[…] so sei es geschwören bei meiner ehrlichen Treue/ Diesen Frevel bestraf' ich man soll es lange

bedenken!' (VII, 93-4). Yet even this late commitment is not fulfilled. The King's failure to enact justice is expanded upon later, but this example shows his promises to be empty rhetoric, and highlights the monarch's indecision. The King's failure to punish Reineke also exposes his sense of vulnerability. He hesitates to have Reineke hanged, as he worries that he will not be able to do without the many courtiers who support the fox (IV, 105-10). Although this does not suffice to halt the execution, Reineke's mention of treasure and a plot to kill the King does (IV, 263-65). King Nobel suspends justice, then, not out of malevolence, but due to concerns about the security of his throne.

The King of *Die natürliche Tochter* expresses benevolent intentions by claiming that he would gladly abdicate and die if he could guarantee the happiness and prosperity of all his subjects (423-24). He thereby evokes an enlightened attitude towards the direction of his power. His remarks are also tinged with the paternalism of the Emperor in *Götz* and Charles V in *Egmont*, as he hopes to spread fatherly care ('des Vaters warme Sorge') throughout the kingdom (420). The King's preparedness to sacrifice his power and life for his subjects' happiness resembles Louis' supposedly final words to the crowd moments before his execution: 'Indeed, I hope that the shedding of my blood will contribute to the happiness of France and you, unfortunate people […]'.[94] It also evokes the prescription for kingship advanced by Frederick II in his essay *Examen du Prince de Machiavel* (1740). Branding Machiavelli's *The Prince* one of the most dangerous works in the world, due to its advocacy of cynicism and perfidy in the quest for glory and riches, Frederick argued that a king should set an example to his subjects, and base his policies on justice, wisdom, and kindness.[95] Goethe resented what he perceived as Frederick's keen militarism, his attack on German

[94] John Hardman notes that it is uncertain how many people heard Louis' last words, and what precisely those words were. This is the most characteristic version, as given in the Parisian press. John Hardman, *Louis XVI* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 232.
[95] Frederick II, King of Prussia. *Examen du Prince de Machiavel, avec des notes Historiques & Politiques.* London, M.D.CC.XLI. [1741]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (Gale: University of Oxford, 30 Sept. 2017), pp. 6-9.

literature (which described *Götz von Berlichingen* as an awful imitation of Shakespeare), and his belief in a strong, centralised state for cultural development.[96] However, he later paid tribute to him as a colossal figure: 'Heil ihm, dem großen Todten'.[97] At a time when kingship was imperilled, it is not improbable that Goethe would have drawn on this bestselling political essay. There is also a faint resemblance to Egmont's view of governing, as the King compares his subjects to animals by describing them as a herd (419). Unlike Egmont, though, the King is not keen on being in the saddle of power.

It is difficult to find any sign that the King of *Die natürliche Tochter* is in control of his kingdom, or even understands contemporary events. His first lines portray him as passive and disorientated: 'Wo sind wir, Oheim? Herzog, sage mir,/ Zu welchen Hügeln schweiften wir heran?' (6-7). The desperate tone of this question (particularly the expression 'Herzog, sage mir') gives an early impression of the King as fearful, vulnerable, and reliant on a social and political inferior. In Act I, vii the Duke argues that the root of the King's problems is the King himself. Eugenie points out some of the monarch's personal qualities, but the Duke contends that they are not compatible with political leadership. He does not deny that the King is kind and gentle, but argues that this will breed contempt within the kingdom, and that a good nature does not make a good sovereign (435-38).

Despite having more power than the Knight of *Der Groß-Cophta*, the King feels a similar frustration at his inability to do good deeds due to widespread vice and self-interest: 'Ja, mit dem besten Willen leisten wir/ So wenig, weil uns tausend Willen kreuzen' (415-16). Vaget accuses the King of ambiguous leadership, however, by showing both a desire to assert power but also weariness with politics, and points to the King's statement that he would

[96] The dismissive reference to *Götz* appeared in Friedrich der Große, *De la littérature allemande* (1780), ed. Ludwig Geiger (Berlin: B. Behrs Verlag, 1902), p. 23.
[97] Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und der Alte Fritz* (Leipzig: Lehmstedt, 2012), p. 179.

gladly retreat to the countryside as a bulwark against courtly and governmental responsibilities.[98] The King uses a nautical analogy to emphasise his sense of powerless: 'Das Fahrzeug treibt an jähe Klippen hin,/Wo selbst der Steurer nicht zu retten weiß' (409-10). The King is nominally at the helm of his polity, but is unable to steer it according to his will, and it is uncertain that he wants to steer it at all.

Although there are many reasons to compare the kings of *Reineke* and *Die natürliche Tochter* with the historical Louis XVI, it is important to remember that they are not *exact* representations of him. *Reineke* is set in the medieval period, and the legend always contained a monarch as hapless as the one portrayed in Goethe's version.[99] *Die natürliche Tochter* was written after the Revolution, and is set in an imaginary kingdom. The play could suggest, therefore, an alternative, even normative, reality, not a reflection on bygone events.

None of the monarchs abuse their theoretical power, but nor do they make sufficient use of it. This mostly appears to be to their own detriment and that of their kingdoms. It allows individuals and movements to prosper which seek to harm either the king (if not the institution of monarchy) and his subjects. The monarchs of *Reineke* and *Die natürliche Tochter* may have good intentions, but lack the courage and conviction to enact them. They are not in control of events in their polities, nor even aware of them, and are therefore unable to counter malevolent forces. The kings are not tyrants, but nor are they strong and effective rulers.

'When kings the sword of justice first lay down,/ They are no kings, though they possess the crown/ Titles are shadows, crowns are empty things,/ The good of subjects is the end of kings […]'.[100] The British writer and political satirist, Daniel Defoe, penned these

[98] Vaget, '*Die natürliche Tochter*', pp. 217-18.
[99] Kolb, 'Nobel und Vrevel', pp. 335-36.
[100] Defoe, *The True-Born Englishman*, p. 46.

words to defend William of Orange's accession to the English throne during the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and remind William's critics of his predecessors' attempt to steer the country towards tyrannical Catholic absolutist monarchy. For Defoe, a commitment to justice reflected a monarch's commitment to altruism, and dignified the throne. How far do the monarchs in Goethe's texts share this attitude, and how do they fare in their handling of legal — and moral — justice?

It is a great paradox of *Reineke* that the monarchy's failure to punish the fox partially stems from a too strong commitment to legal justice. Even after Reineke betrays the King's trust, having narrowly escaped execution, Nobel follows the Queen's advice, based on the presumption of innocence, and demands that the fox be brought back to hear his verdict. Reineke plays on the King's love of justice ('Gerechtigkeitsliebe') as part of his defence, but the King responds that even the fox's silver tongue cannot save him now (IX, 30-8). Yet it does, to the point that the other animals refrain from bringing further grievances against Reineke (IX, 125-26). Here, then, the animals withhold their accusations due to concerns for their own welfare: the fox intimidates his opponents to escape justice. Had the King followed his conviction, and exerted *arbitrary* power, this would not have been possible. The decision to give Reineke another chance to explain himself proves fatal. What heightens the injustice in the epic is not just that Reineke goes unpunished, but that he eventually prospers. In this the King undoubtedly bears much responsibility. When he emerges victorious from the duel, Reineke's supporters fawn over him (XII, 215-18), and Nobel promotes him to the privy council and gives him the royal seal.

