

NARRATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Sandra Maïke Christine Niethardt: Narration and Consciousness in the Late Eighteenth-Century German Novel (Under the direction of Jonathan M. Hess)

The dissertation analyzes third-person hetero-diegetic narrators in three representative German novels from the late eighteenth century in order to illustrate the complexity of modern subjectivity at its emergence: Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser: A Psychological Novel* ("Anton Reiser. Ein psychologischer Roman," 1785/86), Jean Paul's *Life of the Cheerful Little Schoolmaster Maria Wutz in Auenthal* ("Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal," 1793), and Johann Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* ("Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre," 1796/96).

The three analyzed texts stem from an era in which the notion of the modern autonomous subject came into being and each portray protagonists that one might characterize as modern subjects. Likewise, their narrators are usually seen as largely omniscient and authoritative. The dissertation calls into question this view of the novels' narrators as representatives of modern subjectivity and counterparts to the protagonists whose lives they present. Instead, it shows that—despite the narrators' self-representations as confident and self-reliant mediators of their stories and contrary to the equivalent impression their readers might develop at first glance—the narrators' storytelling (the *discours*) is changed by the content of the stories (the *histoire*).

That is, the narrative presentation of the protagonists lives and particularly of their psyche by means of psycho-narration changes how subsequent parts of the story are presented. While these changes in the narrators and their *histoires* manifest themselves differently in the three novels, the dissertation conceives of them as symptoms of historical changes taking place at the end of the eighteenth century and as expression of the insecurities and anxieties that accompanied the demands that were placed onto the modern, self-reliant, and self-determined subject in the wake of movements such as the Enlightenment. The dissertation puts forth the thesis that these historical changes found their way not only into the content of the experimental form of the novel (e.g., in genres such as the *Bildungsroman*), but that they manifested themselves perhaps even more poignantly (and unintentionally) in the way stories were told. In stories that are presented by third-person narrators facing the subjectivity of *an other* thus becomes particularly apparent.

To R. With so much love and gratitude.

Du fehlst. Immer.

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INTRODUCTION

Philosophers and writers dedicated to the Enlightenment envisioned the movement as being dedicated to free subjects from subjugation by external forces. They saw the reliance on the self as guiding authority as the foundation for their belief in the progress of humanity and the spread of the light fighting the darkness of superstition, bondage, and brutality of the Middle Ages. Kant's notion of an autonomous subject that is daring enough to use and follow its reason envisioned a self that created and abided by its own laws.¹ Actual historical changes—the emergence of a capitalist economy and the bourgeoisie, the end of the estate-based society—as well as the weakening of church and state as controlling authorities did indeed grant the individual more freedom than ever before. But the light spreading over Europe and America brought its shadow too. As not only, but probably most prominently Horkheimer and Adorno have pointed out, the reliance on reason brought its downsides as well. Instead of the positive liberating changes the Enlightenment was meant to bring according to its representatives, it also alienated the subject from the world in which it lived—it rendered the “Entzauberung der Welt”—and developed itself into a new subjugating ideology.² As

¹Cf. Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 298: “Kant’s organized the ideas of selfhood around the notion of autonomy; the self-achieved freedom by following the self-made laws of its own rational nature.”

²Cf. Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947), 19-20: “Die Menschen bezahlen die Vermehrung ihrer Macht mit der Entfremdung von dem, worüber sie die Macht ausüben.”

Barbara Potthast so aptly summarizes it, instead of setting people free it created anxiety and disorientation:

Das 18. Jahrhundert gilt als Ära eines tiefgreifenden seelischen Wandels. Für die idealistische Geistesgeschichte stellt er sich im Sinne einer linearen Fortschrittsbewegung als teleologischer Vorgang dar, in dem das Individuum einen psychogenetischen Prozeß der Subjektivierung, Individualisierung und Gefühlsautonomisierung vollzieht – ,vom Rationalismus über die Empfindsamkeit zum Subjektivismus'. Jedoch, der Mensch dieser Epoche wird nicht nur aus der Bevormundung und Beherrschung durch Kirche und Staat, aus jahrhundertealten bedrückenden Ordnungen, Bindungen und Konventionen, die der kritischen Vernunft nicht mehr standhalten, sondern auch aus vertrauten, schützenden Werten, Ideen, Mythen und Bildern entlassen. Er wird tiefer Verstörung und Furcht ausgeliefert und soll doch aus sich selbst heraus kraft seiner Vernunft Selbstbewußtsein, Mut und Autonomie erlangen – dieser spannungsvoll-instabile psychische Zustand muß Brüche, Rückfälle, existentielle Bedrängnis und Sinnkrisen zeitigen.“³

As new spaces for the individual open up, filling them often becomes a destabilizing experience and overwhelming task. Kant was very well aware of this when he chose the verb for the appeal that concluded his essay “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” in 1784.

³Barbara Potthast, *Die verdrängte Krise: Studien zum “inferioren” deutschen Roman zwischen 1750 und 1770. Studien zum achtzehnten Jahrhundert 21* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1997), 23-24.

Sapere aude! – One needs courage to rely on one’s own powers of reasoning. Implied in this statement is the awareness that—despite all hope for a better future—the step to take over responsibility for one’s own actions is accompanied by fear. Christian Begemann identified “Furcht und Angst” as the prevailing feelings in the era of the Enlightenment when he summarizes that “Die Aufklärung, zu deren Absichten es gehörte, die Menschen von Furcht zu befreien, hat Angst geschaffen.”⁴ In his monograph *Sources of the Self* from 1989, Charles Taylor identifies three main domains of conflict for the modern individual, the most important being the one he calls the “conflict between disengaged instrumentalism and the Romantic or modernist protest against it.”⁵ Conceiving of the world as being disenchanted (Max Weber)⁶ or “entgöttert” —as already Schiller in his poem “Die Götter Griechenlands” (1788/1800)⁷ bemoaned—and adopting a capitalist world view that sees the world in terms of cost-benefit analyses, derived the world of the meaning it was permeated with before, but also

⁴Christian Begemann, *Furcht und Angst im Prozeß der Aufklärung. Zu Literatur und Bewußtseinsgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum Verlag, 1987), 313. – Similarly, Georg Stanitzek, *Blödigkeit. Beschreibungen des Individuums im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Niemeyer 1989) [Hermea NF 60] who traces the development of the meaning of “Blödigkeit” in the eighteenth century and states that the demand for emancipation actually led to insecurity and instability of the individual.

⁵Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 498.

⁶Max Weber, “Wissenschaft als Beruf, 1919,” in *Schriften 1894 – 1922. Kröner Taschenbuchausgabe 233*, ed. by Dirk Kaesler (Stuttgart: Kröner 2002), 474-511, here 488: “Die zunehmende Intellektualisierung und Rationalisierung bedeutet also nicht eine zunehmende allgemeine Kenntnis der Lebensbedingungen, unter denen man steht. Sondern sie bedeutet etwas anderes: das Wissen davon oder den Glauben daran: daß man, wenn man nur wollte, es jederzeit erfahren könnte, daß es also prinzipiell keine geheimnisvollen unberechenbaren Mächte gebe, die da hineinspielen, daß man vielmehr alle Dinge – im Prinzip – durch Berechnen beherrschen könne. Das aber bedeutet: **die Entzauberung der Welt** [my emphasis]. Nicht mehr, wie der Wilde, für den es solche Mächte gab, muss man zu magischen Mitteln greifen, um die Geister zu beherrschen oder zu erbitten. Sondern technische Mittel und Berechnung leisten das. Dies vor allem bedeutet die Intellektualisierung als solche.”

⁷Friedrich Schiller, *Schillers Gedichte*, ed. by Klaus L. Berghahn (Königstein/Taunus: Athenäum, 1980), 149. Schiller talks about the “entgötterte Natur.”

fragmentized it as the unity of the Christian world view is broken up and the framework within which the world was bound to a whole loses its power: "The world, from being a locus of 'magic', or the sacred, or the Ideas, comes simply to be seen as a neutral domain of potential means to our purposes. Or else it can be formulated in terms of division or fragmentation. To take an instrumental stance to nature is to cut us off from the sources of meaning in it. An instrumental stance to our feelings divides us within, spits reason from sense. And the atomistic focus on our individual goals dissolves community and divides us from each other."⁸ If these "purposes," as Taylor calls them, are unclear, though, the individual finds himself or herself within a fragmented world that feels threatening and foreign. "[T]he individual has been taken out of a rich community life and now enters instead into a series of mobile, changing, revocable associations, often designed merely for higher specific ends. We end up relating to each other through a series of partial roles."⁹ And despite increased personal freedom, these partial roles might not provide the orientation and security anymore that previous, more tightly defined communities and roles could offer.

While third-person narration and the question of how well a narrator can present someone else's life might always be somewhat problematic, in an era in which, at the same time, subjectivism and insecurity and instability are on the rise, the problem of third-person narration has to become especially problematic. When turning to the characters' interior life and their consciousness, the narrator can neither claim to have observed what happened nor

⁸Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 500-501.

⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 502.

can the narrator rely on others' reports of the events. As a consequence, the origin of the narrator's knowledge can become suspicious. The separation between the text as the product of the narrator's mind and the report of the character's consciousness can become unclear, boundaries might blurr. The narrator might be affected or changed himself by the narration of someone else's consciousness—"himself" rather than "herself" since most of the narrators of that time and all of the here analyzed texts are either explicitly or implicitly male as they present themselves as knowledgeable, presumably older individuals between whose lines one can sense familiarity with his—likewise usually male—protagonists' life roles. In her seminal work *Transparent Minds*, Dorrit Cohn investigates ways in which third-person narrators have narrated the consciousness of a figural mind, i.e., she examines different kinds of psycho-narration. While she recognizes a huge variability in the way consciousness can be narrated, she differentiates two basic types of psycho-narration characterized by the relationship between narrator and fictional character and the prominence of each:

In psychological novels, where a fictional consciousness holds center stage, there is considerable variation in the manner of narrating this consciousness. These variations range between two principal types: one is dominated by a prominent narrator who, even as he focuses intently on an individual psyche, remains emphatically distanced from the consciousness he narrates; the other is mediated by a narrator who remains effaced and who readily fuses with the consciousness he narrates. Two well-known modern narrative texts will

exemplify these two types of psycho-narration: Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist [as a Young Man]*.¹⁰

Cohn sees the relationship between narrator and its character as being one of competition for the depths of consciousness and distinctiveness as a subject. While she points to how multifarious the variations between authorial and figural consciousness can be and have been throughout literary history, she does acknowledge the fact that there seems to be a tendency toward an inverse relationship between both forms of consciousness.

[T]he more conspicuous and idiosyncratic the narrator, the less apt he is to reveal the depth of his characters' psyches, or for that matter, to create psyches that have depth to reveal. It almost seems as though the authorial narrator jealously guards his prerogative as the sole thinking agent within his novel, sensing that his equipoise would be endangered by approaching another mind too closely and staying with it too long; for this other mind, contrary to his own disincarnated mental existence, belongs to an incarnated and therefore distinctly limited being. The historical development of the novel clearly bears out the old-fashioned narrator's self-preservative instinct: with the growing interest in the problems of individual psychology, the audible narrator disappears from the fictional world. Not because, as Wayne Booth misleadingly asserts, 'any sustained inside view ... temporarily turns the character whose mind is shown

¹⁰ Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1978, 26.

into the narrator,' but because a fully developed figural consciousness siphons away the emotional and intellectual energy formerly lodged in the expansive narrator.¹¹

In a time in which a new sense of self is emerging, but not yet consolidated and accompanied by existential fear and insecurity, a third-person narrator's task to narrate a character's consciousness and—more broadly—his life seems to become a particularly challenging task.

My dissertation builds on work done by sociologists such as Niklas Luhmann, historians such as Reinhart Koselleck, philosophers such as Charles Taylor, and others who describe the development of what we now call the *modern autonomous subject* at the end of the eighteenth century.¹² The notion of a self-reliant individual who has the freedom and burden alike to choose and shape his or her own life course and whose meaning is not predetermined by the norms of church, society, and state, has often been defined as the beginning of what we call modernity. New orienting and coping strategies accompanied the lack of externally provided norms on how to lead a life and these strategies, not surprisingly, found their way into the literature of that time period. Most notably, the emergence of a genre such as the *Bildungsroman* stands witness to new conceptualizations of what it means to come of age as a

¹¹Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 25.

¹²Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik vergangener Zeiten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1979), Niklas Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft. 3 Vols* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989: Suhrkamp). – Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Mit einem Vorwort zur Neuauflage 1990.* suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft 891 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990). – Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

young (bourgeois and male) individual. While both the socio-historical background of this development and its topical processing in literature in general and in the German *Bildungsroman* in particular have attracted astute scholarly attention, its influences on the formal dimensions of literature have often been neglected. My dissertation tends to this technical side and the narrative solutions to the dilemma a third-person narrator faces when he narrates a life other than his own—a life that still has to be made sense of. In other words, it analyzes *how* the stories of protagonists with a modern sense of self are told rather than what they are about.

On the basis of the narratological analysis of three representative texts from the end of the eighteenth century, my dissertation adds nuance to the literary struggle for mastery of the newly-gained freedom and responsibility associated with individual making sense of life for its own sake. I show that the shift in narrative focus towards the process of individual creation of meaning was a slow process that introduced discrepancies between a narrator's claim to present a modern life story and its narrative realization. The question that arose a little more than 200 years ago is still a pressing one, namely how to provide narratives about human lives that render them accessible, worth reading, and instructive, but without the narrator either losing his or her own self in the face of the other or re-discovering the own self in all others. Or, following the terminology of Cohn, one can ask: How does a third-person narrator narrate someone else's consciousness, and how does this influence himself as an individual in a time in which the formation of the autonomous subject has just begun? The range of narrative solutions analyzed in my dissertation reveals the struggle for autonomy more poignantly than the common emphasis on the novels' content. For it is where the two consciousnesses of

narrator and character meet—in intimate contact with the other—that their respective senses of self, their degree of autonomy or heteronomy, is revealed.

