

“Ein Glied der liebenswürdigen Familie auszumachen”: Labor, Family, and Werther’s Search for Nature

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Scholarship has certainly discovered that Goethe’s *Werther* has something to do with the family. But these interpretations are curiously bloodless, reverting to supposedly timeless patterns of familial life, or seeing it only in its symbolic permutations as, for example, a heavenly family.¹ Most important, this scholarship ignores a fundamental insight of historical and feminist research: the family cannot be seen in isolation from larger society, the private cannot be divorced from the public. Goethe’s novel – though at first this seems an unlikely thesis – not only recognizes this insight, but stages it. Goethe reveals that family cannot be understood without recourse to social givens – and in particular *work*, the primary activity of the head of the household. I shall attempt to restore Goethe’s novel to a significant eighteenth-century discourse on societal labor, and to place this thematic in the context of the modern discussion of the interface between private and public spheres, particularly as it relates to the (imagined) family.

Near the end of the first version of the novel, the “Herausgeber” makes some remarks that clash rudely with the standard picture of a romantic Werther. The “Verdruss, den er bey der Gesandtschaft gehabt”, we read, gave Werther “eine Abneigung gegen alle Geschäfte und politische Wirksamkeit” (210).² The implication is clearly that before being rebuffed by society in the small German principality, Werther had felt some sort of ‘*Neigung*’ for the kind of political or administrative activity that he carries out at this court. Could it be that Werther’s service in the administration of an absolutist state represents something more than an attempt to escape the impossible passion for Lotte?

The German eighteenth century defined happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) primarily in a social and political sense: the improvement of the human lot, the introduction of Nature into human relations in the widest possible sense. This project of gradual progress toward a natural society – which included empowerment of the middle class – entailed *work* in the public sphere as a means

of reform; it involved a “Suche nach dem Glück, ins Werk gesetzt durch den Verwaltungsstaat” (Stürmer, 1983, 5). But as critics like Peter Weber (1970) have pointed out, the mid-century saw a tendency among intellectuals to withdraw from public activity because of the perceived contamination of this sphere by the dialectics of power and society. The preferred locus of refuge from society and politics was – besides the popular male-male friendships – the “new” family, which showed signs of emerging from outdated patriarchal authority patterns; however, in actuality the old (“primary”) patriarchy was merely replaced with a new (“secondary”) form, designed to assure the authority of the father when the economic basis for this authority (the home as sphere of production) had disappeared (see Hausen, 1976). Thus the illusory nature of such an ideology of retreat became clear to many intellectuals, not least of all because of the impossibility of withdrawing entirely from society; the “new” family proved to be in fact tainted by the power structures of the public sphere (see Habermas, 1962; Grimminger, 1980). So running parallel to “Sezession”, as this movement has come to be called, was an equally persistent, though largely neglected, discourse calling for work within the absolutist state to effect change.³ Though much of this impulse derived from the financially precarious situation of intellectuals, their idealistic motivations should not be underestimated; after all, the influence of the intellectual through public service is an essential feature of the theory of Enlightened Absolutism.

So intellectuals were torn between an ideal of retreat into supposedly “pure” private happiness, located primarily in the family, and the imperatives of political and social efficacy, and they had to weigh the pros and cons of service to the absolutist state. The advantages were tempting. The concept of labor itself had tended during the eighteenth century to lose much of the older connotations of misery endured only for the sake of sustenance, and had begun to move toward the postulate that labor is intrinsic to human existence and independent of religious purpose.⁴ More important, labor was increasingly understood as incorporating the duty to improve society, the “Glückseligkeit” of all people. In addition, the notion that through labor the human being dominates Nature – though it has come under scrutiny by the modern critics of the ‘dialectic of Enlightenment’ – had become firmly established by Bacon, Hobbes and Locke, and inevitably encouraged the project of molding society according to the dictates of Nature and Reason. On a less theoretical level, intellectuals saw that the expanding

bureaucracy often tended to check the power of the sovereign and thus provided an opportunity to realize reforms.⁵ And one of the most important attractions of public service was social mobility. At least in theory, the state apparatus negated social class distinctions in a sphere where training and performance supposedly meant everything, birth nothing. This factor was impelled by the gradual rise in status of the “Gelehrte”, the educated elite, so that the top of this class were sometimes considered equal in status to the nobility.⁶

But actual public service did not live up to some of these ideals. Most significantly, the nobility, which had been increasingly replaced by the trained middle class in state service, fought back tenaciously in the eighteenth century and partly succeeded in reasserting the claims of birth over accomplishments (though nobles also took steps to educate themselves).⁷ Bureaucrats were notoriously ill paid and were often treated not much better than servants.⁸ More daunting was a political system that vested absolute power in one individual and which, both through the arbitrary wielding of that power and the unconditional personal loyalty to the monarch demanded of public servants, inevitably restricted the professionalism and efficacy of zealous reformers (Gerth, 1976, 76). One already finds in this period hints of the criticism of the division of labor and resulting alienation that was increasingly voiced by Moritz, Schiller, and Marx.⁹ When one adds to this mix institutional encrustment, especially the development of a new bureaucratic class that reintroduced the oppression it was designed to eliminate,¹⁰ the ambiguous attitude of eighteenth-century intellectuals toward service in absolutism becomes more than understandable.

Literary criticism has been reluctant to see the sentimental hero of *Werther* in terms of this or similar historically based discourses, and where historical contextualization occurs, it generally either pegs Werther as a heroic, rebellious precursor of socialist humanism (e.g., Müller, 1969) or stresses his entirely “secessionist” impulse (see esp. Scherpe, 1976). Werther is clearly a fictive part of the educated middle class; everyone in the novel agrees that the appropriate career for him – if he is to enter any career – is state service. Everyone except Werther. Like many of his compatriots, he seems thoroughly alienated from the work of the intellectual, from what I shall call “societal” work (which includes public service), and desperately seeks other means of fulfillment – though I shall argue that his thinking and his unique relation to nature lead him to public service as an alternative. It should not be surprising – though it has been overlooked by

critics – that his letters are filled with reflections on the nature of labor.¹¹ In one of these, his narration of the story of a working girl who kills herself, Werther openly portrays human happiness and nature. (“Glück”, “Natur”, 100/101) in direct opposition to labor (“wöchentlich[e] bestimmt[e] Arbeit”, 98/99) from which she seeks to escape in order to find the fulfillment that had been missing in her life.¹² Another passage has broader implications for the societal work of the intellectual: “Es ist ein einförmig Ding um’s Menschengeschlecht. Die meisten verarbeiten den größten Theil der Zeit, um zu leben, und das Bissgen, das ihnen von Freyheit übrig bleibt, ängstigt sie so, dass sie alle Mittel aufsuchen, um’s los zu werden. O Bestimmung des Menschen!” (20/21). The rhetorical flourishes of generalization with which this passage begins and ends show the significance that Werther attaches to labor in his understanding of the human condition. He despairs at the uselessness of work, which most people engage in merely for sustenance; he is alienated from work when it produces no useful change. Significantly, he sees in labor a restriction on freedom, a theme to which he returns again and again; but when he refers to it in his very next letter, it has wider implications. Twice he hints at some sort of quest (“forschend”, “Nachforschungen”) that is related to labor (“thätig”), which ought ideally to have an effect (“Würksamkeit”) beyond merely satisfying needs and prolonging a meaningless life (22/23). As we have seen, “Würksamkeit” is later directly connected with societal or political work, and I think already here Werther laments the condition of intellectuals in the late eighteenth century, who desire to change the world and to discover what lies at the bottom of society, but who are led to quietistic resignation (“Beruhigung”, “Resignation”) because these impulses are frustrated by social and institutional strictures. The image of restriction, of captivity, and the resulting turn inward are rooted in the recognition of the uselessness of specifically societal work.