By letting the fox escape, the king of *Reineke* administers *neither* legal *nor* moral justice. The lion lacks the conviction to either enforce arbitrary justice or to follow the principle of due procedure. As well as representing Nobel's abdication of judicial responsibility, the duel betrays the monarch's subjects, as it reduces Reineke's fate from an

examination of his personal conduct into a matter of personal honour between him and Isegrim. If the King inhabits a fundamentally violent and unfair society, his mishandling of justice and promotion of a scoundrel to his privy council does nothing to improve it. As Kolb argues, the King is not above the general immorality of his kingdom, but symptomatic of it, and therefore inadvertently helps Reineke to prosper.[101] Nobel is not forward-thinking, but trapped within his age: he does not initiate legal reform, but heaps injustice upon injustice.

The King of *Die natürliche Tochter* is too peripheral for his relationship to justice to be properly scrutinised. He lives in a society marked by arbitrary power, as Eugenie's receipt of a document with the fake royal seal shows, but there is no evidence that he supports or exploits it. His backing of the Duke's plans to prefer Eugenie to his son may be perceived as a stroke of moral justice, as he wishes to spare the kingdom a temperamental and irresponsible individual in a high political position. However, his lack of authority makes it doubtful that he will even achieve this modest aim.

The kings do not deliberately put down the 'sword of justice', but their grip on it is loose. The kings in *Reineke* and *Die natürliche Tochter* exemplify how a monarch's failure to take ownership of justice allows rival groups or wicked individuals to manipulate it. This harms both the inhabitants of a kingdom and the position of the monarch. If subjects sense that they are not receiving legal protection from their king, they may be reluctant to defer to him.

As part of his attack on hereditary monarchy, Thomas Paine condemned the absurdity of considering a monarch majestic: 'How impious is the title of *sacred majesty* applied to a worm, who in the midst of his splendour is crumbling into dust'.[102] Burke, however, accused

[101] Kolb, 'Nobel und Vrevel', p. 335.
[102] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, *The Thomas Paine Reader*, ed. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 65-115 (p. 72).

the Revolutionaries of removing the 'decent drapery of life' by degrading royalty. For the Revolutionaries, Burke argued, 'a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman […]'. The logical conclusion of this 'barbarous philosophy', he continued, was the destruction of the monarchy.[103] How do the texts represent those who express loyalty and affection to a monarch, and what are the consequences of doing so? In all, to what extent do the works justify deference to royalty: is a king more than just a man?

The Cardinal is arguably the most nauseating example of deference. His references to the Princess ooze servility, and a readiness to concede his autonomy. His submission to the Princess based on the belief in her increasing goodwill towards him mirrors his submission to Count Rostro based on the belief in his extraordinary powers: 'Du hast mich oft zu deinen Füßen gesehen; hier lieg ich wieder' (p. 32). When he finally meets the 'Princess' (actually the Niece) in the orange grove, the Cardinal claims that his future is dependent on her approval: '[…] es hängt doch nur mein künftiges Leben von Ihrem Winken ab' (pp. 96-7). As the Cardinal eagerly surrenders his independence of thought and action to the Count, he also puts his fate in the hands of the young royal.

In isolation, the portrayal of the Cardinal may suggest that deference is only for the credulous. It is still doubtful, though, whether his admiration for the Princess is based on pure sycophancy or genuine affection. There are hints that the Cardinal wants to do more than just win the Princess' patronage, as some of his references border on the erotic. As he admires the necklace, he fantasises about the slender, pale neck and the divine bosom that it will soon touch (p. 58), and associates this aesthetic beauty with a sense of godliness (p. 57). When he finally realises the impossibility of gaining the Princess' favour, he nonetheless repeats his declarations of passion for her, and insists that he will never lose hope of seeing her again

[103] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 171 and p. 321-22 ('A state of contempt is not a state for a prince: better to get rid of him at once': p. 322).

(pp. 104-05). It is unclear why the Cardinal would continue to say such things when he accepts that his personal aspirations have been dashed.

Reineke's deference towards Nobel appears largely superficial: there is little evidence that he intends to yield to the King's power. Reineke maintains outward forms of deference towards the monarch throughout. He kneels before the King when addressing him at court, and in the penultimate canto (before the duel with Isegrim and his promotion to the privy council) still respectfully addresses the lion as his noble master (XI, 257).

It would be simplistic, though, to say that Reineke is outwardly deferential to the monarch, but inwardly contemptuous of him — at least in the early cantos. His confession to the badger that the King is too powerful for him suggests that the fox has some respect for the latter's authority, and is prepared to submit to it (III, 241-42). As Reineke is talking to an ally, there is no clear reason for him to either put on bravado or to lull Grimbart into a false sense of security by appearing resigned to his fate. The narrator also mentions that Reineke feels distressed as he approaches the King's castle, as he knows that he is going to face many accusers (IV, 446-47). His escape from the brink of death, however, emboldens him, and shatters the last vestiges of respect Reineke may have had for Nobel.

Eugenie may reinforce the link between deference and naivety. Her treatment of the King largely reflects the Cardinal's attitude towards the Princess, and reveals her as out of touch with political reality. Eugenie admires the King's political might (295-96), and feels overwhelmed in his presence: 'Ich sinke hin, von Majestät geblendet' (950). Like the Cardinal, Eugenie associates her own fate with that of the King (959-60). She overestimates the King's actual, if not theoretical, power, which distinguishes her from the courtiers.

For Eugenie, royalty is more than a title. It is a beneficent force in which she, like the Cardinal, is willing to invest herself. Her deference to the crown nevertheless contains echoes

of the voluntary and liberating obedience evoked in *Götz* and *Egmont*. Eugenie wishes to kneel before the King as much out of affection as a sense of duty. Her description of the sovereign as a father and God (352) rhymes with the paternalist instincts of Götz towards the Emperor, and the Netherlanders towards Charles V. Eugenie does not consider herself denigrated by bowing before her superior, but enjoys it. She expresses humility without feeling humiliated.

Eugenie's reverence for the King seems excessive and anachronistic in the context of the play. Stammen interprets her avowed bedazzlement by majesty as a sign of her rash and premature exposure to the political world from sheltered beginnings ('vom Verborgenen ins Helle').[104] Unlike her father, she does not perceive the King's weaknesses, and her devotion to the monarch distracts Eugenie from the harsh reality that not all courtiers and subjects are as deferential to the King as she. Such is the Cardinal's esteem for the Princess in *Der Groß-Cophta*, he cannot conceive that anybody would misuse her name as a ploy. Both Eugenie and the Cardinal fall victim to their excessive deference. This is not to say that their deference is wrong in itself, but that they should temper it with healthy scepticism.

The texts present such flawed monarchs that it may seem baffling that anybody could defer to them, let alone believe that they are more than 'just a man'. That the king of *Reineke* is a lion intensifies the sense of the monarch being a superior 'species', as well as the disappointment when his blatant weaknesses are exposed. The king of *Die natürliche Tochter* is far from 'sublime': he is unthreatening, and seems resigned to his political impotency. The *thought* of the monarch in *Der Groß-Cophta* does not seem to intimidate the courtiers. In his absence, they engage in occultism and fraud.

[104] Stammen, *Interpretation der Natürlichen Tochter*, p. 191.

The texts suggest, however, that deference is just as much for the benefit of subjects as of kings. Submission to another individual, no matter how imperfect, forces humility on the subject. It reminds him that he is not omnipotent, and to limit his personal and political ambitions: *Entsagung*. This is not to say that a subject should view a monarch with *complete* awe and reverence. Eugenie's and the Duke's example indicate that the occasional piece of constructive criticism may help a beleaguered sovereign: in the long term, it may prove more deferential than staying silent. Monarchs are fallible, and sometimes incompetent. It is, nevertheless, better to defer to them than the likes of Breme and Schnaps, or, as will soon be discussed, those who *do* claim to be superhuman.