The questions I seek to answer in this dissertation are the following: How does the turn toward a new content in representative late eighteenth-century German-language novels—the presentation of the psychological development of young protagonists—relate to their form, i.e., to the narrative techniques being employed to tell these stories? Does the degree of self-determination and autonomy demonstrated by the protagonists align with the narrators' accounts? Or do discrepancies arise between the narrator's endeavor to narrate an individual's life in third-person and his own self-awareness and autonomy?

The three texts I chose to answer these questions stem from the time between 1785 and 1796, i.e., all of them were written and published within just one decade at the end of the eighteenth century. All three of them—Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser*, Jean Paul's *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, and Wilhelm Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre*—are third-person novels that present to the reader the development of one main protagonist. They do this by not only narrating their characters' actions, but also their inner lives—their consciousness—and their psychological development. As opposed to earlier third-person novels, they do not classify as the "Mischform" Becker describes and that dominated in the 1770s and 1780s. As Becker points out, authors of novels in the 70s and 80s of the eighteenth century tend to prefer the epistolary novel or the *Dialogroman*. Novels written in third-person tend to include characteristics particularly of the epistolary novel and often include letters and long stories told by characters in the *histoire*. The novel of the eighteenth century was considered a space for experimentation, and—as Becker points out—a novel merely presented in third-person

narration “gilt als langweilig und einfallslos – so wurde auch schon im 16. Jahrhundert erzählt.”¹³ In order to break up the monotony of third-person narration, authors include letters, diary entries and other “neutral” documents to the degree that “die Er-Erzählung stellenweise ganz zurückgedrängt wird.”¹⁴ Where third-person narration is maintained, the narrators remain distanced from their characters and avoid their perspective.¹⁵ At the end of the eighteenth century, however, third-person novels appear that do include *personale Darstellung* and whose narrators relate to their protagonists in different ways. That is, the narrators are more concerned with the characters’ inner lives and narrate them much more often in the form of psycho-narration than exclusively by including letters or dialogs or free direct speech. The three texts chosen for analysis in the following chapters are representatives of this development. Considering their publication within a very short period of time, the broad variety of ways to render consciousness in these three texts captures a time of profound change that finds its expression in diffuse and creative literary thematizations of subjectivity.

The first chapter’s source text, Karl Philipp Moritz’s novel fragment *Anton Reiser*, published in 1785 and 1786, lends itself to the analysis of the proposed questions as it is part of a larger project, namely Moritz’s project of *Erfahrungsseelenkunde* and the establishment of the discipline of psychology in Germany. The declared goal of the novel—that carries the subtitle “Ein psychologischer Roman”—is to analyze the psyche of Anton Reiser from childhood to adulthood by observing him as closely and as objectively as possible. The subjectivity of the

¹³Eva D. Becker, *Der Deutsche Roman um 1780* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlerische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), here 186.

¹⁴Becker, *Der deutsche Roman*, 186.

¹⁵Cf. Becker, *Der deutsche Roman*, 192: “Personale Darstellung kommt in unseren Romanen [of the 1770 and 180s, S.N.] nur selten vor. Distanz zwischen Erzähler und Erzähltem ist in den Er-Romanen die Regel [...].”

narrator is explicitly to be neutralized as much as possible. As we will see, however, this stance is not one the narrator is able to uphold over the course of the novel; as he becomes more and more involved in the story, it becomes increasingly unclear whether the narrator speaks himself or reports his protagonist's thoughts. What started out as introspection and a heuristic tool to understand and present Anton's psychological development eventually leads the narrator astray from his superior position as an observer and clearly identified self. The chapter therefore proposes a new reading of Moritz's novel that complicates its history of interpretation as a veiled autobiography and a witness to the beginnings of empirical psychology in Germany.

The second chapter analyzes Jean Paul's brief narration *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal. Eine Idylle* (1793). The short text juxtaposes the two world views of the protagonist Maria Wutz with the one of the narrator. The former—a schoolmaster who writes his own versions of published books by solely knowing their titles and without ever reading any originals, builds his own library, and exclusively reads his own books—can be seen as a representative of a pre-Enlightenment era, devoid of any self-reflective capabilities and caught within a solipsistic subjectivism. The latter, the narrator, can be seen as a representative of the negative effects of the Enlightenment as he finds himself in the midst of a crisis about the meaning of life, his own purpose in life, and his sense of self. The text exemplifies a way out of the narrator's dilemma: Through writing and reading about Wutz's life the narrator discovers his own subjective imagination and fantasy and integrates his protagonist's perspective on life into his own sense of self. This way, the narrator is able to gain some happiness himself at the end of the text.

The third chapter on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96) analyzes the whole complex narrative network unfolding in Goethe's first complete *Wilhelm Meister* novel. Being one of the classic *Bildungsromane* dealing with the emerging bourgeoisie, its work ethos and the nuclear family, as well as the developing capitalist economy, it is the most canonical text included in my analysis. I seek, however, to take a new approach toward the novel by focusing on its structural characteristics rather than its content and the description of Wilhelm's story. Only more recent scholarship by critics such as Saariluoma (on the correspondence between structure and the process of *Bildung*) and Koschorke (on the relationship between time and narrative structure) have taken a similar approach.¹⁶ My chapter proposes a new reading of the novel, however, that conceives of the narrator neither as a pure mediator between story and readers (Saariluoma) nor as a classical omniscient narrator (Koschorke). Rather, I claim that a complex narrative network, operating on the different levels of *histoire*, *discours*, fictitious editorship, and real authorship, calls into question the reliability of narratives in general as well as the capability of self-knowledge (or, in the case of the narrator, the possibility of knowing one's own text). To distinguish the content of what is narrated and the authority narrating or presenting this content I rely on structuralist differentiation between *discours* and *histoire* as developed by Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov. Martinez and Scheffel very brief, but poignantly summarize the concepts of both when they write: „Erzähltexte vereinigen so zwei verschiedene epistemische Perspektiven, die

¹⁶Lisa Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur und Bildungsroman. Wielands "Geschichte des Agathon," Goethes "Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre"* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004). – Albrecht Koschorke: "Identifikation und Ironie. Zur Zeitform des Erzählens in Goethes *Wilhelm Meister*," in *Empathie und Erzählung*, ed. by Claudia Breger and Fritz Breithaupt (Freiburg i.Br.-Berlin-Wien: Rombach Verlag, 2010), 173-185.

lebensweltlich-praktische der Protagonisten [i.e., *histoire*, S.N.] und die analytisch-retrospektive des Erzählers [i.e., the *discours*, S.N.]. Einen narrativen Text zu verstehen bedeutet für den Leser, beide Perspektiven wahrzunehmen.“¹⁷ But, the power to create and determine meaning is only partly in the hands of the characters and the narrator. The text itself exerts its own power and contributes to the creation of meaning. In this way, Goethe’s novel can be conceived of as an educational *Bildungsroman*, aimed at its readers, and teaching them a lesson about the limits of autonomy.

In summary, my dissertation pursues the question of how topical developments and innovations—the emergence of the modern autonomous subject—are dealt with on the level of the texts’ narrative structure. The three almost contemporary texts analyzed in the following chapters of the dissertation provide a wide and representative array of narrative struggles to deal with the problem of narrating an individual’s life in third-person without clear external sign-posts as to the course, meaning or purpose of that life. They can be understood as different answers to problems proposed and created by the Enlightenment’s and Kant’s claim *sapere aude!* and the emergence of the autonomous subject.

¹⁷ Cf. Matias Martinez and Michael Scheffel, *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*. C. H. Beck Studium. 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000), 122.

CHAPTER 1: COMING TO TERMS WITH THE OTHER: THE NARRATOR'S STRUGGLE FOR AUTHORITY IN KARL PHILIPP MORITZ'S *ANTON REISER*

„Dieser psychologische Roman könnte auch allenfalls eine Biographie genannt werden, weil die Beobachtungen größtenteils aus dem wirklichen Leben genommen sind.“¹⁸

Introduction

Karl Philipp Moritz is probably best known as an author of novels as *Andreas Hartknopf* or the text that is the focus of this chapter, *Anton Reiser* (1785-1790), a novel fragment that narrates the story of Anton Reiser, a not untalented boy with the strong desire to learn and study at a university. However, due to the socio-economic circumstances in which he grows up, neglect by his parents, repeated disparagement, ongoing humiliation, and the rigid and hostile Pietism of his father and other authority figures, Anton is not given the chance to develop his strengths and goes more and more astray. After many twists and turns, he ends up leaving his hometown, Hannover, and follows his fantasy of joining a theater group. His dream to become an admired actor and receive all the acknowledgement and fame he did not get as a child makes him wander around, penniless and aimless, in the fourth book while attempt after attempt to join a theater group fails. After one of those attempts the fragment *Anton Reiser* ends. Scholarship on *Anton Reiser* has examined Pietism and its secularized affects of introspection and individuality as well as the text's affinity to the genre of both autobiography

¹⁸Karl Philipp Moritz, *Anton Reiser. Ein psychologischer Roman. Mit Textvarianten, Erläuterungen und einem Nachwort*, ed. by Wolfgang Martens (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1986), 6. – In the following, page numbers from this edition of the primary text will be given in the text in parentheses.

and novel.¹⁹ Scholars have repeatedly emphasized “die psychosoziale Determination des Helden durch die in der Kindheit erlittenen Erfahrungen”²⁰ and have highlighted the fact that the character actually does not undergo any development: he “erreicht hier keine grundsätzlich neue Entwicklungsstufe.”²¹ Although the term *Bildungsroman* was not yet in use when *Anton Reiser* was published, the text has anachronistically been characterized as a “negativer Bildungsroman” or “Antibildungsroman”²² due to the “unaufhebbare Statik des Charakters.”²³ Far less attention has been paid to the narrator and when it has, he has been characterized as the one bringing together isolated observations and competently mastering his narration, for example by means of his “Vor- und Rückgriffe des Erzählers [...], die erst einen literarischen Zusammenhang herstellen.”²⁴ One commonly sees the narrator as succeeding in narrating Anton’s inner life and explaining it psychologically: “Dagegen ist der andere Aspekt [in contrast to Anton’s psychological development, S. N.] der ‘inneren Geschichte des Menschen’ durchgeführt, nämlich die kausale Verkettung des Handelns der Hauptfigur mit Hilfe der

¹⁹Cf. Günter Niggel, *Geschichte der deutschen Autobiographie im 18. Jahrhundert. Theoretische Grundlegung und literarische Entfaltung* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche J. B. Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1977). – Kerstin Stüssel, *Poetische Ausbildung und dichterisches Handeln. Poetik und autobiographisches Schreiben im 18. und beginnenden 19. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993). – Sabine Groppe, *Das Ich am Ende des Schreibens. Autobiographisches Erzählen im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1990).

²⁰Hans Esselborn, “Karl Philipp Moritz’ ‘Anton Reiser’: Neue Perspektiven der Forschung,” in *Anton Reiser: Autobiographie et avènement du sujet*, ed. by Jean-Marie Paul (Nancy: Centre de Recherches Germaniques et Scandinaves, 1994), 197-210, here 200.

²¹Esselborn, “Karl Philipp Moritz’ ‘Anton Reiser’”, 200.

²²Hans-Joachim Schrimpf, “Moritz: *Anton Reiser*,” in *Der deutsche Roman vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart. Struktur und Geschichte*, vol. 1, ed. by Benno von Wiese (Düsseldorf: August Bagel, 1962), 95-131, here 120.

²³Esselborn, “Karl Philipp Moritz’ ‘Anton Reiser’”, 200.

²⁴Esselborn, “Karl Philipp Moritz’ ‘Anton Reiser’”, 200.

Psychologie.”²⁵ A crisis has so far only been attributed to the protagonist, not to his narrator.²⁶

The narrative mode has mainly been approached from a perspective of genre assignment or in comparison to Moritz’s psychological writings, mainly his *Magazin*. Almost at the same time as he was writing the four parts of *Anton Reiser*, Moritz was also editing the first German psychological journal, the *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, which appeared from 1783 to 1793.²⁷ A common thread throughout the scholarship on Anton Reiser is the discussion of its unique and new mode of narration which reads *Anton Reiser* against the backdrop of Moritz’s psychological writings and position the text somewhere in between *Entwicklungsroman*, *Bildungsroman*, (auto)biography, and scientific text.²⁸ That the concurrency of Moritz’s novel and his editorship is more than just a temporal one has been analyzed particularly in the

²⁵Esselborn, “Karl Philipp Moritz’ ‘Anton Reiser’”, 201.

²⁶Cf. Michael Dobstadt, *Existenzmangel und schwankendes Ich: Georg Christoph Lichtenberg und Karl Philipp Moritz im Kontext einer Krisengeschichte neuzeitlicher Subjektivität* (Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009).