Because of the folly of societal work, Werther’s activity is entirely concerned with “Bildung”, that cultivation of self-fulfillment, both in an intellectual and an emotional sense (“Herz”), that became such a central element of the conservative project of German Classicism. In this essentially aristocratic role of a person of leisure Werther reveals an appropriately aristocratic scorn of others – i.e., of those of his own middle class – who must engage in societal work and do not have access to the leisure of self-cultivation (he remarks with a trace of contempt that sketching and reading Greek are highly unusual in the area: 20–22/21–23).¹³ And he strikes at what he sees as the vain goals of societal work, ridiculing

“Lumpenbeschäftigungen” and those who sell their activities as “Riesenoperationen” for the benefit of humanity (24/25) – thus rejecting the inflated utopian claims of the public servants of Enlightened Absolutism. Werther can see societal work only as a flight from freedom, not as a means of achieving freedom; he has no sense of *political* freedom as a goal for possible labor (see Hirsch, 1958, 240), for his “thätig[e] und forschend[e] Kräfte”.

In connection with his rejection of societal work, Werther repeatedly employs images of pseudo-idyllic enclosure – the gardens produced by work – as signs of the bourgeois self-limitation engendered by societal work. “[D]ie gelassenen Kerls” with their “Gartenhäuschen, Tulpenbeete, und Krautfelder” are associated with a “Philister, ein Mann, der in einem öffentlichen Amte steht” (28/29). In a typical passage, Werther remarks scornfully “wie artig jeder Bürger, dem’s wohl ist, sein Gärtchen zum Paradiese zuzustutzen weis”, but the continuation of the sentence draws a parallel between this burgher and Werther himself: whoever observes such a bourgeois idyll, he says, “ja! der ist still und bildet auch seine Welt aus sich selbst, und ist auch glücklich, weil er ein Mensch ist” (24/25). This connection between Werther and the working Philistine is crucial. Werther rejects the idyllic enclosure that results from societal work, especially since, in the imagery of the geometric French garden,¹⁴ it is closely allied to domination of nature. And yet the “auch” in this passage intimates that *Werther’s own creation of a world from his imagination is related to work that produces a different sort of “artificial” world.* This impression is confirmed in the beginning of the very next letter when Werther describes his own idyll with much the same signifiers as the burgher’s “Gärtchen” (“Hüttchen”, 26/27). Werther thus defends the *work of imagination*, which is not materialistic or self-serving like the work of the burgher; it is supposedly uncontaminated by the world of society and power; and yet it is analogous to societal work and strangely parallel to it in its instrumentalization.

The concrete product of Werther’s work of imagination is the patriarchal idyll centered around the *family*, which, in accordance with the eighteenth-century trend mentioned earlier, he sees as standing *outside* society and its dehumanizing labor. When Werther speaks of “die patriarchalische Idee” coming to life again around him in the same letter in which he asks himself “ob die warme himmlische Phantasie in meinem Herzen ist, die mir alles rings umher so paradisisch macht” (16/17), we are given to understand that his imagination

has created this idyll, just as when he implies that he “bildet [...] seine Welt aus sich selbst” (24/25). It may seem strange that it is this idyll which expresses for Werther most satisfactorily the “Einschränkung” (56/57) that he rejects – using the same word – when it refers to societal work (108–110/109–111).¹⁵ But this connection suggests that Werther compensates for and legitimizes his alienation from societal work with the work of imagination.

Within the more conventional understanding of labor, the only sort of work that Werther finds acceptable corresponds to the patriarchal paradise: what we would call “subsistence farming” – the growing of one’s own food, a concept in which Werther grotesquely distorts the reality of agricultural work and indicates the irreality of his familial idyll. In the central portrayal of this idyll (21 June 1771), Werther reflects on the folly of seeking fulfillment in “der Ferne” – analogous to societal work¹⁶ – and in an imaginary return to the patriarchal Eden he discovers happiness in subsistence labor that sustains an imaginary family: “Und so sehnt sich der unruhigste Vagabund zuletzt wieder nach seinem Vaterlande, und findet in seiner Hütte, an der Brust seiner Gattin, in dem Kreise seiner Kinder und der Geschäfte zu ihrer Erhaltung, all die Wonne, die er in der weiten öden Welt vergebens suchte” (56/57). These “Geschäfte” can hardly be other than the sort that Werther then describes in his own idyll at “Wahlheim”: this well-to-do intellectual picks his own peas in the inn’s garden and cooks them himself, all the while reading in the *Odyssey* and comparing himself to Penelope’s suitors, and then claiming in unintentionally comic earnestness that he is weaving “die Züge patriarchalischen Lebens” into his way of life – “ohne Affektation”! The affectation that the irony of this passage confirms¹⁷ goes even further: he identifies himself with the laboring classes when he revels in growing his own cabbage (58/59). Two factors are important here. First, his imagery reveals that Werther finds in this sort of “work” the union with Nature that he feels is missing from conventional societal work of the burgher (we shall return to this element). Second, this attempt to merge the world of Nature and labor normally carried out by the poor into a patriarchal idyll reveals Werther’s own profound alienation from societal work. This alienation results in a two-sided blindness: to Werther’s own nature as intellectual, and to the oppressive reality of poverty among the classes he idolizes as repositories of his privatistic ideal.¹⁸ Werther repeatedly attempts to ignore the adverse effects of poverty that he describes in his narration; for example, he imagines “der Unglückliche”, evidently a pauper, supposedly suffering “unver-

drossen” under his burden (24/25). More telling is the episode at Wahlheim when he finds two poor boys sitting on the ground; appropriately ensconced on the very image of peasant labor, a plow;¹⁹ Werther sketches them; he manages to incorporate other artifacts of back-breaking peasant labor (“Tennenthor”, “Wagenräder”) into his artistic vision – which he then pronounces a product of “Natur”! (26–28/27–29) When the boys’ mother awakens Werther from his two-hour reverie of “mahlerische Empfindungen”, the obvious signs of poverty (broken lid on basket, children fighting for “die Scharre des Brey’s”) begin to stand out, and when social problems intrude ever more forcefully on his consciousness (the husband has left to make sure he is not cheated out of his inheritance, and the wife fears “Unglück”), Werther flees, bestowing on the children a few coins – the money that is for the poor the all too obvious reminder that he is privileged not to have to work for it (30–32/31–33). In a typically “bürgerlich” psychological maneuver, Werther says that the poor people’s imagined lack of consciousness and their calm persistence help him to come to terms with existence (32/33). But if Werther sees in their life “glückliche Gelassenheit” he has seen very little, he has not heard her laments or seen the hints of suffering. He is consoled by poverty because it represents for him obliteration of consciousness. His rationalizations bespeak a maneuver of resignation, of “Beruhigung” (22/23), that is indicative of the middle-class intellectual who resists the necessity of change and the societal work that it entails. The economic substrate of this maneuver is found in Werther’s full awareness of the “Vortheile” that he has because of class differences (130/131). The gulf between social classes, between Werther and the poor whose labor he so desperately idealizes, is brought out from the beginning; the poor show obvious discomfort at his patronizing gestures, and Werther has difficulty overcoming this alienation (18/19; 32/33). Class dynamics enter from the beginning into his understanding of his existence and his attitude toward labor. His work of imagination builds up an idyllic patriarchy with idealized subsistence work, and represses both the alienation that gives rise to this idealization and the insight into the suffering of the working classes in the real world.