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The prominence of kings in *Reineke* and *Die natürliche Tochter* as opposed to their invisibility in *Tasso* and *Der Groß-Cophta* may be, in part, historically influenced. After the declaration of a French Republic in 1792, and the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette the following year, Goethe surely realised that monarchy could no longer be taken for granted, and this must have encouraged him to articulate the qualities of kingship more directly.

Although the texts portray weak kings who inspire contempt from certain inferiors, they do not call for monarchical tyranny. Full use of a monarch's theoretical power, still less abuse of it, is neither necessary nor desirable. It is worth recalling the Netherlanders in *Egmont* who praise Charles V's flexibility, but complain that his successor is too remote. The contrast between Charles V and Philip II in *Egmont* highlights how a monarch who pushes his authority to the limit instead of deliberately restricting it reduces his subjects' esteem for him. A monarch must discriminate in exercising his authority, and know when to accept and to reject advice. If he consults his subjects, he must do so on his own terms. A monarch who

does this successfully will acquire a special kind of power to which Antonio (and Egmont) allude: the voluntary obedience of his subjects.

The image of a father figure seems essential to Goethe's conception of a strong monarch. A father is imperfect, but his position as a parent and his bond with his children (subjects) is unalterable. At times, he needs to be firm, but he can also exercise power by caring for them. However, subjects' respect for their monarch and attachment to him should not waver. Even if a king fails to meet the criteria above, the texts do not imply that monarchy should be replaced. The institution is greater than the individual, and a king is the temporary embodiment of a power which compels subjects to recognise their relative insignificance. Eugenie's impeccable deference does not express Goethe's desire to return to medieval feudalism, but indicates that a degree of humility is needed to temper the Revolutionaries' undiluted confidence that they can markedly improve — and even perfect — society.

That the texts only allude to the threat of republicanism may be surprising, but does not mean that Goethe was indifferent towards it. By 1793, and certainly by 1803, the effects of a republican regime were obvious to contemporaries: chaos ensued, and a military leader had intervened to prevent anarchy. By the time of the publication of *Die natürliche Tochter*, republicanism had clearly failed, and led to the return of a *de facto* monarchy in the form of Napoleon (who was crowned Emperor of the French in 1804). The purpose of the texts is, then, to identify the characteristics of faulty kingship, and how they may be rectified without the instability and carnage caused by the destruction of the monarchical system. For all his imperfections, a monarch should encourage self-restraint in his subjects, and provide a bulwark against something worse (such as republican chaos). It is this which makes him majestic.

Conspiracy

The Monk in *Die natürliche Tochter* contrasts the beauty and seeming stability of the town by day with its sinister and fragile appearance by night: 'Der feste Boden wankt, die Türme schwanken,/ Gefügte Steine lösen sich herab/ Und so zerfällt in ungeformten Schutt/ Die Prachterscheinung' (2799-802). The Monk senses that an overpowering force will soon demolish his society (2805-09), but is unable to identify it. Lamport interprets this passage as a sign of Goethe's belated concern for affairs of state, whose demise he had regarded with 'serene equanimity' just seventeen years earlier.[105] He also argues that the language of *Die natürliche Tochter* reflects the author's view of politics as 'deception, self-deception, and tragic self-absorption', and that it 'muffles, deadens, smooths out, glosses over the echoes and pre-echoes of not-so-distant catastrophe'.[106] Is this 'not-so-distant catastrophe', however, the consequence of an impending revolution caused by popular discontent, or of something more mysterious?

Long before the outbreak of the French Revolution, Goethe had suspected that shady forces were undermining the foundations of the established order. In a much-cited letter to Lavater in 1781 he wrote: 'Glaube mir […] unsere moralische und politische Welt ist mit unterirdischen Gängen, Kellern und Cloaken miniret'.[107] W. Daniel Wilson explains Goethe's (as well as Carl August's) temporary membership of a masonic lodge as an attempt to monitor secret societies which, it was feared, ultimately aimed to abolish monarchies and sovereign states.[108] Epstein argues that many beneficiaries of the threatened status quo took comfort in the conspiracy theory explanation of the Revolution, as it reduced the event to the work of a tiny minority rather than of grand social forces. It was, therefore, possible to

[105] Lamport, 'Politics in Goethe's Plays', 62.
[106] *Ibid*., 61.
[107] Goethe to Lavater, 22.6.81, *Werke*, vol. 29 (1997), p. 360.
[108] Wilson also interprets this as further evidence of Goethe's reactionary and authoritarian politics. *Geheimräte gegen Geheimbünde* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), pp. 12-3.

remove the danger by 'efficient police work', and without introducing 'far-reaching reforms to remove genuine grievances'.[109] We have already seen that the texts are riddled with plots, some of which are obvious while others develop secretly. It is now time to explore the role and nature of conspiracy in the texts, and to ask how far they support the notion that mysterious forces helped to foment the Revolution, and whether the representatives of the traditional elite are made to look powerless against subversive groups. Answering this will shed some light on Goethe's credentials as a conspiracy theorist: even if the *ancien régime* had enjoyed wise leadership and committed itself to serious reform, would quiet intriguers have still ensured its demise?

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Even though conspiracy is not rife in *Tasso*, the hero fears that the other courtiers are plotting against him. He becomes suspicious when he hears of Leonore's plan to send him to Florence (2490-97), and compares the court to a web in which he is now stuck (2749). He also notes the courtiers' hypocrisy, as they suddenly seem keen to be rid of the poet having initially fawned over him (2785-89). The physical and intellectual claustrophobia which Tasso suffers in the court seems to make him paranoid.

Or is Tasso right to be suspicious? The courtiers make mostly benevolent plans to improve the poet's personal relations, but may inadvertently thwart his best interests. Angelika Jacobs argues that the courtiers have a common purpose, based on a commitment to the ideal of humanity and cultivation, which counters Rousseau's criticism of courts as places of civil inequality and competition.[110] Reed, however, defends Tasso against accusations of paranoia by arguing that the Princess, Leonore, and the Duke all unwittingly hinder him, and that he is right to detect a hidden agenda to Leonore's actions: '[…] wenn sie auch/ die

[109] Epstein, *German Conservatism*, p. 503.
[110] Jacobs, 'Antwort auf Rousseau', p. 56.

Absicht hat, den Freunden wohlzutun,/ So fühlt man Absicht und man ist verstimmt' (968-69). Furthermore, Reed accuses Alphons of failing to properly investigate the row between Antonio and Tasso by condemning Tasso to his room rather than asking who started the quarrel; a veiled Kantian criticism of enlightened paternalism, as the courtiers thwart Tasso's actual interests by enacting their perception of what is best for him. By nonchalantly subscribing to social convention and custom, Reed argues that the courtiers are automatically complicit in a silent conspiracy to deny the poet's true needs.[111] Leonore certainly does have an agenda for Tasso; she plans to prise him from the Princess, travel with him to Rome or Florence, and to bask in his genius (1928-29). Even when conceding that they are unconscious conspirators, though, Reed's assessment of the courtiers is unduly harsh. Although some of their verbal exchanges occur behind Tasso's back, the courtiers' dealings are hardly secretive: they make it clear to Tasso that they wish to integrate him more fully into court life. In comparison to other victims of courtly 'conspiracy', Tasso's problems are minor.