²⁷ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ oder *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde als ein Lesebuch für Gelehrte und Ungelehrte. Mit Unterstützung mehrerer Wahrheitsfreunde*, ed. by Karl Philipp Moritz, 10 vols. (Berlin: August Mylius, 1783-93) [volumes 5, 6 and—without being listed on the title page—the first and second issue of volume 7 were co-edited by Karl-Friedrich Pockels; volumes 9 and 10 were co-edited by Salomon Maimon]. – The ten volumes appeared in three issues each and regularly each year. Only between the volumes 7 and 8 there was a longer, one-year long break. The years of publication for the single volumes are: vol. 1, issues 1-3: 1783; vol. 2, issues 1-3: 1784; vol. 3, issues 1-3: 1785; vol. 4, issues 1-3: 1786; vol. 5, issues 1-3: 1787; vol. 6, issues 1-3: 1788; vol. 7, issues 1-3: 1789; vol. 8, issues 1-3: 1791; vol. 9, issues 1-3: 1792; vol. 10, issues 1-3: 1793. – The edition I refer to is the (selective) edition of Moritz’s contributions to the the journal by the *Deutscher Klassiker Verlag*: Karl Philipp Moritz, “Erfahrungsseelenkunde,” in *Dichtungen und Schriften zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, ed. by Heide Hollmer and Albert Meier, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag im Taschenbuch 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2006), 791-905. – For texts not included in this edition or texts by other authors references and quotations refer to a complete, but unannotated reprint of the *Magazin*: Moritz, Karl Philipp, *Die Schriften in dreißig Bänden. ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ oder Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde als ein Lesebuch für Gelehrte und Ungelehrte* [10 vols.], ed. by Petra and Uwe Nettelbeck (Nördlingen: Franz Greno, 1986).

²⁸See, for instance, Wilhelm Vosskamp, “Poetik der Beobachtung. Karl Philipp Moritz’ *Anton Reiser* zwischen Autobiographie und Bildungsroman,” *Etudes Germaniques* 51, no. 3 (1996): 471-80 or Hans Esselborn, „*Anton Reiser* zwischen autobiographischem Roman und psychologischer Fallgeschichte,” *Recherches Germaniques* 25 (1995): 69-90.

context of the question of the novel's genre.²⁹ What has been repeatedly pointed out in this context is the similarity between the narrator's description of Reiser's life and the program of empirical psychology pursued and unfolded in the *Magazin*. Referring to the narrator's preface preceding the first part of *Anton Reiser*, cited in the epigraph to this chapter and classifying the text as a psychological novel or biography, Vosskamp describes Moritz's writing project as a "Verwissenschaftlichung des Romanschreibens im Sinne einer Nähe zur 'Erfahrungsseelenkunde,'" a phenomenon he terms "Poetik der Beobachtung."³⁰ Scholarly work like the incisive article on *Anton Reiser* by Vosskamp and discussions of the novel's aesthetics and modes of narration by Esselborn and Müller also try to deal with the obvious mismatch between a third-person narration and the genre of autobiography—drawing on the stark parallels between Moritz's and Anton Reiser's lives and reading the novel as a disguised autobiographical self-reflection.³¹ This mismatch is usually discussed from the viewpoint of the problem of genre assignment, and the text is described as a hybrid between the genres of autobiography and *Bildungsroman* (Vosskamp) or autobiography and psychological case study (Esselborn)³² with "wissenschaftliche[m] Anspruch"³³ (Müller) or as "wissenschaftliche[s]

²⁹ For ease of reference the term "novel" will be used to refer to *Anton Reiser* throughout this essay—always having the caveat of the difficulties of genre attribution in mind, however.

³⁰Vosskamp, "Poetik der Beobachtung," 474.

³¹Klaus-Detlef Müller, "Karl Philipp Moritz: 'Lebenwelt und Ästhetik. 'Anton Reiser' und das Konzept der Kunstautonomie,'" *Etudes Germaniques* 50, no. 1 (1995): 59-72. – Hans Esselborn, "Anton Reiser zwischen autobiographischem Roman und psychologischer Fallgeschichte," 83-87.

³² Esselborn, "Anton Reiser zwischen autobiographischem Roman," 83-87.

³³Müller, "Karl Philipp Moritz," 59.

Experiment”³⁴ (Voskamp). Scholarship on *Anton Reiser* customarily points out the text’s emphasis on Anton Reiser’s individuality and the description of his life serving as a “case history,” the appearance of the autonomous modern subject, as well as the emphasis on introspection as a way of knowing (and getting to know human nature).³⁵ However, the flagrant contradiction between Moritz’s and the narrator’s claim to base their writings on empirical observations (“Beobachtungen,” 6) on the one hand and the novel’s actual detailed and lengthy reports of Anton’s inner life of thoughts and feelings on the other has hardly been seen as two related processes, being two sides of one and the same coin. Recent work on *Anton Reiser* by Matt Erlin offers a new take on Anton Reiser’s development by stressing the necessity and validity of social acknowledgment in the process of identity formation or “the fact of a heteronomously defined self.”³⁶ Erlin contrasts this process with the notion of an “autonomous work of art, which rejects any form of external validation [and] appears as an alternative to Anton Reiser’s heteronomously defined self.”³⁷ While Erlin focuses more on the plot and less on the story and narrative techniques, he takes a step toward juxtaposing the two changes in the

³⁴Voskamp, “Poetik der Beobachtung,” 479.

³⁵Cf. Rüdiger Steinlein, “Kindheit als Diskurs des Fremden – die Entdeckung der kindlichen Innenwelt um 1800. Zur literarisch-poetischen ‘Psycho(patho)graphie’ von Kindheit bei Goethe, Moritz und E.T.A. Hoffmann,” in *Erkundungen. Aufsätze zur deutschen Literatur (1975-2008)*, ed. by Rüdiger Steinlein (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009), 112-136 as well as Elliott Schreiber, *The Topography of Modernity: Karl Philipp Moritz and the Space of Autonomy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2012), and Claudia Kestenholz, *Die Sicht der Dinge: Metaphorische Visualität und Subjektivitätsideal im Werk von Karl Philipp Moritz* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987).

³⁶Matt Erlin, “Karl Philipp Moritz and the System of Needs,” in *Necessary Luxuries. Books, Literature, and the Culture of Consumption in Germany, 1770-1815* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2014), 139-174, here 161.

³⁷ Erlin, “Karl Philipp Moritz,” 161.

notion of subject-formation and the development of literature. But like other scholarship on *Anton Reiser* hitherto, Erlin pays far less attention to possible correlations between the two.

While Vosskamp states that the reader as a “Beobachtungsinstanz ‘dritter Ordnung’”³⁸ can observe the “Eliminierung des Ich[s]” of both the narrator and Anton Reiser, this chapter examines the dynamic relations that take place between the plot that is narrated and the narrator’s storytelling, arguing that the narrator loses authority over his story over the course of the novel and that within the story another authority—the one of literature and narration itself—arises. In other words, the narrator loses distance to the story and the gap between *discours* and *histoire* becomes narrower. The longer the narrator writes and exposes himself to Anton’s life history, the more not only Anton, but the narration itself distances itself from the ‘real world’ and loses itself in fantasy and imagination (“Einbildungskraft”). Contrary to the narrator’s claim that he wants to show the influences of the external world, he himself is influenced by this world without noticing it. Following Vosskamp, one can certainly understand the narrative stance as a distanced one—assuming that *Anton Reiser* is, indeed, an autobiography in which an older, observing self distances itself from a younger, observed one by use of third-person narration.³⁹ This chapter, however, wants to set *Anton Reiser* into a broader context of late eighteenth-century social and narrative developments. It does not read the text as a disguised or failed autobiography but rather seeks to explain its narrative particularities as symptoms of a narrative struggle that goes hand in hand with the new subject

³⁸Vosskamp, “Poetik der Beobachtung,” 477, 478.

³⁹Cf. Vosskamp, “Poetik der Beobachtung,” esp. 473-474 and 476.

matter of individual development—a subject matter the narrator is not yet able to handle competently. Focusing on the narration of the protagonist’s subjectivity (although, as we will see, Anton is far from what we would call a modern subject), the narrator loses his own subjective distinctiveness. Experimenting with stories about subjects—although not subjects as agents in Anton’s case, as we will see—the narrator’s narrative toolbox is not yet equipped to handle another subjectivity (his own earlier in life or another person’s) without being involuntarily affected by his own story. Drawing on Dorrit Cohn’s work on third-person narration one can speak of a development from one type of psycho-narration to the next—from “one [that] is dominated by a prominent narrator who, even as he focuses intently on an individual psyche, remains emphatically distanced from the consciousness he narrates [to] the other [that] is mediated by a narrator who remains effaced and who readily fuses with the consciousness he narrates.”⁴⁰ While Cohn distinguishes between the two types as being two principle types of psycho-narration usually found in different texts, *Anton Reiser* transitions from one to the next. The novel seems to be an example of the “seesawing relationship between authorial and figural minds.”⁴¹ While Cohn relativizes the notion of the two types of psycho-narration as being mutually exclusive with regard to the history of the novel, we will see that it does hold true for *Anton Reiser*. In the long run, the narrator does not manage to maintain the integrity of his own subjectivity while being exposed to Anton Reiser’s.

⁴⁰Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 26.

⁴¹Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 26.

In order to demonstrate the changes that take place in the fourth book, I will first analyze the narrative strategies in the first three books and seek to show how the narrator diverges from the ideal of an objective *Erfahrungsseelenkundler* laid out by Moritz in his *Magazin*, since *Anton Reiser* is often read to be in accordance with the *Magazin* and the practical implementation of Moritz's *Erfahrungsseelenkunde*. Before actually turning to the novel proper, however, I will summarize this ideal of Moritz's version of an empirical psychology he presented in his *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*.

I.1 Moritz's Concept of *Erfahrungsseelenkunde*

In his "Vorschlag zu einem Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde," published in the journal *Deutsches Museum* in 1782, Moritz presents the idea of a theory of mental disease ("Seelenkrankheitslehre," 794) as an equivalent to common medicine concerned with the human body.⁴² The human soul ("Seele"), Moritz argues, is in fact of much higher importance for understanding (and preventing) moral failure that harms both the individual and society but also for fighting religious superstition ("mißverständene Religion," 794). His goal of substituting rationally justified morals for superstitious and irrational beliefs (including religious beliefs, for that matter) demands both astute observation of humans and an inductive method that helps to develop a theory on the human soul piece by piece:

⁴²Karl Philipp Moritz, "Vorschlag zu einem *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*," *Deutsches Museum* 1 (Jänner bis Junius 1782) [Leipzig]: 485-503. – Quotes from: Karl Philipp Moritz, "Vorschlag zu einem Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde," in *Dichtungen und Schriften zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, ed. by Heide Hollmer and Albert Meier, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag im Taschenbuch 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2006), 793-809.

Was ist unsere ganze Moral, wenn sie nicht **von Individuis abstrahiert** ist? Der Grundriß eines Gebäudes im Sande, den ein kleines Lüftchen zerstört, ein ohngefährer Umriß ohne innern Gehalt, eben so wie alle Pädagogik, sie sich nicht auf **spezielle Beobachtungen und Erfahrungen gründet**. Aus den vereinigten Berichten mehrerer sorgfältiger Beobachter des menschlichen Herzens könnte eine *Erfahrungsseelenlehre* entstehen, welche an praktischem Nutzen alles das weit übertreffen würde, was unsre Vorfahren in diesem Fache geleistet haben. (794-5, my emphasis)

While his emphasis on an inductive method and on observation as a way of data collection might sound at first like the plea for a modern empirical psychological science, the cited passage makes clear that Moritz has a different understanding of “Beobachtungen.” At the beginning of an *Erfahrungsseelenlehre*, the object of specific observations is not human behavior, but rather the human heart or, in more concrete terms, inner thoughts and feelings. And while Moritz does include observations of other people in his outline of an “Erfahrungsseelenkunde,” he stresses the particular value of self-observation as a starting point and *Gesellenstück* of any *Menschenbeobachter*:

Wer sich zum eigentlichen Beobachter des Menschen bilden wollte, der müßte von sich selber ausgehen: erstlich die Geschichte seines eignen Herzens von seiner frühesten Kindheit an sich so getreu wie möglich entwerfen; auf die Erinnerungen [sic] aus den frühesten Jahren der Kindheit aufmerksam sein, und nichts für unwichtig halten, was jemals einen vorzüglich starken Eindruck auf ihn

gemacht hat, so daß die Erinnerung daran sich noch immer zwischen seine übrigen Gedanken drängt. **Dabei müßte er aber ja nicht etwa die Spuren seines Genies, oder dasjenige, was schon in ihm steckte, in den frühesten Begebenheiten seines Lebens oder in seinen kindischen Handlungen suchen wollen.** Er müßte auf sein gegenwärtiges wirkliches Leben aufmerksam sein; die Ebbe und Flut bemerken, welche den ganzen Tag über in seiner Seele herrscht, und die Verschiedenheit eines Augenblicks von dem andern; er müßte sich Zeit nehmen, die Geschichte seiner Gedanken zu beschreiben, und **sich selber zum Gegenstande seiner anhaltendsten Beobachtungen zu machen**; ohne alle heftigen Leidenschaften müßte er nicht sein, und doch die Kunst verstehen, in machen Augenblicken seines Lebens sich plötzlich aus dem Wirbel seiner Begierden herauszuziehen, um eine Zeitlang den **kalten Beobachter** zu spielen, ohne sich im mindesten für sich selbst zu interessieren. (799, my emphasis)⁴³

Self-observation is thus Moritz's gold standard for an experienced-based psychology.