Werther integrates this transformed labor into his idyll not only by envisioning the goal of male work as the “Erhaltung” of his family; female “Arbeit”, too, – i.e., housework and child care – is explicitly reduced to and transfigured as “thätige Liebe” (90/91).²⁰ Lotte, whose work Werther describes in these terms, initially represents for him much more (or much less?) than merely the romantic

partner or sexual object she is usually taken to be²¹ – she is an image of *family*, and is defined as such repeatedly in the first part of the novel. She is the concrete fulfillment of his (literary²²) “patriarchalische Idee”.²³ Werther uses the language usually reserved for romantic love to describe Lotte in her family setting: “Welch eine Wonne das für meine Seele ist, sie in dem Kreise der lieben muntern Kinder, ihrer acht Geschwister zu sehen!” (38/39) He not only describes Lotte with the children in this paradisaical idyllic family scene as “das reizendste Schauspiel, [...] das ich jemals gesehen habe” (40/41); his first conversation with Lotte launches Werther into ecstasy precisely because Lotte reveals herself to be just as enthusiastic about her Wakefieldian familial utopia as Werther is. Her “häuslich Leben”, she says, is “freylich kein Paradis” – though Werther imagines it to be! – “aber doch im Ganzen eine Quelle unsäglicher Glückseligkeit”, and she solipsistically enjoys only literature that celebrates this idyll. Werther’s extreme response to these remarks – he loses contact with the world around him (44/45) – is understandable only when we realize how much emotional capital he has invested in finding “Glückseligkeit” in the patriarchal refuge that his work of imagination has constructed. And after Albert appears in the novel, Werther defines his now-lost paradise in terms of *family*, not of a simple romantic relationship with Lotte: “Ein Glied der liebenswürdigen Familie auszumachen, von dem Alten [= Lotte’s father] geliebt zu werden wie ein Sohn, von den Kleinen wie ein Vater und von Lotten –” (90/91).²⁴ Though Lotte is the sister of these children, she speaks of them as her own children (118/119), since her dying mother exhorted her to be their mother (120/121, 90/91), and Werther correspondingly imagines himself as their father. He therefore finds a ready-made family, into which he merely has to fantasize himself, making reproduction or sexuality unnecessary.²⁵ Werther can thus repress the sexual aspect of his relationship to Lotte (temporarily); for example, he declares: “Sie ist mir heilig. Alle Begier schweigt in ihrer Gegenwart” (78/79). What Werther’s work of imagination creates is the “new” family of the eighteenth century. One of its primary characteristics is that children are much more highly valued than before. The clash of older and newer paradigms is apparent when we confront the extreme freedom that Lotte and Werther afford to the children (e.g., 40–42/41–43) with the attitude of the physician, who represents the stereotypical older view of childrearing (58/59). It is only appropriate that the children and Lotte’s father show extreme grief at Werther’s death, and they accompany his casket (264–266/265–267).

Werther's vision of familial refuge rests in the end on a delusion, since it is a product of his work of imagination and stubbornly resists reality. It overlooks above all the reality of work that makes Lotte's family life possible – not least of all the work which Lotte's father engages in to create this “paradise”; for it is only *before* Werther meets Lotte that we hear clearly that her father is the “fürstlicher Amtmann” (22/23); *after* he meets Lotte, he fully assents to the father's fanciful description of his rural home as an “Einsiedelei” (38/39), i.e., divorced from society, and Werther never again mentions the father's work.²⁶ The same pattern occurs with respect to Albert. When Werther first hears of Albert, he learns that he is away applying for a lucrative job (“eine ansehnliche Versorgung”, 38/39), but he appears indifferent to this information. Various critics have pointed out that Werther deludes himself by ignoring his temporarily absent rival. However, Werther also ignores the element of *work* that Albert represents.²⁷ Werther's work of imagination excludes the work of the present ‘pater familias’ (Lotte's father) and exploits the temporary, work-related absence of the future one (Albert) to transform the household into a sphere supposedly autonomous from social dynamics.

Werther's work of imagination has a larger purpose for him. Its task is to provide the natural social relations that he misses in life, and is thus integral to his illusory *search for Nature*; it artificially isolates Lotte and the family as nature. Soon after Werther's arrival in the “unangenehm” city (12/13), he retreats to an “elective” rural home (Wahlheim), with its “unaussprechliche Schönheit der Natur” (12/13) and patriarchal reminiscences. Described with the language of intimate domesticity (“vertraulich”, 26/27), his elective home, Wahlheim, and soon his real elective home in its natural splendor, Lotte's nearby idyll, become for him the *natural* home he feels he never had. For Werther, whose mother has moved from a rural town to the imprisonment of an “unerträgliche Stadt” on the death of his father (150/151), has thus lost along with his father both family and nature;²⁸ he regains both in Lotte, whose father, in a mirror image of Werther's mother, has moved from the “Amthaus” in the city to a “Jagdhaus” in the country (22/23) after the death of Lotte's mother. Werther's fatal error is the assumption that the “Amt” has been left behind with the “Amthaus”, that Nature reigns supreme in his new family.

Albert's arrival destroys the idyll that Werther has constructed. It introduces the element that had until then seemed absent and which according to the ideol-

ogy of secession is absent from Werther's idyll in principle: the sphere of society, *societal* work. The reality of the household as the primary legal and social unit in feudal society contrasts painfully with the timeless utopia in Werther's imagination. From the beginning, Albert is identified by analogy with the sort of burgher I analyzed (p. 87), whose idyll Werther finds artificial and meaningless: like these "gelassn[e] Kerls" (28/29), Albert, too, is "gelassen" (84/85, 190/191), the supreme signifier of bourgeois self-satisfaction and an affirmative, quietistic attitude, and is even associated with "Gärtgen" (86/87), the signifier of the burgher's private paradise that supposedly affords him refuge from the sphere of work and society. Work is the main feature that both characterizes Albert and distinguishes him from Werther. Albert is clearly prefigured by the "Mann, der in einem öffentlichen Amte steht" but who gives poor advice about love; Werther admits that a young man who listens to such advice would do well in state service, but not in love (26–28/27–29). Albert challenges everything Werther believes about labor and social interaction: "Ordnung" is one of the words consistently associated with him (38/39, 90/91), and his "Emsigkeit in Geschäften" knows no equal (90/91). For Werther, Albert represents *Unnatur* which reigns over the *Natur* of Lotte and his patriarchal refuge, the embodiment of society, repression, and lack of freedom. Albert's duty, to which Lotte's mother exhorted him on her deathbed, is to make Lotte happy, but we shall see that his societal work prevents this – and thus that Werther is not the only one to fail to perceive the intrusion of work in the private familial refuge.

Only after Albert's arrival does Werther's relation to nature change so radically that he now sees in it only an "ewig verschlingendes, ewig wiederkauendes Ungeheur" (108/109). Albert's presence has made Werther unable to perform the work of imagination that 'created' a natural paradise for him: he has lost "[d]as volle warme Gefühl meines Herzens an der lebendigen Natur, [...] das rings umher die Welt mir zu einem Paradiese schuf" (104/105). In the lengthy description that follows we find that what has really shattered Werther's idyll is not external nature, but the domination of people over nature: "[...] und die Menschen dann sich in Häuslein zusammen sichern, und sich annisten, und herrschen in ihrem Sinne über die weite Welt!" (106/107). Clearly it is Albert who triggers this reflection on what Werther had earlier criticized as the "Bürger" who "sein Gärtchen zum Paradiese zuzustuzzen weis" (24/25) in his domination over nature; the import of this imagery is that Werther recognizes that the soci-

etal worker Albert has replaced him in the patriarchal idyll, and this means that the idyll must be destroyed by the dynamics of domination and societal labor. It is only natural that Werther loses his ability to employ the work of imagination to create his paradise of nature: “Ich hab keine Vorstellungskraft, kein Gefühl an der Natur [...]” (108/109). The destruction of the patriarchal idyll means also that Werther begins to have an awareness of the sexual element of his relationship to Lotte that he had previously denied: “[...] ich wuste, dass ich keine Prätensionen auf sie zu machen hatte, machte auch keine – Heist das, insofern es möglich ist, bey so viel Liebenswürdigkeit nicht zu begehren” (86/87); erotic dreams complete the realization (108/109).