All conspiracies entail deception of their intended victims, and this occurs across the texts in different forms. Many of the characters try to portray themselves as something they are not, or tell lies to mislead their foes: they engage in illusion. Patrick Fortmann argues that *Der Groß-Cophta* ruthlessly criticises illusion by exposing superstition to enlightened reason, and 'chastises' the spectators for yearning for the supposed magic and trickery which the play denounces.[112] Is this true, and can the same be said for the other texts?

Count Rostro and Reineke unashamedly epitomise the use of illusion. Rostro claims to have supernatural powers, but the play exposes such an assertion as ridiculous. In the opening scenes, the Count pretends that he can open doors without touching them, and

[111] Reed, 'Besserwisser', p. 102
[112] Fortmann, 'Miniaturizing the Revolution', 6.

sustain a forty-day fast, as he intrudes on their 'illicit' dinner gathering, whereas he actually relies on assistants, and replenishes himself from the gastronomic delight abandoned by the frightened aristocrats (pp. 34-5). So used is Rostro to deluding others, he seems to end up deluding himself. He explains his refusal to escape by saying that he does not value the guards highly enough to demonstrate his magic before them (p. 107). Reineke creates an illusion of piety by dressing as a monk, and later as a pilgrim. This gives an air of sincerity to his supposed remorse for his numerous sins, and promise to be a better creature, but acts as a cover for further misdeeds, such as the killing of Henne's children (I, 224-47). Reineke asks the Queen to fetch him some shoes to help to maximise his chances of a successful pilgrimage to the Vatican to have his excommunication rescinded (VI, 46-51). He shows his appreciation for the royals' assistance by going home rather than to Rome, and returning Lampe's severed head to the King (VI, 347-64).

A common feature of Rostro and Reineke is an ability to make their lies sound plausible. The Marquise remarks that it is not easy to discern when the Count is lying, as he simultaneously utters the purest truth and the greatest falsehood (p. 42). Reineke once again demonstrates the power of his eloquence by letting his delicately constructed ('zierlich') speech create a veracious tune, and the narrator admits that, just on hearing Reineke, one would have believed him innocent (IV, 79-83). The effect of Rostro's and Reineke's interweaving of fact and fiction is to confuse and unnerve those around them. The Marquise claims that it is impossible to tell whether the Count's bragging is mockery of his victims, or simply a sign of his madness (p. 42). As mentioned, Reineke's gift for suddenly feigning innocence and virtue deters the hostile courtiers from pursuing their condemnation of the fox. By mixing truth and falsehood, Rostro and Reineke manipulate human nature as seen by the Marquise in *Der Groß-Cophta*: 'Die Menschen lieben die Dämmerung mehr als den hellen

Tag' (p. 46). This prevents their followers from detecting their deceit, and their critics from acting decisively against them.

The purposes of Rostro's and Reineke's deception both converge and diverge. The fox uses it to satisfy his base desires, and to escape punishment. That he ends up as a privy councillor is by chance rather than design. It may be assumed that Rostro wants to enrich himself, like all the other characters of *Der Groß-Cophta*. Like Reineke, he seeks to harm the courtiers without reprimand, but in an arguably more sinister way. Rostro does not want to physically injure the courtiers for personal satisfaction, nor deprive them of their material possessions, but to deprive them of their intellectual independence. He does not want them to exercise reason, but to adhere to his philosophy, and, consequently, bend to his will.

'Es ist erbärmlich anzusehen, wie die Menschen nach Wundern schnappen um nur in ihrem Unsinn und Albernheit beharren zu dürfen, und um sich gegen die Ohnmacht des Menschenverstandes und der Vernunft wehren zu können'.[113] The Count's aims contravene Enlightenment values, but exploit courtiers who put superstition above reason. As Hillenbrand argues, the main object of the satire in *Der Groß-Cophta* is not the deceivers but the deceived.[114] Rostro preys on courtiers who could be trying to advance values such as independent thought and scientific inquiry, but choose to follow a cult. Their superstition is another sign of a passive and anachronistic court.

Eugenie is the main victim of deception in *Die natürliche Tochter*, and the Secretary its principal perpetrator. The Secretary wants to lead Eugenie into believing that the King has rejected her, and the plot to banish the Duke's illegitimate daughter derives from an argument over succession to the throne. The monarchy provides a veneer for the Secretary's and his co-conspirators' deception, as well as the source of the conspiracy itself. In *Reineke*, feigned

[113] Goethe to F.H. Jacobi, 1.6.1791, *Werke*, vol. 30 (1991), p. 581.
[114] Hillenbrand, 'Cophtisches bei Goethe', 261.

deference to the Catholic Church and the crown largely enables the fox to practise and prolong his skulduggery. Reineke's and the Secretary's plots occur, then, within the parameters of traditional authority. *Die natürliche Tochter*, like *Der Groß-Cophta*, also refers, however, to more mysterious conspiracies outside the established order. Their implications for the incumbent ruling elite must be considered.

The Duke in *Die natürliche Tochter* emphasises to Eugenie the importance of acting secretly (823), and the King supports this point: 'Gar vieles kann, gar vieles muß geschehen/ Was man mit Worten nicht bekennen darf' (194-95). This typifies the attitude of most of the characters in the texts: they confront conspiracy not with a drive towards greater transparency, but with counter-conspiracies.

Der Groß-Cophta and *Die natürliche Tochter* contain a mixture of rival plots, which ensures that none of the characters have an oversight of the situation, nor are in full control of their actions. They also muddy the moral clarity of the plays. The Marquis plots against his wife despite being complicit in her plot. Even the Knight's noble measures to thwart the scandal are a sort of conspiracy: he keeps his plans secret until the night of the meeting between the Cardinal and the 'Princess', and schemes against the corrupt courtiers. The King of *Die natürliche Tochter* may lament that secret movements are undermining his authority, but he still urges the Duke not to disclose Eugenie's forthcoming presentation at court, as he fears that it would intensify any ill will towards him: 'Mißgunst lauert auf,/Schnell regt sie Wog' auf Woge, Sturm auf Sturm […]' (407-08). He does not seem to realise, however, that his own secret dealings could increase the distrust of his opponents, and contribute to the political storm. *Der Groß-Cophta* and *Die natürliche Tochter* suggest, then, that the tactic of meeting conspiracy with conspiracy is counter-productive.

Secrecy is a recurring theme in *Die natürliche Tochter*, and appears to damage the incumbent regime. The King demands secrecy from the Duke and Eugenie (411-12), and the Governess warns Eugenie that official recognition by the court will see her leave the tranquillity of anonymity for a tempestuous and life-threatening public role (1121-23). Moreover, the Count describes the belief that silence can erase the past as a gloomy human trait (190-92). This is in relation to the Duke's decision not to reveal to the King that he has an illegitimate daughter until the death of the Duchess, even though it was already widely known.

The King and Governess describe silence positively, therefore, whereas the Count criticises it. The King sees it as a means of realising his plans, and preventing further threats to the throne, and the Governess sees it as a means of self-preservation for Eugenie. The Count, on the other hand, portrays it as futile and a self-destructive act of denial. Had the Duke and King previously been more open about Eugenie, his remarks imply, the regime they seek to defend would have had more credibility within both the court and the wider public. Instead, their attempt to cover up a blatant fact has incurred ridicule and contempt. The royalists should not necessarily publicise the details of the Duke's plan to name Eugenie as his successor, but, the play suggests via the Count, they could better combat their enemies' sniping and cynicism if they were more discerning in what they chose to reveal.