Despite the advantage of self-observation producing true, authentic and more detailed observations than one could gain from studying others, this self-observation has to follow some guidelines to reap the benefits of this approach. A cold observer is needed, being

⁴³The quote continues: "Von dem Leben der Menschen, deren Geschichte beschrieben ist, **kennen wir nur die Oberfläche**. Wir sehen wohl, wie der Zeiger an der Uhr sich dreht, aber wir kennen nicht das innre Triebwerk, das ihn bewegt. Wir sehen nicht, wie die ersten Keime von den Handlungen des Menschen sich im Innersten seiner Seele entwickeln. Dies bemerken wir nur so selten bei uns selber, geschweige denn bei andern. [...] [M]an kann den Gedanken nicht gut vermeiden, daß man seiner eignen Person eine zu große Wichtigkeit beilegt, indem man gerade selber der Gegenstand dieser Beobachtungen sein will. - **Aber kann es denn ein andrer sein? können wir in die Seele eines andern blicken, wie in die unsrige?**" (799-800, my emphasis)

knowledgeable about his or her interior like no other, but also not falling prey to the obvious danger of being too biased or emotionally involved in the subject matter. Moreover, the self-observing individual has to avoid the temptation of interpreting the observed individual's memories of past feelings, thoughts, and experiences from his posterior perspective, creating a narrative of a development that appears to be teleological. An *Erzählung vom Ende her*, oriented towards what can be read as seeds now blooming in the observer's current shape of his personality or his *Genie*, should not be the organizing principle for a description that is supposed to pay attention to everything noteworthy, without worrying about assigning every observation its proper place in a development that leads to and explains the status quo.

Only by practice in self-observation can, then, a *Menschenbeobachter* be trained to observe others and evaluate their behavior correctly:

So müßte nun der Menschenbeobachter von sich selber ausgehen, und dann könnten seine Beobachtungen nach und nach zu **Gesicht, Sprache, und Handlungen** von Kindern, Jünglingen, Männern und Greisen übergehn. Von der geheimen Geschichte seiner eignen Gedanken müßte er **durch Gesicht, Sprache und Handlung auf die Seele andrer schließen** lernen. (800-801, my emphasis)

Moritz hardly advocates for an approach here that fits today's understanding of empirical research. Visual and auditory self-observations are used here to make inferences about other people's interiors. Training in self-observation is supposed to guarantee the accuracy of conclusions made about interior states of mind based on exteriors. He explicitly

expresses the wish to avoid observations “wo die Lücken nicht durch leere Spekulationen [sic] zugestopft, sondern durch Tatsachen ausgefüllt würden” (798).

Narrative forms of literature in general—but even more so novels in particular—do not seem to be the first choice to fulfill these demands. And, indeed, Moritz criticizes the influence books have on readers who do not distinguish their reality from the fictional world and end up imitating things they read, while losing parts of their own, authentic identity:

Die **Nachahmungssucht** erstreckt sich gar so weit, daß man Ideale aus Büchern in sein Leben hinüber trägt. Ja nichts macht die Menschen wohl mehr unwahr, als eben die vielen Bücher. Wie schwer wird es dem Beobachter, unter alle dem, was durch das Lesen von Romanen und Schauspielen in den Charakter gekommen ist, das Eigne und Originelle wieder hervorzusuchen! **Anstatt Menschen, o Wunder! hört man jetzt Bücher reden, und siehet Bücher handeln.** Leute, die wenig Romane gelesen haben, sind noch immer der leichteste Gegenstand für den Menschenbeobachter. **Man lebt und webst jetzt in der Bücherwelt, und nur so wenige Bücher führen uns noch auf unsere wirkliche Welt zurück.** (804, my emphasis)

Although the previous quote might suggest that he condemned literature per se, Moritz—*Erfahrungsseelenkundler*, literary theorist, and novelist—obviously did not mean to make a comprehensive statement about literature. For Moritz, “good,” useful literature is characterized by the authentic presentation of human inner life, a radical subjectivism that draws on real-world observations and experiences:

Karaktere und Gesinnungen aus vorzüglich guten Romanen und dramatischen Stücken, wie die Shakespearschen, welche ein **Beitrag zur innern Geschichte des Menschen** sind. Vorzüglich aber **Beobachtungen aus der wirklichen Welt**, deren eine einzige oft mehr praktischen Wert hat, als tausend aus Büchern geschöpfte.

(796, my emphasis)

Indeed, Moritz understands *Erfahrungsseelenkunde* and literary production not as mutually exclusive or completely separate from one another. He rather conceives of his psychological investigations as the solid and informative foundation literature could build on:

Wer wird nicht gern einer so wichtigen Wissenschaft, als die Erfahrungsseelenkunde ist, seinen Zoll abtragen? - Kömmt eine solche Wissenschaft zur Vollkommenheit, so wird man einmal die Kenntnis des menschlichen Herzens mehr aus der ersten Quelle, als aus Erdichtungen schöpfen können. **Das Nachbeten und Abschreiben in den Werken des Geistes wird aufhören**, und der Dichter und Romanenschreiber wird sich genötigt sehn, erst vorher Erfahrungnsseelenlehre zu studieren, ehe er sich an eigene Ausarbeitungen wagt. (798, my emphasis)

Men of letters (or women, one might add in opposition to Moritz's conception of his disciples' gender) writing the original and informative literature Moritz imagines have to become competent in understanding human psyche before they begin writing. Both *Erfahrungsseelenkunde* and writing could become the ideal pair in order to present and spread knowledge about human nature. In the following I want to pursue the question of whether

Moritz's *Erfahrungsseelenkunde* and *Anton Reiser* are indeed such an ideal pair. Does narrating as a conscious process achieve the goal of producing greater knowledge about human psychology?

I.2. Narrative Strategies in *Anton Reiser*

While a lot of scholarly literature on *Anton Reiser* focuses heavily on the author's (or, better, narrator's) prefaces and reads the novel against the backdrop of and in alignment with Moritz's *Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, the actual plot and the narrative strategies within the text have attracted much less attention. This is particularly striking because—as I would like to show in the following close reading of several passages—the narrator of the plot does not at all adhere to the maxims formulated in the *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde* or the first preface. While the narrator acquits himself of his promise of exploring Reiser's inner life (although even this seemingly self-evident observation is subject to restrictions) he is as far from being a disinterested, cold-blooded observer as he is from sticking to an inductive methodology.⁴⁴ Even the very beginning of the novel, right after the preface's announcement of a meticulous description of Anton's life, diverts from this approach. The first sentence of the novel introduces the reader to another character, Herr von Fleischbein. Not only does the narrator avoid opening the novel with its proper protagonist Anton, he also starts out his

⁴⁴Cf. Moritz, "Vorschlag," 799.

literary journey in a town Anton only visits twice and neither actually lives in as a child nor ever returns to later in his (narrated) life:

In P[yrmont], einem Orte, der wegen seines Gesundbrunnens berühmt ist, lebte **noch** im Jahr 1756 ein Edelmann auf seinem Gute, der das Haupt einer Sekte in Deutschland war, die unter dem Namen der Quietisten oder Separatisten bekannt ist, und deren Lehren vorzüglich in den Schriften der *Mad. Guion*, einer bekannten Schwärmerin, enthalten sind, die zu Fenelons Zeiten, mit dem sie auch Umgang hatte, in Frankreich lebte.

Der Herr v. F[leischbein], so hieß dieser Edelmann, wohnte hier von allen übrigen Einwohnern des Orts, und ihrer Religion, Sitten, und Gebräuchen, ebenso abgesondert, wie sein Haus von den ihrigen durch eine hohe Mauer geschieden war, die es von allen Seiten umgab.“ (7-8, my emphasis)

Without doubt, Herr von Fleischbein in Pyrmont plays an important role in Anton's and his father's religious life and upbringing. Nevertheless, the novel's beginning opens up a large panorama of the late eighteenth-century's religious and political landscape into which Anton's story is placed and—as we will later see—in relation to which his life is explained. For the narrator gives more information and sprinkles in judgments and reflections that would not have been necessary for the text's declared main purpose—the presentation of the observations made of Anton's biography. While it is right that the year 1756 also marks the year of Moritz's

birth,⁴⁵ the introduction and framing of the date in the novel evoke much bigger and more important associations. The first paragraph is not only a narrative zooming technique. It frames the plot by linking Anton's fictive life to a broader picture in three ways: (1) Pymont as a location only seemingly as provincial as the modern reader might think; (2) the explicit connection to France via Madame Guion; and (3) the adverb "noch" used as a qualifier to introduce Herrn von Fleischbein and his living in Pymont.

Pymont at the end of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century did not have the provincial associations it might have today. Having been an independent principality since 1712, it had been a meeting place and the premier spa hotspot for Europe's high aristocracy since the "Fürstensommer" in 1681. Starting out the novel with the *Fürstenbad Pymont* does not only evoke the estate of high aristocracy in general—one neither Anton or his father belongs to— but also the international aristocratic network preceding the modern nation state.⁴⁶ Thus, as one of their members, Herr von Fleischbein does actually stand for much more than just himself or the Pietist religious movement to which he is so deeply committed. He also stands for a societal order that would soon come to its end. While the narrator also stresses the secluded life of Fleischbein and the isolation of his entire household from the locals of Pymont, his strong connection to France becomes even stronger and gains significance. Not only does the narrator tell us how much he admires Mme. Guion, her writings and how devotedly he

⁴⁵Cf. for this observation Lothar Müller, "Moritz: Anton Reiser," in *Interpretationen. Romane des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*. Reclam Universal-Bibliothek 9474 (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam jun., 1996), 259-301, here 267-268.

⁴⁶ Cf. "Bad Pymont," Wikipedia, last modified January 15, 2015, accessed January 20, 2015, http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bad_Pymont#Geschichte and "Da haben wir die Geschichte," accessed November 5, 2014, <http://www.stadt-badpymont.de/index.phtml?NavID=1922.65&>.

works on a translation of her entire œuvre (cf. 8-9); he also informs us about the origin of his Pietist zeal, which stems from his travels through France during which he came into contact with her writings (cf. 10). Against this backdrop, the little qualifier “noch” used by the narrator in order to situate Fleischbein’s aristocratic life in the internationally well-connected Pymont does indeed deserve some attention. While the first part of *Anton Reiser* was published in 1785 and Moritz started working on *Anton Reiser* probably around 1782/83 (meaning, before the French Revolution),⁴⁷ one can hardly dismiss this opening as being reminiscent of the pre-revolutionary political climate—one in which France’s political instability since the coronation of Louis XVI in May 1774 increased along with its financial crisis, debts (fueled not least by the costs of the American Revolutionary War from 1775 to 1783) and social upheavals, like the ones during the Flour War in 1775.⁴⁸ Moreover, the year 1756 itself denotes the beginning of the Seven Years’ War.⁴⁹

The “noch” by which the narrator introduces the “Edelmann” (7) von Fleischbein seems to express astonishment about an aristocrat still living an uncontested life in Pymont in 1756. Implicit in this astonishment is an apprehension of change to come—a reading which is backed up by another remark the narrator makes at the beginning of the first book when he comments on Anton’s pyromaniac affectations as a child: burning paper houses, delighting in watching a

⁴⁷While the novel’s development cannot be dated exactly it is likely that Moritz started the project around the same time as his work on the *Magazin*. Cf. on the text’s tradition and development *Dichtungen und Schriften zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, ed. Hollmer and Meier, 938-942 and 956-961.

⁴⁸Cf. Michael Adcock, *Analysing the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2004), 1-51.

⁴⁹Cf. Müller, “Moritz,” 267-268.

house in his neighborhood burn down, and wishing for the fire to not be extinguished too quickly:

Dieser Wunsch hatte nichts weniger als Schadenfreude zum Grunde, sondern entstand aus einer dunklen Ahnung von großen Veränderungen, Auswanderungen und Revolutionen, wo alle Dinge eine ganze andre Gestalt bekommen, und die bisherige Einförmigkeit aufhören würde. (29)

Hence, starting *Anton Reiser* with Fleischbein in Pyrmont—instead of beginning the novel proper with a description of the family’s hometown Hannover—sets the tone for the narrative strategies to come which diverge from Moritz’s model of an “Erfahrungsseelenkunde” based upon observations and the inductive approach of his venture of exploring the human psyche.

Identifiable characteristics of the narrator’s narrative stance throughout the novel’s first three books are: (1) his structuring of the entire plot from an *ex post* perspective that chooses and presents the events and Anton’s reactive feelings and thoughts being incorporated into the novel from a bird’s-eye view with authoritative knowledge of Anton’s entire life; (2) a preconceived idea about human nature and “natural” or “normal” human development against which Anton’s development, his reactions and choices are measured in order to evaluate them in terms of either alignment with or deviation from the blueprint or matrix of a preconceived norm; (3) the inclusion of speculation about alternative courses of the story; and (4) the instrumentalization of the story for didactic purposes in order to illustrate wordly wisdoms.

These characteristics of the narrator's *Erzählhaltung* manifest themselves in several textual phenomena I shall explore in what follows.

I.2.a With the End in Mind... Retrospection as Organizing Narrative Principle

The fact that the narrator is telling Anton's life from an *ex post* perspective might, at first glance, seem to be too trivial to mention and inherent in the genre of biography in general. While this is certainly true, I would argue that this observation should not be considered a *no-brainer* at all. The *explicit* display of the narrators' *a posteriori* stance and the employment of a narrative technique that transforms the story into a plot and crafts it according to the narrator's specific epistemological interests demonstrates not only the narrator's ability to take control over the novel, but also shows his awareness of his doing so. This is important to point out since this sovereign mastery is not upheld over the whole of the novel, as I will show later in this chapter. But what exactly does this sovereign *ex post* stance look like on the textual level?