With the patriarchal paradise crashing down around him, Werther decides to enter the world of societal work. His public service is usually ignored in criticism of the novel, or treated with palpable embarrassment as a sort of aberration; in any case his *commitment* to service to the state is almost always negated, since many critics portray the heroic Werther as having died “ohne seine Seele durch Kompromisse mit der schlechten Wirklichkeit der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft zu beschmutzen.”²⁹ It is essential to see this service in the context of Werther’s attitude toward labor and its place in the search for nature, family, and happiness. When his idyll is destroyed, its underpinnings become clear to Werther: not only the sexuality he had repressed, but his alienation from work and the futility of avoiding societal work appropriate to the intellectual. Werther ultimately comes to the point where he realizes that work can provide satisfaction, albeit the illusory one of offering the worker something to look forward to each day (108–110/109–111).

To a certain extent, it is folly to speculate on Werther’s thoughts as he takes up a government position, but the novel gives certain indicators. The motif structure of the novel to this point suggests that in public service Werther seeks the establishment of ‘natural’ social relations, the reconquest of society by Nature – expressing that faith in the capacity of absolutism to establish a just society that most critics (e.g., Hohendahl, 1972, 202) see as characterizing Albert, but not Werther. On the shattering of his familial paradise in the “Jagdhaus”, Werther adopts a more traditionally Enlightenment strategy of introducing nature into all social life, not just his own; he reverts to the hidden discourse of socio-politically productive activity when he discovers the intrusion of society into his idyll. Werther himself hardly speaks of his sociopolitical ambitions, reflecting

the uneasiness felt by a whole generation of young men (including the young Goethe in Weimar) at the feeling of being “Fürstendiener”. While working, he expresses his vacillation by insisting that he will fail, and he calls the position a “Posten, [...] der nicht nach meinem Sinne war” (140/141), insisting that *others* talked him into it (128/129, 140/141) and that a laborer’s work is more useful than his own (128–130/129–131). But the fictive ‘editor’ of the novel clearly points to Werther’s ideals in the passage quoted at the beginning of this essay; it was radically altered in the second version and has thus escaped most critical discussion (210/211). In the 1774 version, the fictive editor assigns to the “Verdruss” a crucial role in the further course of the action (see Müller, 1969, 232). In the 1787 version, it is embedded into language that, considered carefully, is probably also meant to refer to Werther’s societal work with the Ambassador (“in seinem wirksamen Leben”), but vagueness and the addition of a statement that could be taken very generally (“alles was ihm sonst misslungen war, was ihn je gekränkt hatte”) avoid the single-minded specificity of the first version. In the first version the “Verdruss” results in an aversion to all work, but the addition of the phrase regarding state service (“politische Wirksamkeit”) gives an impression that he has soured on *this* sort of work, not just – as in the later version – “irgendeine Handhabe”. And the conjunction “Daher” establishes much more decisively than in the Weimar version the causal link between the “Verdruss”, the aversion to societal work, and the resulting passion and suicide.

One of the most important implications of the first version of this passage rests in the indication that the incident at the count’s house gave Werther an “Abneigung gegen [...] politische Wirksamkeit”, so that an “Abneigung” must have replaced some sort of “Neigung” for “politische Wirksamkeit”, contrary to the assumptions of almost all critics.³⁰ And we have another witness to this enthusiasm; the minister of state who gives Werther a mild official admonishment for insubordination to the “Gesandter” nevertheless sends him a *private* letter in which, Werther says, he respects “meine überspannte Ideen von Würksamkeit, von Einfluss auf andre, von Durchdringen in Geschäften” (138/139).³¹ Any sort of political enthusiasm fits awkwardly into our received image of the sentimental Werther; the reason for this image, of course, is that it is only in this passage that Werther himself speaks about something with which he feels so uncomfortable – though in his praise of Count C’s “Thätigkeit für’s gemeine Leben” (128/129) he also hints at an interest in public service. After all, when he first mentioned

the possibility of working for the Ambassador, he rejected it firmly because of the “Subordination” it would entail, and because of the uselessness of any such “Aktivität”: he had pointed clearly to his notion that his ‘occupation’, the work of imagination, was also active, creative work, the only meaningful work:

[...] bin ich jetzt nicht auch aktiv? und ist's im Grund nicht einerley: ob ich Erbsen zähle oder Linsen? Alles in der Welt läuft doch auf eine Lumperey hinaus, und ein Kerl, der um anderer willen, ohne dass es seine eigene Leidenschaft ist, sich um Geld, oder Ehre, oder sonst was, abarbeitet, ist immer ein Thor. (80/81)

Here Werther does not reject societal work unconditionally; he implies that if a “Leidenschaft” did motivate him, he would perhaps work; and his “überspannte Ideen von Würksamkeit, von Einfluss auf andre, von Durchdringen in Geschäften” certainly hint at such a “Leidenschaft”. But we can still understand when after such histrionics he wishes not to write about his subsequent step into “Subordination” as satisfying or useful or freely chosen, and this is why he speaks about these motivations only in the passage where he lets slip the hint of his “überspannte Ideen”.

One could object that this enthusiasm, this “Leidenschaft” only reflects what Lotte later calls Werther’s “unbezwänglich haftend[e] Leidenschaft für alles, das Sie einmal anfassen” (220/221) – i.e., the content of this passion changes with circumstances and is irrelevant to Werther’s inner self. However, his “passion” follows a pattern established early in the novel and pointing to the basis for Werther’s political activity. In the first place, Werther is a keen social critic from the very beginning of the novel, as others have noted. We have seen that Werther’s awareness of the social and political injustice that he had previously ignored or avoided begins to increase after Albert’s arrival. It is only in a dispute with Albert, for example, that Werther’s once affirmative social attitude changes sufficiently for him to use in an argument a highly political example about rebellion against a tyrant (96/97).³² This awareness leads naturally to an attempt to help eradicate social and political ills through public service. And his social criticism is combined with a defense of the existing order as a means of effecting change. In this same dispute with Albert, Werther sees a glimmer of hope in *laws*, which, though “kaltblütig[e] Pedanten”, nevertheless “lassen sich rühren” in such exceptional cases as robbery because of poverty (94/95);³³ in this argument we can detect the voice of a committed jurist. It is only logical that Werther sees in societal work, in laws, the possibility of rebuilding on a grand scale the idyll of nature that he had

seen destroyed in Lotte's house. The exact content of these plans for "politische Wirksamkeit" remains vague, but the enthusiasm is palpable.