The texts highlight the ruthlessness of conspiracy in social and political structures which condone it. The Niece of *Der Groß-Cophta* is stuck between the Marquise's and Marquis' necklace scandal, and the Marquis' plot to flee with her to England, and eventually resigns herself to being a pawn of other people's actions (pp. 105-06). Count Rostro describes the successful adjustment he makes to the principles of the second grade in order to secure the Knight's continued support by comparing it to catching fish: 'Man muß die Angeln, die Netze nach Proportion der Fische einrichten, die man zu fangen denkt' (p. 69). Eugenie does

not initially feel entrapped, but it soon becomes obvious that she is in a 'web', too, and eventually acknowledges that her fate is reduced to a choice between two evils (2635). The Monk reinforces the extent of her entrapment by advising her to choose the option she deems *less* spiritually restricting and *less* preclusive to pious deeds (2733-34). Those who do not partake in conspiracy lose control of their destiny, and perish. Their only hope, as the Knight proves when he makes the late decision to expose the necklace conspirators, is to respond in kind. That generally decent people should use underhand tactics for their survival, or to thwart other people's wrongdoing, adds to the impression that the regimes presented are not only politically inefficient, but also morally bankrupt.

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Conspiracy features to varying degrees in all the works, but never does it seem powerful enough to topple the established order alone. The conspirators and charlatans appear to be symptoms of moral and intellectual decline in the aristocracy, and could not survive without the latter's credulity. The most dangerous figure is Rostro, but even his actions are only shown to affect a part of the aristocracy rather than the whole social rank. The Count may show the most visible signs of wanting to overturn traditional (monarchical) sovereignty, such as the unquestioning obedience he demands from his followers, but is no more threatening than the other subversive figures. He undoubtedly exercises a strong hold over the imagination of the courtiers, but this is due more to their lack of critical thought than his rhetorical and intellectual prowess. The identifiable conspirators of *Reineke* and *Die natürliche Tochter* work within the framework of the established order, and depend on its weaknesses. In all the works, the nobility is undermining itself through internal divisions, and the monarch fails to intervene effectively and to stamp out dissent. Conspiracies and charlatanism may intensify the woes of the traditional order, but its problems are rooted more in internal than external factors. Goethe does not appear attracted to conspiracies as an

explanation for the collapse of a regime, but presents them as part of wider institutional decay. He may partly benefit from the threatened status quo, but his works *urge* the need for 'far-reaching reforms to remove genuine grievances'.[115]

Conclusion

The regimes presented are clearly imperfect, and the courts are beset by rivalry, personal hostility, greed, and intrigue. The sovereigns are generally depicted as weak and slightly dim, and seem unfit to weather the political storm created by their opponents. More favourable treatment is given to the monarchs than the aristocrats, however, as the kings appear mostly benevolent, if incompetent. They are not just the victims of aristocratic intrigues, though, for they also perpetrate injustices which create, or exacerbate, divisions within their court, as epitomised by King Nobel's failure to punish Reineke. Nor are the courtiers universally bad, as shown by the Knight in *Der Groß-Cophta* or Eugenie in *Die natürliche Tochter*. That such figures appear marginal and anachronistic, however, reinforces the impression that vice is an inherent feature of courtly life. Goethe's relatively lenient treatment of the monarchs may be ascribed to the nature of their position: they represent an institution which essentially depends on an individual, unlike the aristocracy which is composed of thousands of people of varying titles and ranks. It is easier to attack certain aristocrats without denigrating the aristocracy than to attack a monarch without denigrating monarchy. A king is in a more powerful, but more vulnerable, position: although the transcendental power of monarchy *ought* to be greater than the temporal power of a monarch, the works indicate that any assault on a king's character damages the reputation of the entire institution.

[115] Epstein, *German Conservatism*, p. 503.

None of the texts present a clear threat of democratic government or the republicanism which characterised the French Revolution from 1792. The King alludes to political pressure from the masses in *Die natürliche Tochter*, but there is no evidence that this will lead to a new form of government. However flawed the kings and aristocrats are, the scoundrels and charlatans who prey on the courts are no better. It is hard to imagine how Rostro, Reineke, and the Duke's son could provide wiser and more virtuous leadership than the traditional figures of authority, especially since they undermine those (most notably, the Knight and Eugenie) who represent the best hope of positive change. The subversive characters' manipulation of the courtiers' desires may contain a political allegory. The Revolutionaries sought to transform France by promising her people unprecedented freedom and prosperity, but eventually led them to civil and foreign war, the Terror, and military despotism: by pursuing what they thought they wanted, the French destroyed themselves. As Goethe implied in his letter on *Reineke Fuchs*, quoted earlier, the 'new', republican regime seems no more immune to scoundrels than the 'old', courtly one, and is arguably even more susceptible to them.[116] It also echoes the sentiments in the additional lines he attributed to Reineke on the perils of those who are convinced that they can right all the wrongs of the world (VIII, 152-60).

The message conveyed in the texts is similar to that of the previous chapter: elites must be attentive to popular pressure, but the onus is on them to initiate reform. Subjects have a minor role in *Tasso*, *Der Groß-Cophta*, *Reineke Fuchs*, and *Die natürliche Tochter*. They are briefly mentioned at the convening of the court in *Reineke*, and are portrayed as a volatile force by the king of *Die natürliche Tochter*. There is a trace of Egmont when the King insists that aristocrats need to step forward to channel the energy and will of their subjects. A 'rider' who fails to do this will be 'unsaddled'. Whereas this only means the downfall of a single

[116] Goethe to Charlotte von Kalb, 28.6.1794, *Werke*, vol. 31 (1998), p. 10.

ruler in *Egmont*, though, it implies the downfall of an entire regime in *Die natürliche Tochter*. Popular movements are likened to a tidal wave which sweeps along all in its path, and does not discriminate between the more politically experienced, erudite, and benevolent *Bürger* and the politically naïve, uneducated, and selfish ones. An elitist government has, by contrast, no such power, and is easier to restrain. The rule of the many is potentially more tyrannical than the rule of the few.

Judging by these texts, Goethe defended the traditional ruling elite primarily because it resembled a family structure which prevented abstract politics: it was 'familiar' and 'structured'. Monarchs and aristocrats gave subjects visible and nameable authority figures to whom they could relate and whom they could hold to account. Their hereditary status ensured continuity and common ancestry with their predecessors. This reinforced the sense of familiarity with their subjects, regardless of their fluctuating competence and personal qualities. The structure of the established order was also more conducive to practical decisions for moderate reform than the elusive promises of 'democratic' political agitators (such as liberty, equality, and fraternity). Changes could occur within the political system by addressing problems caused by errant groups or individuals, whether monarchs, nobles, or *Bürger*. Even if traditional authority figures often fail to redress grievances, this does not mean that they are unable to do so: they are more a warning to contemporary rulers of the need for pre-emptive action. Goethe may have despaired at the conduct of some members of the traditional ruling elite, but believed that this should spur improvement of the regime they represented rather than its destruction.