First, the narrator states right at the beginning that what he has to tell his readers is not a random succession of minor facts from Anton's life. Rather, he instructs the reader that what might look like single and arbitrary narrated events belong to the larger whole of Anton's life and must be seen as meaningful as part of how his life unfolds.

Wer den Lauf der menschlichen Dinge kennt, und weiß, wie dasjenige oft im Fortgange des Lebens sehr wichtig werden kann, was anfänglich klein und unbedeutend schien, der wird sich an die anscheinende Gerinfügigkeit mancher Umstände, die hier erzählt werden, nicht stoßen. (6)

The following narration stands in harmony with this announcement. Telling the story with the end in mind serves as an organizational principle for the narration and explicitly so. After having started out the story of Anton's life with five very short paragraphs describing the circumstances into which he was born and the breakdown of his parents' marriage and how it affected him,⁵⁰ the narrator steps out of his linear narration already in the fifth paragraph of the novel proper in order to situate what he has just said and to evaluate its significance for the whole of Anton's life:

Diese ersten Eindrücke [of his parents' unhappy marriage, S. N.] sind nie in seinem Leben aus seiner Seele verwischt worden, und haben sie oft zu einem Sammelplatze schwarzer Gedanken gemacht, die er durch keine Philosophie verdrängen konnte. (13)

The subsequent two one-sentence paragraphs repeat the succession of the telling of a snippet of Anton's life a subsequent assessment of its meaningfulness and effects:

Da sein Vater im siebenjährigen Kriege mit zu Felde war, zog seine Mutter zwei Jahre lang mit ihm auf ein kleines Dorf.

⁵⁰First paragraph: "Unter diesen Umstaenden wurde Anton geboren, und von ihm kann man sagen, daß er von der Wiege an unterdrückt ward" (12). – Second paragraph: "Die erste Toene, die sein Ohr vernahm, und sein aufdaemmernder Verstand begriff, waren wechselseitige Flüche und Verwünschungen des unauflöslich geknüpften Ehebandes" (12). – Third paragraph: "Ob er gleich Vater und Mutter hatte, so war er doch ein seiner fruehesten Jugend schon von Vater und Mutter verlassen, denn er wußte nicht, an wen er sich anschließen, an wen er sich halten sollte, da sich beide haßten, und ihm doch einer so nahe wie der andre war" (12). – Fourth paragraph: "In seiner fruehesten Jugend hat er nie die Liebkosungen zaertlicher Eltern geschmeckt, nie nach einer kleinen Mühe ihr belohnendes Lächeln" (13). – Fifth paragraph: "Wenn er in das Hause seiner Eltern trat, so trat er in ein Haus der Unzufriedenheit, des Zorns, der Tränen und der Klagen" (13).

Hier hatte er ziemliche Freiheit und einige Entschädigung für die Leiden seiner Kindheit. (13)

In the next paragraph, the narrator supplements the previously mentioned evaluation of negative events with positive ones, this time changing from past tense to present tense—referring to and explaining a part of the personality of a protagonist who seems to still be alive. What this statement reveals is that the status quo of Anton's life in the narrator's present serves as the focal point: the narrated life events are oriented toward and subordinated to it in order to illuminate its constitution:

Die Vorstellugen von den ersten Wiesen, die er sahe, [...] **mischen sich noch immer** unter seine angenehmsten Gedanken, und machen gleichsam die Grundlage aller der täuschenden Bilder aus, die oft seine Phantasie sich vormalt.
(13, my emphasis)

Finally, before picking up the thread of his chronological narration again, the readers acquire a premonition that what is to come won't be a *Lucky Hans* tale with a happy ending. The narrator gives them an epic premonition, forewarning them that Anton's few happy days in the country will soon come to an end: "Aber wie bald waren diese beiden glücklichen Jahre entflohen!" With exasperation in his voice, the narrator reveals his compassion and sympathy even more than earlier and leads the implicit reader beyond the current point in the novel. By means of this forecast he also opens up a (negative) horizon of expectation that transcends the present moment in the plot and connects it with future moments. In addition to providing these forecasts, the narrator also, though less frequently, looks back for the causes of narrated

events and in this way connects events retroactively,⁵¹ and utilizes guiding (rhetorical) questions in order to organize the novel.⁵² The exhaustive discussion of the very beginning of Anton's life story is representative for the *discours* of the whole first three books, and many more examples could be cited.⁵³

1.2.b Deductive Induction: The Narrator's Preconceptions as Organizing Narrative Principle

It is not only the *discours*, however, that the narrator oversees, crafts, and controls in the first book. Contrary to Moritz's claim of an inductive methodology of the discipline of psychology based on objective observations and reports, his narrator in *Anton Reiser* is neither neutral or uninvolved in Anton's story, nor does he derive an understanding of the workings of human psyche or development from his observations. Rather, he defends Anton over and over again by attributing Moritz's failures, weaknesses, and poor choices to circumstances or human nature that do not allow for an alternative outcome. Again, there are countless examples for this in the novel. One of the most notable is the recurrent use of "natürlich," "natürlicherweise," or "Natur" as descriptors for the motives driving Anton's actions. These descriptors' references are twofold, assigning responsibility for his actions to two culprits at the same time: to the narrator's preconceived idea of the "normal" development of young men of

⁵¹Cf., for instance: "Diese Phantasie war mit einer andern verwandt, die er noch aus H[annover] mitgebracht hatte - schon dort war [...]" (97).

⁵²Cf., for instance: "Woher mochte wohl dies sehnliche Verlangen nach einer liebeichen Behandlung bei ihm entstehen, da er doch derselben nie gewohnt gewesen war, und also kaum einige Begriffe davon haben konnte?" (14).

⁵³ Cf., for instance, for predictions, anticipations and connections to Anton's later life p. 30 or 106, for biased comments supporting Anton p. 100.

his time as well as the causal relation of Anton's choices to the external circumstances that surround him. When the narrator, for instance, tells us how the nine-year old Anton tries to follow a self-imposed repression of all too fierce emotional or physical expression in order to follow the instructions of a book on how to intensify one's piety already in childhood, he also informs us about Anton's occasional missteps with the words: "Wenn er, wie natürlich, sich zuweilen vergaß, [...] umhersprang oder –lief, [...]" (20). The narrator leaves no doubt that he does not want the reader to judge Anton too harshly. In this cited passage as well as numerous times over the course of the novel, the narrator uses adjective and adverbs such as "natürlich" and "natürlicherweise" to judge Anton's fallibility not in terms of an individual character flaw, but as a shared common human experience or natural occurrence for certain stages of development. Other phrases express the narrator's exculpatory narrative strategy even more boldly. Concerned about the reader's perception of Anton, the narrator tells us about Anton's intense self-loathing and self-flagellation whenever he believes he has gone astray from his goal of advancing on the path of a pious life, but the narrator immediately adds that Anton's self-condemnation was, indeed, highly exaggerated and unjustified: "[...] aber seinen wahren innern Kampf, wo er oft seine unschuldigsten Wünsche einem eingebildeten Missfallen des göttlichen Wesens aufopferte, bemerkte niemand" (31). Moreover, when talking about Anton's inclination to feel insulted or overlooked, the narrator does not hesitate to frame this characteristic with general reflections on children's dependent and vulnerable position in the world, reminding us: "Und gewiss ist wohl bei niemandem die Empfindung des Unrechts stärker, als bei Kindern, und

niemandem kann auch leichter Unrecht geschehen" (33).⁵⁴ What becomes clear through these remarks is that Anton is, indeed, not serving (as Esselborn argues) as a case study for a single human navigating the hardships of life. Rather, Anton's story seems to serve as anecdotal piece of evidence for views on human nature, childhood development, and pedagogy the narrator wants to convey to his readers. Anton is fit into a preconceived matrix of human nature and development rather than serving as data for the formulation of such. But the narrator's preconceptions go even further than measuring Anton against an all-too-human standard. Although he recounts observations of his protagonist's actions, feelings, and thoughts, the narrator does not use these to provide the reader with a characterization of Anton. The narrator rather corrects the impression that might have arisen due to his narrative account by informing the reader that this account in fact does present an accurate picture of Anton's "true" nature. He discredits his own account when he debunks it as *Schein* rather than *Sein*.

On other occasions, the narrator acts as Anton's guardian who does not want the readers to judge Anton too harshly and who is eager to provide explanations for Anton's behavior that allow the reader to sympathize with the protagonist. When the latter Lobenstein tries to enforce Anton's conversion and presses him to continue confessing sins after Anton claims to be done, the narrator takes this external force as reason for Anton to feign humble devotion. But the narrator does not blame Anton for his wrongdoing by making up sins he did not commit. Rather, he does not fail to point out that this behavior is not in agreement with Anton's true inner nature: "Dies [Lobenstein's pressure on Anton, S. N.] war für Anton eine

⁵⁴ Cf. for more examples p. 51 ("natürlicherweise") and pp. 54, 56, 92 ("natürlich") and more often.

neue Veranlassung zur Heuchelei und Verstellung, die sonst seiner Natur ganz entgegen war” (64). Again, this exculpatory strategy reoccurs in the novel.⁵⁵ Other times, the narrator sprinkles in rhetorical questions directed at the readers, asking the reader to agree with his evaluation of Anton’s life events. For example, when telling us about Anton’s first time in Hatter’s household in Braunschweig, the narrator deems it “sehr natürlich” (92) that Anton does not quite know where he is when waking up in the morning and that he has trouble distinguishing between dream and reality, having not settled into his new environment yet. Then, by addressing the reader with a direct, rhetorical question, the narrator connects Anton’s experiences to the readers’ and involves them in the story: “Ist es also wohl zu verwundern, wenn die Veränderung des Orts oft so vieles beiträgt, uns dasjenige, was wir uns nicht gern als wirklich denken, wie einen *Traum* vergessen zu machen?” (93)

These attempts to protect Anton from harsh judgment, revealed in the narrator’s comments about human nature, Anton’s “true” character, and rhetorical questions, are surpassed by numerous comments that suggest a much stronger connection between circumstances and Anton’s choices. These comments show the narrator’s understanding of Anton’s fallibility not as something all humans have a strong inclination to exhibit once in a while, but rather as an almost inevitable necessity and consequence of certain conditions. In this way, the course of the story is almost presented as deterministic and determined by natural laws, not the character’s choices. The law that shines through all such comments is one

⁵⁵Cf. for more examples pp. 82, 84 (“ihm natürlich”), 41 (“beinahe seiner Natur zuwider”), 25 (“Seine Übungen im innern Gebet setzte er nun sehr fleißig fort; allein es konnte nicht fehlen, daß sie nicht zuweilen eine sehr kindische Wendung nehmen mußten.”).

that could be called the *law of homeostasis*—upholding a cosmic balance between positive and negative life events. The narrator does not solely describe life as inevitably including ups and downs, he rather seems to imply a lawful succession of both, using model verbs like *können*, *müssen*, or *sollen* to describe the change between positive and negative experiences, adjectives like *nötig*, and subordinating conjunctions like *damit*. For example, when the narrator describes Anton’s feverish attempts to live a pious life without fail, deadening all sensual experiences and fantasizing about death, he designates as a necessity the fact that opposing inner forces seek to assert themselves as Anton’s motivation:

Aber es **konnte nicht fehlen**, daß bei allen diesen Ausschweifungen seine Phantasie die Natur ihren Zeitpunkt wahrnahm, wo sie wieder zurückkehrte – und dann die **natürliche Liebe zum Leben**, um des Lebens willen, in Antons Seele wieder erwachte. Dann war ihm freilich der Gedanke an seinen bevorstehenden Tod sehr etwas Trauriges und Unangenehmes [...], weil es ihm nicht möglich war, die **Stimme der Natur** in sich zu unterdrücken. (89, my emphasis)⁵⁶

Far from actually taking his observations of Anton as source of knowledge—as postulated in the *Magazin*—the narrator starts from his understanding of human nature and uses it as a matrix to explain the many ups and downs in Anton’s life and his pursuit of so many, so frequently changing goals and interests. And it is not merely the pointing to the naturalness of Anton’s actions that has to be noted here, it is the necessity of fulfilling nature’s demands.

⁵⁶Cf. the similar statement: “[...] die natürliche Liebe zum Leben, die, trotz aller Schwärmereien, wovon Anton den Kopf vollgepfropft hatte, dennoch bei ihm die Oberhand behielt” (90).

And the narrator even goes beyond the belief in a human nature that enforces itself. A general notion of a cosmic balance that has to be restored stands behind the explanations the narrator offers when transitioning from a temporarily lucky or happy Anton to a once again defeated one: “**Damit** er sich seines Glücks nicht überheben sollte, waren ihm fürs erste schon starke Demütigungen zubereitet.” (44, my emphasis).⁵⁷ Again, it is not merely the vicissitudes of life the narrator reminds the reader of here. It is rather the expression of the belief that what Anton is experiencing is governed by laws that equilibrate both sides of Anton’s balance sheet of life. A little later, the narrator tells us that Anton experienced a short period of happiness in the hatter’s house, getting along well with the head of the household and taking piano lessons. But almost at the same time, the narrator lets us know that this, by necessity, had to come to an end: “Nun hatte aber auch Antons Glück im L[obenstein]schen Hause den höchsten Gipfel erreicht, und sein Fall war nahe.” (68). His phrasing of the development of the story reveals his effort to fit the parts of his narration and of Anton’s life into a lawfully organized whole that had to evolve the way it did.