Werther is now willing to accept temporarily all the "Unnatur" and "Cereemoniel" (130–132/131–133), and particularly the "Subordination" he had earlier insisted he would not accept; his perception that he has relinquished freedom is reflected in the vocabulary of enclosure and captivity ("Joch", 128/129; "Galeere", 130/131; "Käfig", 136/137). In his new position he issues forth all the topoi of criticism of the court and of "die fatalen bürgerlichen Verhältnisse" that have encouraged various critics to brand him a revolutionary *avant la lettre*, and yet Werther is working for change *within the state* as he pronounces this criticism. But he is willing to sacrifice his freedom to service only under certain conditions. First, he must ultimately have some political effect. This condition shows promise of being fulfilled by Werther's conviction that the lower bureaucracy has a great deal of power to effect reforms, a conviction he shared with many of Goethe's contemporaries:³⁴ "Wie mancher König wird durch seinen Minister, wie mancher Minister durch seinen Sekretär regiert [Werther is himself a "Sekretär"]. Und wer ist dann der Erste? der, dünkt mich, der die andern übersieht, und so viel Gewalt oder List hat, ihre Kräfte und Leidenschaften zu Ausführung seiner Pläne anzuspannen" (132/133). But Werther also counts on the patronage of enlightened superiors, and it is clear from the dismay of the minister and the prince regent on Werther's resignation (148/149), as well as the private letter from the minister quoted above, that he in fact has very powerful patrons. The minister reveals clearly in his letter that Werther fits into his plans; Werther is useful to enlightened reformers precisely because he shares their aspirations. – Werther's second condition for remaining in his job (and at court, the necessary evil associated with his position) is that he find a repository of nature there that will make his task bearable. This condition seems to be met by Graf C. and Fräulein von B.; she retains "sehr viele Natur mitten in dem steifen Leben" (130/131), among "dem fremden, meinem Herzen ganz fremden Volke" at court (134/135). In this way, Werther can retain "Bildung" along with "Arbeit", an ideal reflected in his description of Graf C: "[...] ich habe [...] niemand gekannt, dem es so geglückt wäre, seinen Geist zu erweitern [...] und doch die Thätigkeit für's gemeine Leben zu behalten" (128/129). As in his patriarchal idyll, Werther believes that he can isolate private fulfillment from society and societal work; but this time he believes that he can himself partake in both worlds.

Werther's modest attempt at building a political idyll is shattered no less surely than his familial idyll by the intrusion of reality. Significantly, he does not leave court because of his dissatisfaction with the Ambassador, as critics like Hirsch (1958, 243) believe; these difficulties had been overcome, and Werther even feels new energy (138/139). Obviously, the affront in the Count's house has something to do with his resignation, as the editor indicated, but in what way? Werther recovers quickly from the ejection itself, with the help of refuge in *Nature* and in Homer, his patriarchal 'source'; afterwards, he is content: "Das war all gut" (142/143). It is not the incident itself, but the *reaction of others* that disturbs him: when he learns that gossip of the ejection has spread through the town, he is dejected: "Da fieng mir das Ding erst an zu wurmen" (144/145). What does all this mean?

The personal aspect of the affront to Werther should not be ignored; as the 'editor' indicates, Werther's honor has been damaged. But Werther ultimately fails because he does not recognize the nature of societal work; he learns that "Unnatur" will always dominate "Natur", that personal relations cannot be separated from work, the private sphere from the public. Werther's description of Fräulein von B., "Natur mitten in dem steifen Leben" (130/131), already alerts us to the dangerous encirclement of Nature; another warning is contained in the artificially literary nature of his staged refuge in Nature with her: "wir verphantasiren manche Stunde in ländlichen Scenen von ungemischter Glückseligkeit" (136/137; cf. Hirsch, 1958, 248). And sure enough, the "Unnatur" of social prejudice defeats the "Natur" of both Count C. and Fräulein von B.³⁵ The incident at the count's house, which precipitates this crisis, shows the entwinement of public and private spheres. As I pointed out, the nobility jealously guarded their claim on high government positions; middle-class intellectuals felt constantly threatened in the competition for fewer positions, the struggle between nobility of birth ("Geburtsadel") and 'nobility' of achievement ("Verdienstadel"). But Werther seems unaware of the root of this prejudice in competition for political position. He notices that people at court are inordinately concerned "wie sie um einen Stuhl weiter hinauf bey Tische sich einschieben wollen" (132/133), but he is wrong to attribute this jockeying to a shallow love of "Ceremoniel"; the seating order at courtly tables was a direct reflection of bureaucratic status and power.³⁶ While these "kleine Verdrüsslichkeiten" detract from more important work (132/133), they were part of the institutional framework of late absolutism.

Werther is entirely unprepared for them. This explains some of his reaction to the episode at the count's house. Here the nobility employ social ostracism as compensation for their inferiority in *work*, or at least to retain an advantage over the upstart "Bürgerlicher". Werther's enemies at court explicitly declare that his supposed rebelliousness against class differences stems from his feeling of *intellectual* superiority – and in the context of an absolutist court in the eighteenth century, this means his superior qualification for a court position based on education and intellect, not birth: "[...] ich höre, dass meine Neider nun triumphiren und sagen: Da sähe man's, wo's mit den Uebermüthigen hinausgieng, die sich *ihres bissgen Kopfs* überhüben und glaubten, *sich darum über alle Verhältnisse hinaussetzen zu dürfen* [...]" (144/145; emphasis mine) – we can assume that this "Lärm" about Werther's ejection comes from the nobility, since it is Fräulein von B. who reports it (144–146/145–147; see Löwenthal, 1974, 167). And it is the recognition that these noble "Schurken", "die schlechten Kerls" will triumph which twice drives him to thoughts of suicide (144–146/145–147). Whether it is merely Werther's 'honor' that is involved in his decision to leave court, or whether he senses that his 'political' position at court has been weakened by his insistence on natural social relations, in the bureaucracy and outside it: in either case, Werther is a victim not primarily of class differences, but of the nature of societal work (decisively affected by class differences, of course) in absolutism. As a result, his efficacy as a public servant, his "politische Wirksamkeit", has been irremediably diminished. His "Uebermuth und Geringschätzung andrer" (146/147) – because of the superiority of intellect over birth – has been repudiated, and thus his position in the bureaucracy has been weakened. He may consciously leave his position because of the affront to his honor, but objectively speaking his 'mission' in government has been irrevocably damaged.

Where does the blame for Werther's failure lie? Most critics place the burden on the nature of the absolutist state, and on class dynamics. Neither can be rightly discounted. But the pattern we have seen developing in the novel suggests that perhaps Werther is himself also at fault for the failure of his mission. As in his first idyll in Lotte's house, Werther tries to insist that the world of societal work can be divorced from the world of private happiness and self-fulfillment. In other words, he nurses the illusion that individuals can achieve happiness before society is reformed. Furthermore, Werther also continues to overlook the true nature of work, as he had earlier done in the case of the laboring classes. He is

enthusiastically devoted to high-minded ideals, but the institutional realities of the everyday political struggles for power and influence within the bureaucracy elude him. This is perhaps surprising, when, as we saw, Werther is all too aware of the nobility's contempt for the bourgeoisie. But his self-delusion goes so deep that he fails to anticipate the dominance of these motives either in the sphere of work (his "Neider") or in his private refuge. In fact, Werther's *self-destructive* impulse, which has been seen by several critics (and Lotte herself) in Werther's choice of a married woman as the vessel of his romantic idyll,³⁷ is active here, too. Why does Werther choose his two friends exclusively from the nobility?³⁸ Perhaps he subconsciously undermines his mission from the beginning – partly through the sort of scorn of his own class that we saw earlier. But he also seems truly ignorant of the reach of social dynamic into private affairs. *Both* tendencies, naiveté and self-destructiveness, are shown by crucial passages in the first version revealing Werther's reasons for staying too long in the count's house and triggering the crisis. After seeing that Fräulein von B. conformed to the behavior of her class, Werther seems truly baffled and stays behind to observe her longer: "[...] [ich] wollte gehn, und doch blieb ich, weil ich intrigürt war, das Ding näher zu beleuchten" (142).³⁹ However, he admits not only to bafflement, but to masochism (while attempting to externalize it): "[...] ein böser Genius hat mich zurückgehalten" (142/143). Werther *forces* the confrontation by picking friends from the nobility and by putting them to the test. He comes face to face with his own self-destructiveness, but he is also confronted with the depths of his illusion that social ills cannot contaminate his private enclave. Paradoxically, it is this confrontation, this baffled investigation of the taint, that causes him to be ejected and thus causes his "Neider" to lash out at him and so initiates in Werther the *further* insight that he has artificially isolated his political goals, his "überspannte Ideen", from the reality of labor. Werther makes a discovery similar to his earlier experience with Albert: personal self-fulfillment cannot ripen in isolation from society and its malaise – labor in one case, the social conventions propelled partly by competition for scarce labor in the other case. The ejection from the count's house and Werther's subsequent resignation from his position are thus intimately related to his earlier tendency to seek refuge from the world of labor, and to idealize the nature of labor itself. Paradoxically, this occurs after Werther has made an enthusiastic commitment to societal labor as a means of producing social and political change. But he has retained his dogged illusion that while working

toward a future “Glück” and “Natur” on a societal scale, he can escape from the present intrusion of “Unnatur” into the private sphere of “ungemischt[e] Glückseligkeit”, of “viele Natur mitten in dem steifen Leben” (136/137, 130/131). The destruction of this illusion spells the end of Werther’s societal work.