Conclusion

Goethe in context

Contemporary reactions to the French Revolution broadly fall into three categories: perpetual enthusiasts, initial enthusiasts turned opponents (the largest category), and perpetual opponents. Goethe shared none of the enthusiasm of those who supported the Revolution throughout, and desired to see it replicated in all corners of the earth, such as Thomas Paine: 'If universal peace, civilisation and commerce are ever to be the happy lot of man, it cannot be accomplished but by a revolution in systems of government'.[1] Paine's seditious writings saw him outlawed from ever returning to Britain. Having already fled to France, he joined the National Convention in 1792, and kept faith in the Revolution even after his imprisonment by the Montagnard faction a year later. Following the fall of the Jacobins, Paine was released and re-elected to the National Assembly in December 1794. Another foreigner to put himself at the heart of the Revolutionary cause was the wealthy Prussian baron and anti-religious fanatic, Anarcharsis Clootz, who announced himself to the National Assembly as the 'Orator of the Human Race', and was 'the nearest thing to a true German Jacobin'.[2] Forster greeted the arrival of French troops in the Rhineland with the words 'Vive la République!', and, less than a month before his death, claimed that the 'hurricane' of the Revolution would pass, and lead to long-term peace in Europe.[3] For Fichte, the Revolution encapsulated his faith in humanity to free itself from the supposed intellectual tyranny of traditional authority, and to create its own constitution. His writings urged the eradication of all vestiges of the old order in France and Germany, and argued that the Revolutionary violence did not compare to the barbarity which despotism and fanaticism had previously inflicted on French subjects.[4] Not

[1] Paine, *The Rights of Man*, p. 161.
[2] Boyle, *Poet and the Age*, vol. 2, pp. 3-4.
[3] Forster to Therese Forster and Ludwig Ferdinand Huber, 28. December 1793, *Werke*, vol. 17 (1989), p. 498.
[4] J.G. Fichte, *Zurückforderung der Denkfreiheit von den Fürsten Europens, die sie bisher unterdrückten. Eine Rede, J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Reinhard Lauth und Hans

all these figures were indifferent to the violence of the Revolution — Paine praised the French for removing 'the absurdity of Royalty', but implored them not to replicate the 'sanguinary arts' of monarchical governments by executing their former king.[5] However, they thought that Revolutionary ideals would eventually triumph and benefit humanity.

'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/ But to be young was very heaven!'[6] William Wordsworth typified those who first greeted the Revolution with optimism but became disenchanted with its outcome — especially during the Terror of 1792-4. Johannes Müller, Secretary to the Elector of Mainz, called 14 July 1789 the best day since the fall of Roman Empire, and still found much to praise in the Revolution in 1791.[7] By 1792, however, he argued that Forster typified the myopic and intolerant 'Aposteln der Freiheit', and, following Louis XVI's execution in 1793, he viewed the French as the scourge ('l'horreur et l'opprobre') of the human race.[8] Although Schiller did not greet the Revolution with the effusive praise of Wordsworth or Müller, he initially saw it as a liberation from absolutism, but later deplored its descent into brutality, and, in December 1792, prepared an appeal to the French people on behalf of the threatened Louis.[9] Schiller concluded that the Revolution had failed because humanity lacked a sufficient aesthetic education to undertake such fundamental political change: 'Die moralische Möglichkeit fehlt, und der freygebige Augenblick findet ein unempfängliches Geschlecht'.[10] Although claiming that all revolution was wrong, Kant argued that the King had lawfully transferred sovereignty to the National

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Jacob, 41 vols (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1962-2012), vol. 1.1 (1964), pp. 163-92 (pp. 184-85).

[5] 'An Essay for the Use of New Republicans in their Opposition to Monarchy' (1792), and 'Reasons for Preserving the Life of Louis Capet' (1793), *Thomas Paine Reader*, pp. 387-93 (p. 387), and pp. 394-98 (p. 398).

[6] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 441 (Book 11, lines 108-09).

[7] Johannes von Müller, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Johann Georg Müller, 27 vols (Tübingen: J.G. Cotta, 1810-19): Letter from Mainz, 14.8.1789, and Letter from Mainz, 29.11.1791, vol. 5 (1810), p. 269, and pp. 380-81.

[8] *Ibid*., Letters from Vienna, 7.12.1792, vol. 5 (1810), p. 416, and Letter to Herrn von E…, 28.11.1793, vol. 16 (1814), p. 430.

[9] Gooch, *Germany and the French Revolution*, pp. 208-29.

[10] Schiller, *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, *Werke*, vol. 20 (2001), pp. 309-412 (p. 319).

Assembly by swearing an oath to the constitution of 1790.[11] Like Schiller, though, Kant regarded the Revolution as a premature event for an 'immature' people, and described the killing of the Monarch as an unforgivable crime.[12] Not all early enthusiasts lost faith in the ideals of the Revolution, but came to see their enactment in France as fraudulent. Wordsworth joined many early enthusiasts by later agreeing with the ever-critical Edmund Burke that the Revolution was a false dawn for liberty and reason: 'Genius of Burke! forgive the pen seduced/ By specious wonders […]'.[13]

It was with Burke and Justus Möser that Goethe's response to the Revolution had most in common. Goethe was not among the ardent reactionaries, such as Joseph de Maistre, who opposed all change, and saw little cause for grievance with the *ancien régime*.[14] He sought, however, to protect the foundations of the established political order, and opposed the Revolutionaries' sweeping away of all tradition. Just as Burke criticised the French and (more so) German aristocracy, Goethe depicts a nobility, court, and crown whose demise is partly self-inflicted. The solution, though, lies not in their abolition, but in their reform. Even before the Terror, Goethe (like Burke) sensed that the underlying aims and principles of the Revolution were, if not always ill-intentioned, wrong and perilous. Yet, unlike Burke's unrelenting excoriation of the Revolution in 1790, Goethe's pre-1793 texts, such as *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral*, have a critical, but relatively light-hearted, tone which

[11] The constitution corresponded with Kant's view of a legitimate state. Its legitimacy derived from the general will of the people, representative government, and a restriction of political rights to economically independent citizens. Kant, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, *Werke*, vol. 4 (1956), pp. 303-614.
[12] Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Kant und Schiller als Zeitgenossen der Französischen Revolution: The 1985 Bithell Memorial Lecture* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1986), pp. 3-4.
[13] Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1850*, p. 281 (Book 7, lines 512-13).
[14] De Maistre saw the bloodshed of the Revolutionary Wars and the Reign of Terror as the logical consequence of Enlightenment thought, and as a punishment for the abolition of the supposedly divinely sanctioned monarchy and the rationalist rejection of Christianity: 'L'effusion du sang humain, occasionnée par cette grande commotion, est un moyen terrible; cependant c'est un moyen autant qu'une punition […]'. Joseph de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, intro. Pierre Manent (Brussels: Editions Complexes, 1988), p. 41.

does not represent the Revolution as an international menace. The mood of the post-Terror *Unterhaltungen*, *Herrmann und Dorothea*, and *Die natürliche Tochter* is decidedly darker.

The Enlightened Counter-Revolutionary

'For forms of government let fools contest/ What'er best administered is best'.[15] Goethe does not share this philosophy. His fictional works do not give simple answers to difficult questions, but allow differing approaches to be evaluated: they avoid dogma. This should not, however, be mistaken for political neutrality, still less indifference. The texts feature recurrent themes which indicate a preference for certain modes of governing, or, at least, some idea of how *not* to govern.