While the narrator paints the picture of a whole that is wisely organized and balanced,⁵⁸ he attributes the specific events that initiate a change very often to pure chance. When he talks about the selection of books Anton reads as a child and that becomes so influential for his

⁵⁷Cf. the very similar comment: “Allein **damit** er sich seines Glücks nicht überheben sollte, stand ihm am andern Tage eine Demütigung bevor, die beinahe jene in B[raunschweig] noch übertraf, da er zum ersten Mal mit dem Tragkorbe auf dem Rücken gehen mußte” (110, my emphasis).

⁵⁸Cf. also: “Nach einer allgütigen und weisen Einrichtung der Dinge hat auch das mühevolle, einförmige Leben des Handwerksmannes, seine Einschnitte und Perioden, wodurch eine gewisser Takt und Harmonie hineingebracht wird, welcher macht, daß es unbemerkt abläuft, ohne seinem Besitzer eben Langeweile gemacht zu haben. Aber Antons Seele war durch seine romanhaften Ideen einmal zu diesem Takt verstimmt” (61).

unruly *Einbildungskraft* and his fascination with theater, the narrator calls it a “zufällige Lektüre” (40). Later, “[e]in Zufall” (64) makes Anton witness the disturbed hatter who has suffered a nightmare and makes Anton keep his company. The nightly gathering results in more socializing and conversations about Anton’s religious conversion that, in turn, make Anton again feign remorse and disguise his real feelings—a behavior “die sonst seiner Natur ganz entgegen war” (64). When Anton finally leaves the hat maker and Braunschweig, another coincidence happens that has less serious consequences, but illustrates how the narrator brings together necessity on a large scale and chance in their concrete unfolding:

Um von dem Ganzen seines hiesigen Lebens ein anschauliches Bild zu haben, **war es nötig, daß gleichsam alle die Fäden abgeschnitten wurden**, die seine Aufmerksamkeit immer an das Momentane, Alltägliche und Zerstückte desselben hefteten; und daß er zugleich in den Standpunkt wieder versetzt wurde, aus welchem er sein Leben in B[raunschweig] betrachtete, ehe er es anfang, da es noch wie eine dämmernde Zukunft vor ihm lag. **In diesen Zustand wurde er nun gerade versetzt, da er zufälligerweise aus dem Tore ging**, durch welches er vor ohngefähr anderhalb Jahren, auf der breiten mit Weiden bepflanzten Herrstraße hereingekommen war, und die Schildwache auf dem hohen Walle hatte hin- und hergehen sehen. (94, my emphasis)

We will later see, however, that it is in the fourth book that coincidences become more frequent and more influential.⁵⁹ But already at this point in my analysis of the first book of

⁵⁹Cf. for more examples pp. 457, 458, 466, 481.

Anton Reiser, it becomes clear that the author acknowledges and repeatedly points out how chance and social circumstances in impact the course of the protagonist's life. But this does not prevent the narrator from perceiving and explaining the course of events from a preconceived idea about principles of human nature, child development, and the way of a purposefully organized world.

I.2.c Speculative Empiricism: The Narrator's Counterfactual Mode of Narration

As we have seen, the narrator not only strives to give us a description of Anton's life, he wants to offer an explanation for its course too. Yet he does not keep to the facts or what he deems to be the facts. He also engages in *what if...* speculations about an alternative order of events. When his temporarily good relationship with the hatter Lobenstein causes the other members of the household to become envious of Anton's privileged position and to malign his character, Lobenstein starts to doubt Anton's adherence to a lifestyle both agreeable to God and committed to simplicity. The narrator explains Lobenstein's change of opinion by stating:

[...], daß ihm [Lobenstein, S. N.] Anton seit eniger Zeit zu klug zu werden anfang, zu viel sprach und vernünftelte, und überhaupt, wegen der Zufriedenheit mit seinem Zustande, zu lebhaft wurde. - Diese Lebhaftigkeit war ihm der gerade Weg zu Antons Verderben, der nach dieser Heiterkeit in seinem Gesichte notwendig ein ruchloser, weltlich gesinnter Mensch werden mußte, von dem nichts anders zu vermuten stand, als daß ihn Gott selbst in seinen Sünden dahingeben würde. -

Hätte Anton seinen Vorteil besser verstanden, so hätte er itzt durch ein niedergeschlagenes, misanthropisches Wesen, vorgegebene Beängstigungen und Beklemmungen seiner Seele noch alles wiedergutmachen können. (70, my emphasis)

The narrator informs us that Anton could have indeed turned around the hatter's resentment by behaving less lively and more melancholically. However, Anton does not detect the change in Lobenstein's mindset and is thus unable to even consider pretending being chastened and humbly devoted to a life with as little sensuousness as possible. Interestingly enough, the narrator seems to endorse Anton deceiving Lobenstein in this case, whereas earlier he disapproved of Anton pretending to be devastated by his own sinful character in order to please the hatter. While the narrator reveals himself to be inconsistent with his judgments about the value of authenticity and the acceptance of pretense—a point the author Moritz was indeed very clear about in his writing about *Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, as we have seen earlier—he actually does demonstrate consistency in his attempt not to let the facts obfuscate the readers' judgment of Anton too much; and he definitely displays involvement in Anton's story in this passage when he digresses from the actual progress of events and thinks about an alternative, counter-factual storyline that would have been more advantageous for Anton. Moreover, it is worthy of note that the paragraph that concludes the first book of *Anton Reiser*, published in 1785, makes use of literary narrative strategies that create suspense and apprehension in the reader's mind.

The first book ends with the prospect of Anton having to leave school very soon and taking on an apprenticeship as a craftsman in order to not be a financial burden on his parents anymore and to make his own living. This seems to be the end of Anton's school career and the shattering of his longing for a university education. However, the narrator concludes the first book with a remark suggesting that there might actually be a turn for the better for Anton:

Da sich nun für Anton keine solide Aussicht zum Studieren eröffnen wollte, so würde er doch am Ende warhscheinlich den Entschluß haben fassen müssen, irgendein Handwerk zu lernen, wenn nicht, wider Vermuten, ein sehr geringfügig scheinender Umstand seinem Schicksal in seinem ganzen künftigen Leben eine andre Wendung gegeben hätte. - (120)

Skillfully, the narrator keeps the reader in suspense and creates apprehension for the sequel in Part II, which appeared the following year, in 1786. The allusion to a drastic turn of events serves as a cliffhanger that is supposed to keep the reader involved in Anton's story as much as the narrator himself is taking an interest in the story.

I.2.d The Narrator as Pedagogue: Anton as Didactic Object of Observation

Finally, a noticeable characteristic of the narrator's narrative technique is the interspersal of didactic remarks about the take-away messages from Anton's life story and the reflection on general worldly wisdoms. Although Moritz partitioned off didactic remarks from the narrative parts of the novel far less distinctly than contemporary authors of didactic novels of the Enlightenment—for which Johann Heinrich Campe's (1746-1818) *Robinson der Jüngere*

from 1779/80 is exemplary—he lets his narrator interrupt the plot once in a while and reminds his readers of the narrator’s mediating presence. Even in the first preface, the narrator informs us about the pedagogical value of the following story as he assures us:

[A]ber wenigstens wird doch vorzüglich in pädagogischer Rücksicht, das Bestreben nie ganz unnütz sein, die Aufmerksamkeit des Menschen mehr auf den Menschen selbst zu heften, und ihm sein individuelles Dasein wichtiger zu Machen. (6)

Anton’s story and the narrative exploration of his thoughts, feelings, and actions, we learn, is supposed to serve as an exemplum for how to direct attention to our own being. But not only in the preface, in the narrative text proper, the narrator addresses “Lehrer und Pädagogen” repeatedly. One example from the beginning of the book was already cited above to illustrate the narrator’s references to general child development when talking about Anton at certain ages. The narrator points out children’s vulnerability and sensibility to any kind of injustice, and he calls on educators to keep this in mind: “Und gewiss ist wohl bei niemandem die Empfindung des Unrechts stärker, als bei Kindern, und niemandem kann auch leichter Unrecht geschehen; ein Satz, den alle Pädagogen täglich und stündlich beherzigen sollten” (33). Later, in the second book, the narrator tells us about Anton’s difficulties with his classmates at the Hannoverian *Lateinschule* and his precarious situation as the penniless recipient of *Freitische*. Anton, oppressed by his dependence on his benefactors’ goodwill, sinks into depression and lethargy, both of which result in him experiencing even more hostility and affronts. The narrator disabuses his readers of the misconception that Anton acted out of spite,

which is the belief Anton's teachers and classmates hold. Rather, the narrator claims, one has to take into account previous affronts to Anton as cause for his withdrawal. He dedicates a whole paragraph to this justification, highlighted in print in the first edition through a bold and larger font, in the quoted edition through italics.⁶⁰

Allein man erwog nicht, daß eben dies Betragen, weswegen man ihn zurücksetzte, selbst eine Folge von vorhergegangner Zurücksetzung war. - Diese Zurücksetzung, welche in einer Reihe von zufälligen Umständen gegründet war, hatte den Anfang zu seinem Betragen, und nicht sein Betragen, wie man glaubte, den Anfang zur Zurücksetzung gemacht.

Möchte dies **alle Lehrer und Pädagogen** aufmerksamer, und in ihren Urteilen über die Entwicklung der Charaktere junger Leute behutsamer machen, daß sie die **Einwirkung unzähliger zufälliger Umstände** mit in Anschlag brächten, und von diesen erst die genaueste Erkundigung einzuziehen suchten, ehe sie es wagten, durch ihr Urteil über das Schicksal eines Menschen zu entscheiden, bei dem es vielleicht nur eines aufmunternden Blicks bedurfte, um ihn plötzlich umzuschaffen, weil **nicht die Grundlage seines Charakters, sondern eine sonderbare Verkettung von Umständen** an seinem schlecht in die Augen fallenden Betragen schuld war. (205, my emphasis)

⁶⁰Cf. p. 136 in the first edition of the second part that has been digitalized and can be accessed on the homepage of the *Deutsches Textarchiv*: http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/moritz_reiser02_1786?p=146, *Deutsches Textarchiv*, accessed November 6, 2014.

This quote summarizes most of the points mentioned earlier in this chapter. The narrator emphasizes the importance of chance as well as external, mainly socio-economic circumstances, holds them responsible for Anton's misery, and advocates for a self as "heteronomously defined," as Erlin puts it.⁶¹ Reflecting on what could have been done to avoid some of Anton's misfortune goes hand in hand with his advice for educators to keep Anton's story as an instructive fable in mind.⁶²

The narrator broadens the potential readership that can be instructed by the narrative by also including reflections on life in general; and the narrator does not do so as a cold-blooded observer:

Wie groß ist die Seligkeit der Einschränkung, die **wir** doch aus allen Kräften zu fliehen suchen! Sie ist wie ein kleines glückliches Eiland, in einem stürmischen Meere: **wohl dem**, der in ihrem Schoße sicher schlummern kann, ihn weckt keine Gefahr, ihm drohen keine Stürme. **Aber wehe dem**, der von unglücklicher Neugier getrieben, sich über dies dämmernde Gebirge hinauswagt, das wohlthätig seinen Horizont umschränkt. Er wird auf eine wilden [sic] stürmischen See von Unruh und Zweifel hin und her getrieben, sucht unbekannte Gegenden in grauer

⁶¹Erlin, "Karl Philipp Moritz," 161.

⁶²Cf. also the narrator's reflection only a little later: "**Man siehet aus diesem allen**, daß die Achtung, worin ein junger Mensch bei seinen Mitschülern steht, eine äußerst wichtige Sache bei seiner Bildung und Erziehung ist, worauf man bei **öffentlichen Erziehungsanstalten** bisher noch zu wenig Aufmerksamkeit gewandt hat. - Was Reisern damals aus seinem Zustande **retten, und** auf einmal zu einem fleißigen und ordentlichen jungen Menschen **hätte umschaffen können**, wäre eine einzige wohlangewandte Bemühung seiner Lehrer gewesen, ihn bei seinen Mitschülern wieder in Achtung zu setzen. Und das hätten sie durch eine etwas nähere Prüfung seiner Fähigkeiten, und ein wenig mehr Aufmerksamkeit auf ihn sehr leicht bewirken können. -" (215-216, my emphasis)

Ferne, und sein kleines Eiland, auf dem er so sicher wohnte, hat alle seine Reize für ihn verloren. (37, my emphasis)⁶³

In this comment by the narrator a tone of desperation and general emotional turmoil shines through in both punctuation and word choice, and it is the narrator's own emotional involvement that thwarts Moritz's concept of the ideal observer of humans.

I.3 The Narrator's Loss of Authority

The emphasis the narrator puts on chance and external circumstances to explain the course of Anton's life clearly draws on preconceptions about the course of personal development and the world in general. What I seek to show in the following analysis is how the main narrative strategies in the fourth book diverge from the previous ones. That is to say, it is not so much the case that the described narrative characteristics vanish and are not employed anymore at all. Rather, we can see how different techniques become more important than others and how some of them are modified in a way that changes their functioning. First of all, the narrator still uses retrospection and preconceptions in order to form a whole narrative that presents the reader with a story that flows well, is comprehensible, and logical. He still evaluates narrated events by highlighting their lasting impression on Anton⁶⁴ and interprets the

⁶³Cf. for other examples for general reflections only in book one for instance pp. 88, 91, 92, and 93.