The eternal question of whether Werther or society is to blame for his malaise can thus be addressed with respect to the “Verdruss” at court, which the editor connects directly to Werther’s suicide. Of course, Werther’s position at court has, *objectively* speaking, been made untenable, since his first condition for remaining on the job – what the editor calls “politische Wirksamkeit” – has been destroyed by the actions of his rivals. The same goes for his second condition, the viability of a private refuge from society and work. But in both cases, Werther shares the blame with society. He has himself triggered the machinations of his rivals by deliberately choosing aristocratic friends and failing to envision – or by testing – their participation in social and political dynamic; his perplexed “beleuchten” of their submission to this dynamic in the house of Graf C. exhibits not only naiveté, but also sabotage of his own position. His expected meteoric rise “zum Geheimderath und Gesandten” (148/149), to the top of state service, is halted. Werther can thus be faulted for his idealism, his lack of insight into the nature of society. But it would be unfair to fault him for those social ills themselves. To be sure, there is an implied criticism of those intellectuals whose privatistic ideals are too pure to allow them to bring about the change that would eliminate those ills. The paradox is that Werther must be willing to give up his illusions, to relinquish “Natur”, in order to have “politische Würksamkeit”, to work to overcome the social and political “Unnatur” that gives rise to those illusions. But whether this is possible at all remains a central question of political philosophy. In the case of the absolutistic state that Werther is serving, the tables are heavily weighted against him; the very idea of reform within absolutism (i.e., the concept of enlightened absolutism itself) was fraught with illusion. His visions and his delusions are thus typical of Goethe’s time. Werther is fired by a great deal of just the sort of idealism, of ultimately utopian goals that drove large numbers of intellectuals into public service in eighteenth-century Germany; but his illusions of the separation between public and private spheres were also typical of at least a whole generation of the ‘secessionist’ school of *Empfindsamkeit*.

It is important to take seriously Werther’s ideals, but also the fictive editor’s indication in the first version that the shattering of these utopian ideals leads

almost directly to Werther's indulgence in passion and his subsequent suicide (210). When Werther returns from his work at court to be near Lotte, he is confronted almost violently with the destroyed patriarchal idyll. Its collapse is mirrored by the destruction of everything else he had identified with nature and patriarchy: the nut-trees have been wantonly cut down, Wahlheim has been flooded, and the family whom he had associated with rural happiness fails to gain a rightful inheritance and loses a son, one of the boys Werther sketched (and again, Werther is unable to cope with this misfortune of the poor: 158/159). The episode of the nut-trees⁴⁰ ends with a poignant indication of the fate of Werther's 'political' thinking: he instinctively wishes for justice through the political means of enlightened absolutism, and fantasizes having the political power to carry out his wishes: "O wenn ich Fürst wäre! Ich wollte [...]". But then he again reveals the insight he has gained into the futility of expecting Nature to reign among those who really rule society: "Fürst! Ja wenn ich Fürst wäre, was kümmern mich die Bäume in meinem Lande" (170/171). Nature seems shattered; because of the defeat of Nature on a social and political level, he can no longer create the idyllic natural paradise that he could earlier: "o wenn da diese herrliche Natur so starr vor mir steht wie ein lakirt Bildgen, und all die Wonne keinen Tropfen Seligkeit aus meinem Herzen herauf in das Gehirn pumpen kann [...]" (178/179) – one can hardly imagine a more effective image of the chasm between Nature and the reality of society.

Thus Werther has suffered the destruction of two fantasies: the construction of a 'natural' patriarchal idyll autonomous of the world of the state and societal work; and the dream of helping establish natural social relations through the state bureaucracy and through societal work. We have seen that the narrator indicates that Werther's frustration at court leads not only to a rejection of "politische Wirksamkeit", but of all other work, too ("alle Geschäfte", 210; cf. 1787 ed.: "irgendeine Handhabe", 211), which is entirely consistent with what we know of Werther, since we saw that he must believe in his work, must even have a 'passion' for it – otherwise he considers himself a 'fool' (80/81). And Werther is convinced of the folly of the only kinds of work he feels a passion for: subsistence work in the now-shattered patriarchal idyll, and societal work in the state. So it is understandable that we now hear him express again his previous ideas of the uselessness of all work: "Die Welt ist überall einerley, auf Müh und Arbeit, Lohn und Freude; aber was soll mir das?" (190/191)

Werther, however, has a tenacious capacity for delusion, and he has left one alternative unfulfilled. The reality of society and especially of work has twice intruded on his privatistic realm, and he now undertakes an effort to wall off an even smaller enclave. It is built from the ruins of the first (patriarchal) one, the family, and reduced to the smallest possible social unit: passion between man and woman. His present relationship to Lotte is as different from his earlier one as a passionate love is from a patriarchal ideal. Consequently, the familial element, in particular the children, essentially drop out of his consciousness.⁴¹ His former desire to merge with Lotte's *family* ("Ein Glied der liebenswürdigen Familie auszumachen [...] [90/91]) contrasts sharply with his sexual desire for an isolated Lotte in the second part of the novel: "Ich ihr Mann! [...] Sie meine Frau!" (156/157). He has reduced his grand visions to one woman: "[...] nichts anders kenne, noch weis, noch habe als sie" (160/161). Consequently, the awareness of the sexual nature of his desire for Lotte now breaks through to his consciousness in dreams (196/215), completing the process that had begun with Albert's arrival; sexuality (and at most a *heavenly* family – see Sørensen 1997, 122) now bears all the burden of utopian expectations that the family had earlier borne. Lotte, who had earlier been little more than a character in his patriarchal idyll, again plays the role of image for Werther rather than a real woman; in her function as yet another concretization of his search for natural human relations, she corresponds closely to what Inge Stephan calls the "Frauenbild" of men: "Das Bild der Frau ist Wunsch- und Erinnerungsbild eines anderen, besseren Lebens, es ist der gemeinsam geträumte Traum von Männern, die, ernüchtert vom gesellschaftlichen Alltag, einem Ideal nachjagen, das nur in ihren Köpfen existiert" (1985, 4). Thus it is not surprising to find that Werther repeatedly employs images of *possession* of Lotte, always in the form of a struggle with Albert,⁴² since Werther must wrest Lotte from society into his private enclave of passion. Lotte becomes the reified object of his last flight from labor and society.