Among the themes to which the works repeatedly allude are the importance of self-restraint (*Entsagung*) from both the ruling elite and their subjects, a preference for clear and concrete policies over nebulous and abstract principles, and a preference for small-scale and personal government over centralised and distant rule. Rulers should hesitate to make full use of their authority, and should pursue policies which reflect the general interest and sensitivities of their subjects. Those outside the ruling elite should expect sound governance, but should not treat every grievance as an opportunity to attack authority. The texts do support a people's right to revolt, but only in extreme circumstances: under an incorrigibly oppressive regime. The works present a close link between small government and clear principles, and large government and abstraction. Götz and Egmont strive to protect familiar and transparent rights and laws against novel and elusive ones. Breme, Schnaps, and the fiancé in *Herrmann und Dorothea* exemplify how abstract principles may be misunderstood

[15] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt and others, 8 vols (London: Methuen, 1939-67), vol. 3/1 (1950), pp. 123-24 (Epistle 3, lines 303-04).

or dubiously interpreted. Adhering to traditional concepts of principles (such as freedom) removes such ambiguity, and creates greater trust between rulers and subjects. F.J. Lamport's view that Goethe's works show his failure to understand politics, and reflect an unpolitical (or even anti-political) disposition may appear somewhat naïve. The texts contain several telling insights on the relationship between human nature and government, and depict politics as neither frivolous nor intrinsically bad. Goethe opposed a certain type of politics: one which was abstract, doctrinaire, and excessive. Politics should be taken seriously, but should be not so seriously as to affect *all* areas of life.

To accuse Goethe of political inconsistency is wrong. Neither the Revolution, nor his exposure to the Weimar court, caused a fundamental shift in his principles. From the earliest to latest work examined in this thesis, Goethe maintains a belief in the inevitability of social hierarchy, whilst urging against the complacency of the powerful, and providing scope for reform. Even Werther admits: 'Ich weiß wohl, daß wir nicht gleich sind, noch [sein] können' (p. 19). Werther's frustration is with individual attitudes towards the lower orders, not with the hierarchy itself. Wilson is right to argue that Goethe's attitude towards the lower orders was 'constant', but wrong to see it as one of profound mistrust. The texts reveal a much more discriminatory Goethe, who recognised that some *Bürger* were better equipped for political involvement than others. Certain themes are more prominent in some texts than in others, and this often alludes to the author's most pressing concerns. The depiction of the court becomes more sinister after 1792, and kingship receives more scrutiny in the works published after 1793. *Bürger* continue to feature prominently in the later works, and seem to play a more important role in rectifying the traditional order after the execution of Louis XVI in 1793 (such as the Judge in *Die natürliche Tochter*). From *Götz* to *Die natürliche Tochter*, however, the essential message on civil freedom, the role of the *Bürgertum*, the responsibilities of the ruling elite and how they should exercise their power, follows a pattern.

The texts convey Goethe's lament at the violence of the French Revolution, and do so most forcibly in *Herrmann und Dorothea* and the *Unterhaltungen*. Goethe's opposition to the Revolution was not, though, just a matter of practice, but also of principle. Goethe supported versions of liberty, equality, and fraternity which differed from the Revolutionary mantra of 'liberté, égalité, fraternité'. His understanding of freedom meant for each social stratum to be free from oppression, and to exercise their specific rights. It did not mean unconditional freedom, according to some abstract notion of the 'rights of man'. Equality for Goethe meant all members of a polity had an *equal* right to these prescribed freedoms, and to be treated with dignity and minimal interference from authority. Efforts to equalise wealth and status might well proceed from spite and envy, and the leaders would use such movements to gain extra prestige and affluence. The texts also imply that social and financial equality is not necessary for amicable relations between the *Stände*. Goethe's view of 'fraternité' results from all members of society fulfilling their specific duties towards their social rank and each other; it does not require the abolition of titles. The texts often show the Revolutionary interpretation of equality and fraternity as an excuse for radical leaders to impose a new, but equally authoritarian, hierarchy within the same social rank, and to provoke animosity towards political opponents.

Goethe opposed the Revolution *because* he supported Enlightenment values. The texts support independence of thought, and the individual's right to develop his talents, as well as tolerance. Wilhelm's theatrical failure may suggest that *Bürger* should not seek to cultivate themselves, and restrict their horizons to more menial employment. Herrmann may epitomise the argument that they should not leave their geographical, social, and intellectual origins. However, Wilhelm *does* have the opportunity to realise his potential, but discovers that this does not extend to a theatrical career. Herrmann's preference for an agrarian, provincial life is an exercise in critical thought. He grows up in a town and family in which

Bürger are being encouraged to leave their surroundings, and to increase their material wealth and cultural knowledge, but decides that it is not for him: he refuses to conform to the intellectual and social emancipation of the *Bürgertum*. The texts show that the ability for *Bürger* to think and act independently has different outcomes: they are not *all* fit or inclined to become highly cultured or ascend the social hierarchy. *Bürger* have varying abilities and judgment; a fact which the removal of institutional or educational obstacles will not change.

Independence of thought is inherently good, then, but the results of it are sometimes not. Acknowledgement of this simple fact makes Goethe sceptical about *bürgerlich* involvement in politics, but not completely hostile towards it. Indeed, he is also sceptical about the capacity of monarchs and aristocrats to govern, as shown by Philipp and Alba in *Egmont*, the nobles of *Der Groß-Cophta*, and the chaotic relationship between the King and courtiers in *Die natürliche Tochter*, as well as the particularly erratic Duke's son and Frederike. The likes of Vansen, Breme, Schnaps, and the *Magister* represent the negative political impact of independent-minded *Bürger*. Machiavel in *Egmont*, the Judge in *Herrmann und Dorothea*, and, most notably, the Court Counsellor in *Die Aufgeregten*, show greater *bürgerlich* potential for productive political engagement. The main attribute is not their formal education, but temperament. Whereas some *Bürger* are rash and emotionally driven, Machiavel, the Judge, and the Court Counsellor reason judiciously. They are not seduced by rhetoric, but prefer to evaluate circumstances empirically, and to consider the long-term effects of political action. The works show the potential, then, for selective integration of *Bürger* into government. This approach relies on a willing and discriminatory aristocracy, and may seem more focused on personalities than systems. If aristocrats persist in accommodating the most able *Bürger*, however, this will gradually change the complexion of the ruling elite, and the political *system*. Whilst Goethe was suspicious of mass participation in politics, he did believe that political actors could emerge from the masses.

The works defend tolerance, as they negatively depict regimes which suppress freedom of thought and expression. The efforts of King Philip and the Duke of Alba to eradicate religious heresy and criticism of the Spanish government are severe, and,ultimately, counter-productive. Machiavel is the most vocal spokesman for the right of subjects to disagree with their leaders, and intellectually, though not violently, dissent from state doctrine. Machiavel is vindicated in his assertion that accepting freedom of conscience makes for a more governable and peaceful realm, as the Spanish Crown fails to thwart the spread of Calvinism. Admittedly, the Calvinist iconoclasts express much intolerance towards Catholicism, and their violence cannot endure. By arguing that the Calvinists should be free to practise their faith, even if the Spanish monarchy finds it objectionable, Machiavel echoes the sentiments found in the *Brief des Pastors zu *** an den neuen Pastor zu**** (1773). The anonymous pastor urges Protestant toleration of the Catholic Church, and plays down the significance of Biblical interpretation: 'Kommt aber ein Glaubensbekenntnis dem Worte Gotte näher als das andre, so sind die Bekenner desto besser dran, aber das bekümmert niemand anders'.[16] *Egmont* highlights the link between religious intolerance and draconian politics. It appeared during a period in which fanaticism was transferring from the religious to the political sphere. For Goethe, the Revolution, just like Philip's and Alba's treatment of Protestantism, was driven not by enlightened reason but impassioned bigotry.