⁶⁴Cf., for instance: "[D]er Aufenthalt in diesem Hause [the widowed host's house at the very beginning of the fourth book] *mit dem Wirt ganz allein*, blieb ihm eine seiner angenehmsten Erinnerungen" (395). – Or: "[...] und er konnte sich mit innigem Vergnügen daran zurückerinnern" (406). – Or: "Nie aber in seinem Leben ist seine Teilnahme an einem fremden Schicksale stärker gewesen, als sie es gerade diesen Abend an dem Schicksale der Liebenden [des Theaterstücks] war, [...]" (421). – Or: "Reisern trog aber diesmal, so wie nachher noch oft seine Ahndung, und sein Glaube an eine Entschädigung für erlittenen Kummer, die notwendig noch auf Erden

story by means of a set of preconceptions that help him situate the details of the story within a narrative whole.⁶⁵ The narrator also sprinkles in speculations about alternative stories⁶⁶ and didactic comments⁶⁷ from time to time. However, these comments and explanations become less frequent and they also become less substantial. What becomes much more frequent in the fourth book compared to the previous ones is the narrator's reference to chance as explanation for the way things unfold. Overall, it is remarkable how important the role of pure chance in the fourth book is, for it is due to chance and pure passive reaction that Anton takes on the role of a student, when his first landlord, the lonely widower, assumes him to be one and Anton does not correct him (cf. 394). It is chance that Anton's specific upbringing makes him fool himself by believing that he is determined to be an artist in the first place— "was bloß in den zufälligen Umständen seines Lebens gegründet war" (413-4). It is chance that Anton has some of his

stattfinden müsse" (464). – Or, finally: "Das Bild wie [the doctor and Anton's English student] Sauer mit blassen Wangen, und untergeschlagenen Armen, bedeutungsvoll in diesen stygischen Fluß hinunterblickte, kam Reisern lebhaft wieder vor die Seele, als er einige Jahre nachher die Nachricht von seinem Tode vernahm" (465).

⁶⁵Cf., for instance "Wenn das gänzliche Hinscheiden aus dem Leben durch irgendeinen Zustand kann vorgebildet werden, so muß es dieser [the complete disconnection from every human community] sein. –" (384) – Or: "Ein solcher Traum [about being in a head of an old woman in a tavern] war bei der plötzlichen Veränderung, die sein Zustand gelitten hatte, sehr natürlich" (389). – Or: "Und dann erhielt so etwas [a refreshing well at the end of a long day of walking] für Reisern einen doppelten Wert, weil er das Poetische mit hinzutrug, das nun bei ihm wirklich wurde, und wovon man sagen könnte, daß es die einzige Schadloshaltung für die notwendigen Folgen seiner Torheit war, für die er selbst nicht konnte, weil sie nach natürlichen Gesetzen in sein Schicksal von Kindheit auf sich notwendig einflechten mußte. –" (437). – As well as: "Sein [Anton's] Glück scheint sich in dieser Kleinigkeit gleichsam ganz erschöpft zu haben, um ihn im Großen wieder desto mehr büßen zu lassen, was er auf keine andre Weise, als durch sein Dasein verschuldet hatte" (472).

⁶⁶Cf.: "Mochte nun dies Lesen im Homer eine zurückgebliebene Idee aus Werthers Leiden sein, oder nicht, so war es doch bei Reisern gewiß nicht Affektation, sondern machte ihm wirkliches und reines Vergnügen - denn kein Buch paßte ja so sehr auf seinen Zustand, als grade dieses [...]" (388).

⁶⁷Cf.: "Es ist merkwürdig, wie die verächtlichsten wirklichen Ding, auf die Weise in die glänzendsten Gebäude der Phantasie eingreifen und sie zerstören können, und wie auf eben diesen verächtlichen Dingen eines Menschen Schicksal beruht" (405-406). – Or: "So wohlthätig reicht die Natur den [sic] Hoffnungslosen auch schon die Schale dar, aus der er Vergessenheit seiner Leiden trinken, und alle Erinnerungen an irgend etwas, das er wünschte, oder wornach er strebte, aus der Seele verwischt werden sollen" (422).

poems and some documents with his name on them with him in his bag when he spontaneously sets off from Gotha to join the theatrical group in Eisenach (cf. 427), precisely these documents save him from the obtrusive army canvasser in Orschla and make people believe that he is indeed a student (cf. 397-400) and that help him again only a little later on his way to Eisenach (cf. 431). Is it pure chance as well that his temporary fellow traveler, the bookbinder does not buy Anton's story of being a student upon arrival in Erfurt and that "diese zufälligen Worte des Buchbindergesellen [ihn] ins Leben zurückrufen" (437) so that he, paradoxically, decides to stay in Erfurt and settle as a student instead of pursuing his theater career. And after Anton rests before entering the town, sleeps for a while and, then, opens his eyes, it is, magically, the abbot Günther who stands right in front of him, later coming to administer to Anton's needs and making a life as a student in Erfurt possible for him (cf. 439). And again, once Anton becomes more unsatisfied with his living situation as a student, it happens to be the case that university students are planning a theater performance for which some parts were "noch unbesetzt" (457). Equally accidentally, when a professional theater group finally comes into town, it happens to perform *Die Poeten nach der Mode*, the play which Anton was part of in Hannover so that he is offered a part. And, finally, the narrator tells us about the "komischer Zufall" (494) that Anton witnesses a scenic reading of Goethe's *Werther* on stage in which the actors do such a poor job that it "bestärkte [...] ihn darin [in his pursuits on stage], weil er so etwas Unvollkommenes vor sich sahe, das durch etwas Vollkommenes ersetzt werden mußte" (494).

This long list demonstrates that Anton exerts actually almost no agency in the fourth book. Whereas Anton does show some agency in the previous books by, for instance,

approaching people with his wish to study or deciding to leave his parents' house, he now seems to be a pawn in the hands of external forces that become more and more random. Seeing Anton as a "heteronomously defined self"⁶⁸ is not unique to the fourth book; we have seen how the narrator points out Anton's heteronomy from the beginning, starting with the first pages that evoke the historical time frame. In a sense, the focus on chance, upbringing, and socio-economic circumstances determines the way the narrator presents Anton's life in the whole novel fragment. But the events in the fourth book are more and more random and isolated events since chance plays such an important role in them. The narrator's declared intention in the second preface to present a "künstlich verflochtne[s] Gewebe eines Menschenlebens aus einer unendlichen Menge von Kleinigkeiten" (122) does not hold true for the fourth book, in which the carefully woven fabric of the first three books—woven together by explanations and drawn connections—is unwoven by pure chance. Previous scholarship has already pointed out the significance of chance in the novel as a whole⁶⁹ but has not taken into account the changes that take place over the course of the novel fragment. The effect of the increased significance of chance in the last book corresponds to another observation that can be made when we take a closer look at the kind of explanations the narrator gives us for the course of the story. In the first book, the narrator spends a lot of time presenting Anton's few highs and successes as well as his many lows and humiliations in great detail and explaining their negative effect on Anton's development. It is noteworthy that all explanations for Anton's suggestibility and lack of orientation in the fourth book sound almost alike and are all very

⁶⁸Erlin, "Karl Philipp Moritz," 161.

⁶⁹Müller, "Moritz: Anton Reiser," 270.

indistinct. Anton's childhood and the circumstances he grew up in and that surround him are the two big factors the narrator refers to when explaining his protagonist's feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and urges. Anton's passion for the theater, the narrator tells his readers, would be "ein Resultat seines Lebens und seiner Schicksale [...], wodurch er von Kindheit auf, aus der wirklichen Welt verdrängt wurde" (382) and a „Zufluchtsort gegen alle diese Widerwärtigkeiten und Bedrückungen" (382). A little later, the narrator states that this passion originates from the fact that Anton "von Kindheit auf *zu wenig eigene Existenz gehabt hatte*" (413) so that he is prone to take on different roles. As for Anton's unfettered imagination and the mishaps it leads Anton into, the narrator sees them as „die notwendigen Folgen seiner Torheit [...], für die er selbst nichts konnte, weil sie nach natürlichen Gesetzen in sein Schicksal von Kindheit auf sich notwendig einflechten mußte." (437)⁷⁰ And apart from the reference to Anton's childhood, it is his generally unfavorable circumstances that the narrator holds accountable for Anton's failures and his tendency to withdraw and flee the world that "hatten ihren Grund in seinen Schicksalen von seiner Kindheit an. [...] Und wurde nicht diese [Reiser's] Selbstverachtung durch den immerwährenden Druck von außen bei ihm bewirkt, woran freilich mehr der Zufall schuld war, als die Menschen" (481).⁷¹

Arguably, it is possible to see the narrator's vagueness as a result of rather than a contradiction to the more detailed reflections in the previous books—the narrator builds on provided information that has already been provided and seeks simply to avoid repetitions. He

⁷⁰Cf. similar comments on p. 476 ("von seiner Kindheit an in einer Sphäre war, die ihn bis zum Staube niederdrückte") and p. 445 ("weil ihn seine Erziehung, und der Kummer von seinen Schuljahren drückten").

⁷¹Cf. also p. 476 ("in seiner äußerlichen Lage").

does, however, do exactly this when using the cited general explanations—he repeats himself over and over again, using the same generic phrases. On the other hand, the woodcut-like, global, unspecific narrative mode of the fourth book stands out in stark contrast to the narrator’s precision in the previous books, in which he meticulously traces the genealogy of certain behavioral or emotional response patterns to the memory of one single event.⁷²

However, the text tells us much more about the connections between events in the fourth book and their exact foundations in Anton’s childhood than the narrator does, revealing a remarkable blind spot the narrator has when it comes to the more complex origins for Anton’s poor choices. Interestingly enough, the narrator does not draw any connections between Anton’s reading experience and religious upbringing in the first book and the fourth book—the latter seems almost like a fulfillment of Anton’s early attempts to rid himself of his ego and detach himself from the sensuous and physical world in the first book.

And although the first book of Anton’s biography is in large part a *biblio-biography*, talking extensively about Anton’s reading socialization, the narrator presents Anton’s losing himself in his imagination or a book consistently as the *result* of painful external circumstances and events:

Durch das Lesen war ihm nun auf einmal eine neue Welt eröffnet, in deren
Genuß er sich für alle das Unangenehme in seiner wirklichen Welt einigermaßen
entschädigen konnte. Wenn nun rund um ihn her nichts als Lärmen und Schelten

⁷²Cf. scene of the little Anton being carried by his mother and protected from snow (p. 37) or narrating the memory of Anton shouting at a man on the street for no reason (pp. 37-38).

und häusliche Zwietracht herrschte, oder er sich vergeblich nach einem Gespielen umsah, so eilte er hin zu seinem Buche. So war er schon früh aus der natürlichen Kinderwelt in eine unnatürliche idealische Welt verdrängt, wo sein Geist für tausend Freuden des Lebens verstimmt wurde, die andre mit voller Seele genießen können. (16-17)⁷³

The narrator acknowledges the enormous power and influence of the external world on Anton's internal life, but he is mostly ignorant of the formative power the reading exerts upon Anton. Even more so than the external circumstances, I would argue, it is Anton's reading experience and how he processes his exposure to the Pietist reverie that accelerate all the problems Anton has in adjusting to his surroundings. In other words, the narrator seems to give us an almost behavioristic explanation of external circumstances eliciting certain conduct. But the narrator mostly disregards the processing of external stimuli that takes place within Anton's interior. It is in the way Anton learns reading, practices reading, and tries to make sense of what he hears about Madame Guion's teachings that make his loss of orientation in the fourth book appear to be a consequential development.

Characteristic of Anton's reading socialization is that he is on his own and without guidance from the very beginning. At the age of eight, the narrator informs us, Anton's father starts to teach him to read by means of two books that associate reading with a loss of

⁷³See also: "Dies [Anton's intense pain due to his hurt foot, S. N.] entfernte ihn natürlicherweise noch mehr aus der Welt und von dem Umgange mit seinesgleichen, und fesselte ihn immer mehr an das Lesen und an die Bücher. [...], und wann es ihm damals an einem Buche fehlte, so war es, als wenn es ihm itzt an einem Freund fehlt: denn das Buch mußte ihm Freund, und Tröster, und alles sein" (18). – See also pp. 16, 28, 58 and more often.

orientation and detachment from reality from the very beginning. For the two books could not be more antithetical since “das eine [Buch] eine Anweisung zum Buchstabieren, und das andre eine Abhandlung zum Buchstabieren enthielt” (15). After having received a few lessons from his father, Anton is left alone to develop his reading skills with these two books on his own: “Sein Vater hatte ihm kaum einige Stunden Anweisung gegeben, und er lernte es nun, zur Verwunderung aller seiner Angehörigen, in wenig Wochen von selber” (15). But it is mostly the mechanical skills Anton develops, less the experience that reading can be a way to become informed about the world. Although he learns to form words out of sounds and syllables, he ends up with words that have no meaning to him, hollow signifiers that do not point beyond themselves to reference anything in the real world. As Anton’s father makes his son read an “Anweisung zum Buchstabieren,” Anton “mußte [...] größtenteils schwere biblische Namen, als: Nebukadnezar, Abednego, usw., bei denen er auch keinen Schatten einer Vorstellung haben konnte, buchstabieren” (15). The “Abhandlung gegen das Buchstabieren” does not offer Anton much more concrete points of orientation. First, he has to read about the opposing opinion that “es schädlich, ja seelenverderblich sei, die Kinder durch Buchstabieren lesen zu lehren” (16) —the very thing he just did and that might fuel Anton’s obsession about his presumed sinfulness.⁷⁴ Second, the book does not provide Anton with meaningful units either, it merely substitutes sounds for them as a unit equally devoid of meaning as it provides “eine Abhandlung über die Hervorbringung der einzelnen Laute durch die Sprachwerkzeuge: so trocken ihm dieses schien, so las er doch aus Mangel an etwas Besserm, mit der größten

⁷⁴Cf., for instance, pp. 19-20 and more often.