If Werther's patriarchal secession gained its historical impetus from 'Empfindsamkeit' and his political mission from the Enlightenment, his new-found idyll corresponds closely to what Jürgen Bolten (1985, 268) has described as a gesture common to the early Sturm und Drang: having 'seceded' from societal work, but sensing the contamination of the familial idyll by the social sphere, this generation reduced the idealized refuge to the sphere of the lone individual, thereby presumably excluding encroachments of work and the public sphere. Of

course, the conscious side of Werther recognizes from the beginning that his is an idyll that is doomed to failure and destruction. The final recognition of futility, the illusory nature of this idyll created by the work of imagination, drives him to suicide. And again, the narrator gives a decidedly social interpretation to this death; Werther's activity, he says, does not have the goal that work provides, does not achieve a social purpose, and must destroy itself in a nihilistic implosion of energy: "Das ewige einerley eines traurigen Umgangs mit dem liebenswürdigen und geliebten Geschöpfe, dessen Ruhe er störte, *das stürmende Abarbeiten seiner Kräfte, ohne Zweck und Aussicht*, drängten ihn endlich zu der schrecklichen That" (210, emphasis mine). Contrary to Werther's own opinion, the narrator seems to indicate that he is not made for passion, but for work that has more social purpose. The work of imagination and then the "Arbeit" associated with the public sphere disintegrate and lead to an "Abarbeiten" that destroys those very energies that had created the earlier utopias and which had carried out work within them, work that seemed to have "Zweck und Aussicht". The lack of purposefulness, his nihilistically desperate pursuit of passion and domination, lead him to self-annihilation. After his failed search for nature, the dying Werther depicts himself as Nature's son, friend, and lover (248/249).

The great irony of the ending of the novel is that societal work, which Werther has eliminated from his enclave of passion, allows that passion to reach its (imperfect) consummation – by poisoning private happiness. In stark contrast to the second edition, in the first version of the novel Albert's work as a bureaucrat in the absolutist state, "seine überhäuftten, gehinderten, schlecht belohnten Geschäfte" (198), help sour his relationship to Lotte; we learn that "der freundliche Umgang mit ihr subordinirte sich nach und nach seinen Geschäften" (198), and Albert creates, not the "Glück" he had promised (on her mother's death), but rather "das Elend ihres Lebens" (228).⁴³ Lotte is the most obvious victim of this; she is forced to marry Albert because of the stability his work guarantees, but this very work destroys her relationship with him. We find the pattern typical of many eighteenth-century literary works, in which patriarchal authority within the family becomes a compensation for the father's frustration in the increasingly rationalized, anonymous, and politically unsatisfying public sphere of work (see Stephan 1985). But this final irony extends the double-edged criticism of both Werther's utopia and its social causes. For if Werther's expectations of happiness and fulfillment through passion are doomed from the start, so are bour-

geois familial expectations of “Glück” in marriage (the expectation of Albert, Lotte, and her mother), of a refuge from and counterweight to “überhäuft[e], gehindert[e], schlecht belohnt[e] Geschäfte”. Above all, these ideals fly in the face of the male’s need for a sphere of domination to compensate for his loss of a primary economic motivator for patriarchal authority and for unfulfilling labor in the marketplace and state.

A decade after Goethe took up his political position in Weimar, he fled to the refuge of Italy and art, recognizing the futility of his ideals of political efficacy in the system of Enlightened Absolutism.⁴⁴ His nominal “love novel” from 1774 already shows the ambiguity toward public service, the vacillation toward societal work that was to plague Goethe in Weimar. It is important to stress both sides of this ambiguity, the enthusiasm for societal work and political utopia, and the illusions that accompanied it, both in Goethe and in Werther. These insights might provide a link to our present condition. For is it not one of the most fundamental insights of modern social and feminist theory that the excessive expectations that we place in romantic and sexual relations result from disappointed societal ideals – and that personal relations can never be entirely divorced from the dialectic of society, power, and labor?

Notes

- 1 An exception are sketchy remarks by Sørensen, 1997. Other examinations of the family in the novel: Meyer-Kalkus, 1977; Strack, 1984; Fischer, 1989; Hasty, 1989; Perels, 1998. – This paper is the revised and shortened version of one published in *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 14, 2 (1989), pp. 15–44, and is reproduced with permission of the editors.
- 2 I shall quote the first version of the novel (1774) from Goethe: *Sämtliche Werke* (FA), I, 8 (1994). When a similar passage occurs in the second version (1787), page numbers from FA I, 8, will be given after a slash (/) for purposes of comparison. Since FA prints the first edition on the left-hand page and the second edition on the right-hand page, an even-numbered reference is to the 1774 version and an odd-numbered reference is to the 1787 version.
- 3 See Brandes, 1808, 167; Vierhaus, 1967, 179.
- 4 For the following, see Conze, 1972, 167–176.
- 5 See Gerth, 1976, 74; Biedermann, 1979, 76, 87.
- 6 See Engelhardt, 1986, 54; Gerth, 1976, 73, 74; Grimminger, 1980, 87–88.
- 7 See Gerth, 1976, 74; Vierhaus, 1978, 78; Engelhardt, 1986, 55–61; Biedermann, 1979, 81.
- 8 Biedermann 1979, 75–83; Brandes 1808, 167.
- 9 See Karl Philipp Moritz's essay, *Einheit, Mehrheit, menschliche Kraft* (in: Moritz, 1981, 239–242) and the 6th of Schiller's *Ästhetische Briefe*.
- 10 See Gerth, 1976, 76; Vierhaus, 1972, 532; Biedermann, 1979, 90.
- 11 A few critics like Müller (1969, 112) and Hübner (1982, 100–106) mention Werther's alienation from work but without confronting it with his own later commitment to public service.
- 12 Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus reveals the weakness of purely psychological (Lacanian) analyses when he neglects this important social basis for the girl's misery (1977, 79–80).
- 13 Some contemporaries noted Werther's aristocratic characteristics; Lichtenberg ridiculed "Herr Baron Werther" (Scherpe, 1970, 51), and Christian Garve voiced a similar critique of Werther's intellectual elitism: "[...] er verachtet einen niedrigern Grad von Empfindlichkeit [...] mit eben dem tadelhaften Stolz, womit der grosse Gelehrte den minder Belesenen zu verachten pflegt" (Braun, 1883, 128).
- 14 Cf. Rothmann, 1971, 14, who rightly points to the passage about another, more 'English' garden type (12/13).
- 15 Hirsch's argument that Werther seeks in nature "Freiheit und Ungebundenheit" without purpose (1958, 239) overlooks both this crucial indication of the opposite (Werther, 56/57) and Werther's goal of familial harmony (90/91); in his assertion of Werther's purely individualistic concept of freedom (240), Hirsch neglects the fundamental search for natural social relations in the patriarchal idyll.
- 16 Both Albert and Werther are depicted as going off to some other location to perform their societal work.
- 17 See Blackall, 1976, 27; Schlaffer, 1978, 216; Muenzer, 1984, 20.
- 18 Remarks of Peter Uwe Hohendahl tend in this direction (1972, 201). – Müller's analysis of Werther's relations to the lower classes (1969, 107) overlooks Werther's idealistic transformation of these classes and their work.
- 19 Cf. Scherpe, 1970, 58; Grathoff (1984, 61) draws an interesting parallel to the use of the plow in the story of the farm-hand in the second version (57–58). Though at several points Grathoff touches on the theme of labor, he ignores Werther's familial idyll and his work as bureaucrat when he claims that Werther seeks "free", not societized or domesticated nature (p. 69).