The Revolution fosters neither critical thought nor tolerance, and appears hostile to the individual. Dorothea's first fiancé exemplifies how the Revolution turns former friends into enemies, and is, indeed, deadly intolerant. Goethe's opposition to pure democracy becomes most apparent in *Die Aufgeregten* and *Der Bürgergeneral*, but the aforementioned 'spirit of democracy' —governing in the interests of the majority — is poorly represented by most of the 'Revolutionary' characters. Breme and Schnaps act primarily out of self-interest,

[16] Goethe, *Brief des Pastors zu *** an den neuen Pastor zu ****, *Werke*, vol. 18 (1998), pp. 119-30 (pp. 124-25).

and the Magister's motivations are mostly vindictive. The general good is, in fact, the view of a very small minority, and a mere pretext for egoistical aims. Breme marginalises Peter for his 'eccentrically' critical response to events in Paris, and Eugenie perishes in a politically saturated world. Revolutionary rhetoric encourages a herd mentality (like 'das Volk' who follow Vansen) which is attracted by pithy slogans such as 'Freiheit und Gleichheit!' This reflects a hollow ideology which is prepared to destroy all that stands in its way. The Revolution is, then, politically and intellectually *disempowering* for those it supposedly seeks to liberate.

'A disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman'.[17]

Goethe deplored political ideology, but the texts certainly reveal a political philosophy. Describing this is an act of translation: it cannot convey the whole meaning of the original, and risks adding other connotations in the process. The previous chapters have shown how terminology evolves and frequently depends on specific contexts, and even current definitions are disputed. If progress, however, is to be simply defined as the improvement of civilisation (the development of social and political relations), then Goethe was a progressive. Yet his approach to improving civilisation was cautious and pragmatic. The texts support Reed's appraisal of Goethe, as they do not imply an automatic aversion to change, but encourage the reader to examine how far the alternative is preferable to the current arrangement. Change must be implemented only after much reflection, and recognise limits to improvement.

[17] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 267.

The historical works are not an exercise in nostalgia, but highlight the importance of historical reflection for determining and contextualising modern society and politics. *Götz* and *Egmont* present aspects of feudalism as venerable, such as the loyalty and personal bond between rulers and subjects, but other practices, such as feuding and (as in *Reineke Fuchs*) duelling, appear brutal and anachronistic. *Reineke Fuchs* gives the least sentimental depiction of medieval society, and conveys the author's fear that its general barbarity and immorality was being resurrected by the Revolution. Goethe shares Kant's belief in the need for the rule of law to complement man's instinctive desire to develop his creativity and pursue his own will.[18] The question he poses the reader in *Götz* and *Egmont* is who should make the law and how should it be implemented. Nor may Goethe be accused of portraying courtly dishonesty, rivalry, and intrigue as the preserve of the eighteenth century. The courts of the thirteenth and sixteenth century are just as beset by secrecy, deception, and general wrongdoing, as exemplified by figures such as Weislingen, Alba, and Antonio and Leonore in *Tasso*. Eugenie and the Knight of *Der Groß-Cophta* have many chivalric virtues, but their inability to adapt to modern society prevents them from turning their good intentions into practice. The texts represent a continuation of long-standing vices into the present, as well as suggestions as to what parts of history could help Goethe's contemporaries. They are not an invitation to replicate the past, but to learn from it.

Goethe's acceptance of the limits of political change derives from a belief in the inherently flawed nature of human beings, as expressed by the Countess of *Die Aufgeregten*: '[…] seitdem ich mit eigenen Augen gesehen habe, daß die menschliche Natur auf einen unglaublichen Grad gedrückt und erniedrigt, aber nicht unterdrückt und vernichtet werden kann' (p. 183). The Countess recognises the inevitability of people acting unjustly and

[18] Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, *Werke*, vol. 6 (1964), pp. 31-50 (pp. 39-40).

selfishly, regardless of their social status or political cause. This makes a mockery of any regime which claims to perfect humanity, and especially one which sees no need for a corrective power, such as Robespierre promised during his speech to the National Convention in 1794. Goethe may have believed that people could better themselves through aesthetic education and intellectual stimulation, but they would still be fallible.

Goethe's political philosophy may, then, be loosely labelled as conservative. It is important, though, to distinguish his 'conservatism' from reaction: Goethe's conservatism is a friend — not an enemy — of the advancement of civilisation (progress). His works are not a rigid defence of the status quo, nor of the status quo ante (as desired by reactionaries). They advocate piecemeal change born primarily out of necessity, with a view to protecting the benefits yielded to society by *certain* traditions, customs, and hereditary institutions. Goethe has much in common with Klaus Epstein's understanding of a reform-minded conservative, who 'has reverence for the past even as he removes surviving anachronisms, and is free of the illusion that utopia can be achieved in a necessarily imperfect world'.[19] The texts show the Revolution to be bringing the world even further from an ideal state, and ruthlessly exposing the human vices which make it imperfect.

'Ein ordentlicher Bürger, der sich ehrlich und fleißig nährt, hat überall so viel Freiheit als er braucht' (pp. 486-87). The form of freedom which Egmont prescribes to the townspeople of Brussels may sound restrictive, but is very liberal in comparison to Alba's version of it: 'Was ist des Freiesten Freiheit? Recht zu tun!' The unflinching confidence of Alba's words resonates throughout the texts — in the pretensions of Breme, the Magister of *Die Aufgeregten*, the Nephew of the *Unterhaltungen*, and the carnage caused by the Revolutionaries in *Herrmann und Dorothea* — and reveals the crux of Goethe's response to

[19] Epstein, *German Conservatism*, p. 9.

the Revolution and wider political thought: opposition to tyranny. Leadership which considers itself the sole source of truth and righteousness is perilous. Authority should accept that it will occasionally err, and that its subjects are entitled to protest when it does so. This is not to say that tyranny cannot be an *effective* way to govern in the short term, and the fates of *Götz* and *Egmont* may indicate that leniency does not work. Yet tyranny is not a *desirable* way to govern, as it does not achieve the goodwill of its subjects, and inspires rather than quells resistance — history shows that the Spanish Crown's attempts to oppress the Netherlands eventually succumb to the more liberal legacy of the executed Egmont. By advising the townspeople to content themselves with a limited stock of freedom, Egmont encourages them to reject specious promises of liberty which will chain them to the will of a single ruler or regime.

Goethe's conception of freedom ensures that no part of the social hierarchy suffers oppression from a power claiming to do ultimate and absolute good, be they *bürgerlich* provincials under an absolutist monarch, or an enfeebled king under a popular uprising. Argument, debate, and negotiation are the best course to wise policy, and create the stable government for people to lead enriching lives, and to cultivate their social relations. Goethe did not consider his views 'so utterly and self-evidently right' as to be above political discussion, but feared a regime which would prevent them from being heard.[20] Supreme in his political thought was the right to express divergent opinions, and a concern for individual liberty within a clear, but not overbearing, legal framework: Goethe's conservatism was rooted in a desire for civilised freedom.

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[20] Lamport, 'Goethe's Political Plays', 42.

This thesis has deliberately avoided in-depth discussion of Goethe's activities as Privy Councillor, and experiences beyond 1803. It does sharpen the focus on the question, however, as to why a benevolent and liberal-minded writer supported the execution of a mother for infanticide, the sale of prisoners as military mercenaries, opposed freedom of the press, and did not condemn the belligerent imperialism of Napoleon. Was Goethe, despite the consistency of the political beliefs expressed in his fictional works, really an opportunist? Did power corrupt him? Did the inner liberal and 'progressive' feel that he could only survive in the political world by acting as an authoritarian reactionary? It seems more likely that Goethe subscribed to repressive measures with much reluctance, and perhaps after being overruled by other members of the Privy Council or signatories of political documents. Whatever the answer to such questions, Goethe's fictional works are not the product of a callous political thinker.

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