- 20 Müller analyzes Lotte's care of the family using the concept of "altruism" (1969, 117–119), without realizing that he is resorting to a sexual stereotype (see Hausen, 1976, 368) that is apparent in Werther's portrayal of Lotte. On female work as 'love,' see Duden, 1977, 133ff.
- 21 But see Blackall, 1976, 27, and especially Nolan, 1984, 200 and *passim*.
- 22 On Werther's use of literature (here Homer) to distort reality see Tobol/Washington, 1977; Schlaffer, 1978, 216; Waniek, 1982; Duncan, 1982; Pütz, 1983.
- 23 Already in 1775 Blanckenburg noted this connection: "Wir wissen, dass W[erther] schon bey unbeseeelten Szenen der Natur und Abbildungen patriarchalischen Lebens glühete, und dass seine Einbildungskraft sich Vorstellungen davon, zur Nahrung seines Herzens erschuff; und sein erster Blick auf Lotten ist ein Augenblick, in welchem er sie süsse Träume seiner Art, in Leben und Wirklichkeit bringen sieht" (Braun, 1883, 184). More recently, see Muenzer, 1984, 21; Sørensen, 1997, 120. Hasty (1989, 170) perceptively notes that Werther constructs his 'family' around Lotte when his love threatens to violate moral norms.
- 24 Though Friedrich Strack overlooks this episode when he claims that Werther eliminates the father from his idyllic vision of family (1984, 71–72), he insightfully outlines Werther's loss of traditional family ties (pp. 70–72). – Meyer-Kalkus underscores Lotte's role for Werther as "Mutter-imago" (1977, 98), a psychological pattern that I do not see as contradicting his socially mediated vision of familial bliss as father, as Lotte's mate; it merely elucidates its sexual substrate. However, the "Abwesenheit des Vaters" that Meyer-Kalkus notes (p. 100) in various repeated images in the novel is Werther's vision, not reality, and in his vision it has a socioeconomic, not merely a psychological component.
- 25 Nolan examines Werther's repression of sexuality (1984, 203–205) and perceptively interprets Werther's fascination with Lotte as an image of motherhood and virginity combined (p. 205). See especially Meyer-Kalkus 1977, 102.
- 26 In the second version, the father's work as public servant is fully present during his investigation of the murder by the farm-hand – and in his arguments with Werther on this occasion (207). See Sørensen, 1997, 123–124.
- 27 Müller accepts this absence of patriarchal authority as real, rather than as Werther's illusion (1969, 120). Meyer-Kalkus makes the same mistake when he speaks of Lotte's family – even after Albert has returned – as maternally dominated (1977, 118). This is evident in the scene that Meyer-Kalkus describes – the farewell scene at the end of Part One –, where Lotte's dying mother gives her over to Albert, precisely because of his financial stability (90/91, 120/121); Werther is thus hardly "adopted" into a "matriarchal" family (Meyer-Kalkus, 1977, 118); this very scene makes clear to him the futility of his wish to replace Albert as 'pater familias'.
- 28 On Werther's loss of family and in particular his loose ties to his mother, see Pütz, 1983, 57; Strack, 1984, 71. – Perels interprets the 'patriarchal idea' as Werther's replacement of his father with a non-judgmental authority of nature (1998, 54), but he does not examine the social implications of this authority, or Werther's own imaginary role as father, or the role of Lotte's father.
- 29 Lukács, 1950, 38. Hirsch notes, but does not explain, the destruction of Werther's "paradise" (1958, 240–241). He denies any political commitment of Werther to his position at court, and glosses over those passages that contradict his viewpoint (pp. 242, 243). Hirsch's conclusion is that the episode at court is a demonstration of the impossibility of such a completely developed "Bürger" being integrated into absolutist society (p. 250). This conclusion robs Werther of his individuality, his social-political ambitions, and his self-destructive impulses. – Gerhard Kluge's is the only study (1971) devoted to Werther's period at court, but he hardly mentions Werther's actual work there, instead integrating

the episode into the theme of the individual's insistence on autonomy. Hohendahl's study represents an advance over Hirsch's unquestioned assumptions about class and Kluge's unhistorical approach, but Hohendahl, too, leaves Werther's societal work out of the equation. Müller states that Werther goes to court only to explore his last remaining "Lebensraum", the court, in order to find new use for his energies (1969, 148) and a new mode for his "Selbstverwirklichung" (p. 152); in this emphasis and especially in the stress on the "secessionist" aspect of Werther's stay at court, Müller's analysis resembles Scherpe's, despite the polemics between them. – Leo Löwenthal is one of the few critics who appreciate that Werther considers "ein politisch tätiges Leben im Sinne einer weitwirkenden Verwaltungstätigkeit" (1974, 168).

- 30 Hirsch's explanation of this passage: "Werther findet also in dem Vorfall eine Rechtfertigung seines tatenlosen Dahinlebens und insbesondere seiner unpolitischen Haltung" (1958, 242) contradicts the text, which states that the incident gave Werther his antipathy to political efficacy, rather than merely justifying an already present antipathy.
- 31 The entirely positive, encouraging effect of this letter on Werther is shown in the rest of this passage, contrary to Müller's claims (1969, 159). – The encouragement from the minister gains part of its significance from the fact that it is completely absent from Goethe's source, Kestner's report of Jerusalem's "Verweis" (FA I, 8, pp. 909–915).
- 32 Scherpe is correct to point out that this potentially political example is an argument not for revolution, but for suicide (1976, 204). However, Werther's own suicide follows only after his experiment in actualizing his political awareness.
- 33 This passage directly contradicts Hohendahl's assertion: "Werthers Gegner ist letztlich [...] das System der Bürokratie und der Versachlichung [...]" (1972, 202). Like other critics, Hohendahl leaves unanswered the crucial question: why, if Werther thinks this way, does he take on public service and reveal commitment to it?
- 34 Stürmer remarks: "Der Monarch sollte allein dem Glücke des Staates und der Untertanen dienen, und die Verwaltung, längst auf dem Weg zur eigentlichen Machtelite, machte ihn glauben, er wolle es auch" (1983, 4).
- 35 See Hohendahl, 1972, 200; Scherpe, 1976, 203; Müller, 1969, 153.
- 36 "An den Höfen der hochabsolutistischen Zeit werden [...] Rangordnungen entworfen und für verbindlich erklärt, die eine generelle Geltung für vielerlei Situationen, nicht etwa nur für den Tisch, beanspruchen. Aus diesen Rangordnungen ist ersichtlich, dass die Beamtenhierarchie aus der Ordnung des Hofstaats hervorgegangen ist; [...] die Rangordnungen [leiten sich] aus höfischen Tischordnungen her" (Willoweit, 1983, 304).
- 37 See esp. Nolan, 1984, 199–205; Meyer-Kalkus, 1977, 98.
- 38 Müller solves this problem by calling the two characters "verbürgerlichte[r] Adel" (1969, 163), but this term raises the obvious question: why does he not choose his friends from the "Bürgertum" itself?
- 39 The second version attempts more subtlety: "[...] [ich] wollte gehen; und doch blieb ich, weil ich sie gerne entschuldigt hätte, und es nicht glaubte, und noch ein gut Wort von ihr hoffte und – was du willst" (143).
- 40 Grathoff's analysis of this episode demonstrates again Werther's aestheticization of Nature in disregard of the social instrumentalization of Nature (1984, 61–62). – Müller sees here an objective destruction rather than a destruction of Werther's subjective vision (1969, 172–173).
- 41 Children are now mentioned only incidentally in the second part of the novel: 192/193, 218/219, 226/227.

- 42 E. g., “Albert ist angekommen [...] so wär’s unerträglich, ihn vor meinem Angesichte im Besitze so vieler Vollkommenheiten zu sehen. Besizl!” (84/85); “Sie ist mein! du bist mein! ja Lotte auf ewig!” (250/251).
- 43 The second version waters all this down (199, 229); Albert is portrayed much more positively there – to satisfy Kestner’s objections. – Sørensen sketches Werther’s awakening to the social role of Lotte’s father and Albert (1997, 123), but because Sørensen uses the 1787 edition of the novel, he misses the sharpness when Albert’s work poisons his relationship to Lotte.
- 44 “[...] wer sich mit der Administration abgiebt, ohne regierender Herr zu seyn, der muss entweder ein Philister oder ein Schelm oder ein Narr seyn” (9 July 1786, WA IV/7, pp. 241–242).

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