Standhaftigkeit, nach der Reihe durch" (16). Instrumentalizing reading as a way of distraction and escapism, Anton enters a world where his imagination floats freely and without connection to reality not because of the process of reading per se, but because of his first exposure to reading and lack of guidance.

This lack of guidance also becomes apparent when the narrator tells us that the child Anton—despite his very religious upbringing—does not make any distinction between ancient mythology and the bible. Having been given books about mythology by Fleischbein on his first visit to Pyrmont, the ancient world "hatte nun freilich für Antons Seele weit mehr Anziehendes, als die biblische Geschichte, und alles, was er vorher in dem Leben der Altväter, oder in den Guionschen Schriften gelesen hatte; und da ihm nie eigentlich gesagt worden war, daß jenes wahr, und dieses falsch sei, so fand er sich gar nicht ungeneigt, die heidnische Göttergeschichte mit allem, was da hineinschlug, wirklich zu glauben" (27). This results in Anton's attempt to reconcile both worlds with one another.

Similarly, Anton experiences a disconnect between word and meaning—or more accurately, the lack of the latter—when listening to his father who uses a "Büchersprache" (32) he does not understand.⁷⁵ Left to his own devices, Anton tries to make sense of what he reads and hears as well as he can. Receiving no guidance in the real world on how to relate his read

⁷⁵"Antons Vater las nun zuweilen selber, anstatt aus der Madam Guion Schriften, etwas aus dem Telemach vor, oder erzählte ein Stück aus der ältern oder neuern Geschichte, worin er wirklich ziemlich bewandert war (denn neben seiner Musik, worin er es im Praktischen weit gebracht hatte, machte er beständig aus dem Lesen nützlicher Bücher ein eignes Studium, bis endlich die Guionschen Schriften alles Übrige verdrängten). Er redte [sic] daher auch eine Art Büchersprache, und Anton erinnert sich noch sehr genau, wie er im siebenten oder achten Jahre oft sehr aufmerksam zuhörte, wann sein Vater sprach, und sich wunderte, daß er von allen den Wörtern, die sich auf *heit*, und *keit*, und *ung* endigten, keine Silbe verstand, da er doch sonst, was gesprochen wurde, verstehen konnte" (32).

and imagined world to it, his imagination has no anchor and ends up free-floating and lost in fantasy. While Anton—as the narrator informs us—does indeed use reading and imagination to escape his misery temporarily, this does not directly sow the seeds for the predisposition that leads Anton to completely lose himself and all grounding at the end of the novel fragment. What stands out to the reader of the fourth book—despite the narrator’s comments about Anton’s upbringing as the main cause—are the parallels between the descriptions of Anton’s reading experiences in the first book and his perceptions and behavior in the fourth. Rather than being the main cause for Anton’s loss of self, his upbringing is, as described, only the indirect cause for his meandering life later on. Its direct cause is reading itself. This depiction of negative consequences for reading too much fiction is not unique to *Anton Reiser* and was an integral part of the discussion on *Lesewut* in the late eighteenth century. What is striking, however, is that this connection constitutes a complete blind spot on the part of the narrator, who overlooks the important internal processes going on in Anton’s mind while focusing on the external circumstances—and despite his declared intention to write a psychological novel and to concentrate on Anton’s “*innere Geschichte*” (6). The narrator indeed revokes this label in the second book’s preface by explaining that one should instead conceive of *Anton Reiser* as a biography.⁷⁶ What remains, however, is that the narrator talks about Anton’s reading experiences at length and then does not pick up this thread when it would make the most sense. Anton has lost his sense of self and any connection to reality in the fourth book as much

⁷⁶“Um fernern schiefen Urteilen, wie schon einige über dies Buch gefällt sind, vorzubeugen, sehe ich mich genötigt, zu erklären, daß dasjenige, was ich aus Ursachen, die ich für leicht zu erraten hielt, einen *psychologischen Roman* genannt habe, im eigentlichsten Verstande *Biographie*, und zwar eine so wahre und getreue Darstellung eines Menschenlebens, bis auf seine kleinsten Nuancen, ist, als es vielleicht nur irgendeine geben kann. --” (122).

as he is floating from one geographic location to the next without ever really arriving anywhere. Far from gaining a more distinct identity, Anton has lost all orientation by the very beginning of the fourth book. Freed from all bonds to human settlements or society, Anton “lebte ungestört in seiner Ideen- und Phantasienwelt” (387) and “außer allen Verhältnissen” (384); he is playing theatrical roles on the field (cf. 391) while deliberately avoiding taverns or other human contact for too long (cf. 388), and he leads “gleichsam ein doppeltes Leben, eins in der Einbildung und eins in der Wirklichkeit” (390). Although the narrator describes the same processes as in book one in almost the same language, he does not draw any connection to Anton’s reading experience. His silence about an evident connection is even more striking when the narrator talks about Anton’s loss of self in the fourth book, using the same language used to describe Madame Guion’s mysticism in the first book. Here again the narrator does not mention her name or draw any connection—neither to Anton’s experience he describes nor to the words he uses for his description. When Anton has just left Hannover to find and join the theater group, the narrator states that “seine Individualität, die ihn so oft gequält und gedrückt hatte, hörte auf, ihm lästig zu sein” (385) and that “sich selbst darüber [in fantasies about other people] zu vergessen, klebte ihm von Kindheit an” (389). One night, after Anton has received a final no from the theater group in Gotha and is lying in his bed, discouraged and tired, the narrator tells us:

Der Gedanke von Auflösung, von gänzlichem Vergessen seiner selbst, von
Aufhören aller Erinnerung und alles Bewußtseins war ihm so süß, daß er diese
Nacht die Wohltat des Schlafes im reichsten Maße genoß - denn kein leiser
Wunsch hemmte mehr die gänzliche Abspannung aller seiner Seelenkräfte; kein

Traum von täuschender Hoffnung schwebte ihm mehr vor - alles war nun vorbei,
und endigte sich in die ewigstille Nacht des Grabes. (422)⁷⁷

Phrases about Anton's "Ich-Verlust" reoccur again and again in the fourth book and seem to indicate that Anton finally achieves what he dreamed of as a child and adolescent: to follow Madame Guion's Pietist "Schwärmereien," eliminating all individuating notions of self and individuality and become one with God. This theme is so dominant in the fourth book, the phrasing so reminiscent of the one the narrator used in book one to describe the teachings of Madame Guion—for example phrases such as the goal of an "Ausgehen aus sich selbst" (8, 9) or the goal to "[sich, S.N.] soviel wie möglich von den Sinnen [sic] loszumachen" (23; cf. 57, 62)—that it is striking that the name Guion does not occur a single time in the whole book. At another point, the narrator talks about Anton's fantasy to—like Odysseus—return home after a long time and impress the people who once scolded him with his new achievements. The narrator describes Anton's fantasy in a somewhat wordy manner: "Er stellte sich vor, wie schön es sein würde, wenn er nach einigen Jahren in dem Ankenken der Menschen, worin er nun gleichsam gestorben war, wieder aufleben, in einer edlern Gestalt vor ihnen erscheinen, und der düstere Zeitraum seiner Jugend alsdann vor der Morgenröte eines bessern Tages verschwinden würde" (385).

Without detectable distance or sarcasm the narrator uses similar words to condemn Engelbrecht's autobiography and the author as "ärgern Aufschneider, [...] von dem man geglaubt hatte, dass er wirklich tot wäre, und der nun, nachdem er sich wieder erholt hatte,

⁷⁷Cf. also with similar phrasing pp. 388, 391, 425, and 474.

seiner alten Großmutter weismachte, er sei wirklich im Himmel und in der Hölle gewesen” (100). The narrator does not show any awareness of employing basically the same story when describing Anton’s life in the fourth book. In combination with the silence about the parallels between Anton’s intense experiences with Madame Guion’s teachings that shape his childhood in book one and his state of mind in book four as well as the general silence about the specific reasons for Anton’s free-floating fantasy—connections very obvious to the reader—the narrator’s silence about the parallels between Pietist writings and his own story becomes highly significant. Not only does Anton seem to finally succumb to the Pietist temptations he was exposed to from early childhood on, the narrator now uses the same language he used in book one—but with an important difference: in book one, the narrator uses the language to describe teachings attributed to a third person more in the form of reported speech. In book four, the narrator has adopted the same language as his own, without acknowledging its origin. The narrator himself has adopted the same “Büchersprache” (32, 112) he criticized Anton’s father and Anton for using and which Moritz despised as “Nachahmungssucht” in his *Magazin*. One could say that the narrator gets “infected” by his own narration. By narrating Anton’s exposure to and immersion into fictive worlds and the Guion’s detached-from-the-real-world mysticism he himself adopts some of this language without noticing—a phenomenon Dorrit Cohn coins “stylistic contagion.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 33. Cohn adopts a term by Leo Spitzer here and applies it to techniques of narrating consciousness, “where psycho-narration verges on the narrated monologue, marking a kind of mid-point between the two techniques where a reporting syntax is maintained, but where the idiom is strongly affected (or infected) with the mental idiom of the mind it renders.”

Another observation that supports this claim is the complete disappearance of the subject of the narrator in the fourth book. Very early in the novel, the narrator repeatedly uses a first-person pronoun and identifies himself as a member of those observing and learning from Anton Reiser. What is important, though, is that this inclusion also implies a self-identity, separate from others, although not isolated as the “wir” implies. What the narrator creates in this way is, indeed, similar to what Moritz wants an observer to do; although he is highly emotionally involved, the narrator still separates himself from his protagonist, and one clearly discerns here two sides of observer and observed, or subject and object. Looking at the instances where the narrator identifies himself as present in the narration by the use of a first-person (singular or plural) pronoun, one can summarize that the narrator uses “ich” for himself five times in the whole novel,⁷⁹ “mich” once,⁸⁰ “wir” twice,⁸¹ and the dative form “mir” once.⁸² Hence, first-person pronouns amount to only nine instances. It is striking that we find the last example as early as on page 128, page six of the second part in the quoted edition—about 370 pages away from the end of the fragment *Anton Reiser*. All of the remaining eleven examples can be found in part one. In the rest of the second and in the third and fourth book, we find the indefinite pronoun “man” or general, generic terms like “die Menschen” instead of first-person pronouns: “So wie man nun an allem zweifelt, was man heftig wünscht, so zweifelte er auch immer, ob die wirkliche Aufführung der Komödie zustande kommen, und er seine Rolle darin

⁷⁹Cf. 37, 38, 92, 105, and 128.

⁸⁰Cf. 92.

⁸¹Cf. 40 and 93.

⁸²Cf. 92.

behalten würde" (459). That is to say, it is not only the case that the narrator incorporates fewer comments into the narrated plot, he also does not appear as an individual anymore. The division between the narrator as an observer-subject and Anton as the observed object falls apart. While there is still a clear distinction between plot and story, the observing entity becomes de-individualized such that Anton loses all sense of self and orientation in the fourth book and the gap between story and plot becomes narrower. This way, the general comments throughout the fourth book seem much more to arise from within the narration than from an external point of view. Hence, Anton loses authority over his life and the narrator loses authority over the narration.

Conclusion

What is interesting is that the narrator suffers from the same blind spot when looking at Anton's life and that he does not see how his way of narrating changes. If *Anton Reiser* is really to be seen as an autobiography and a means to gain self-knowledge, then one must conclude that the essential blind spots of the observed character Anton are carried over into the narration by an older, but not wiser Anton. This is also the case if we do not read the novel fragment as an autobiography but see the narrator as a different individual. Although the narrator seems to know more about Anton than Anton himself, Anton's "Selbsttäuschungen" (382), which the narrator wants to reveal in the fourth book, are impenetrable to the narrator's gaze when it comes to the influence of reading and fantasy on his personality development. The narrator falls prey to his own delusion that he has control over the narrated material. Given that Moritz suggested accurate self-observation and self-reflection as the starting point and

litmus test for the successful *Erfahrungsseelenkundler* in his “Vorschlag zu einem Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde,” the narrator’s blind spots are indeed a hard blow for his endeavor to redefine literature as an undertaking devoted to exploring and shedding light on the human psyche. The fact that the narrator adopts a similar *Büchersprache* as his protagonist Anton forecloses the novel’s return “auf unsere wirkliche Welt” that Moritz demands of his envisioned new kind of psychological literature.⁸³ Of course, we do not know how Moritz would have ended the novel *Anton Reiser*, had he done so. This conceptual dilemma, however, raises the question of whether the fragmentary character of *Anton Reiser* is no more than the result of Moritz’s early death or distraction from the project or whether it is inherent in the design of his psychological studies in literary form. It is hard to say whether the narrator’s loss of sovereignty in book four is an intentional one or not. But whatever the answer to this question might be, the actual text fragment we look at today, by Moritz’s intention or not, sets foot on a path that is fully taken only in early German Romanticism. What becomes apparent in *Anton Reiser* due to the influence the text has on the narrator is the discovery that *discours* and *histoire* are actually two levels that cannot be separated or kept apart completely, but exist in interdependence with one another. Authors of German Romanticism consciously played with this problem and highlighted it by means of *Romantic Irony*. *Anton Reiser*, then, can be conceived of as a precursor to that narrative technique. Moritz’s attempt to write a psychological novel in order to produce knowledge lays bare the problems of self-reference that arise when literature turns to the investigation of the human psyche. In a roundabout way,

⁸³Moritz, “Vorschlag,” 804.

Moritz *does* succeed in gaining insight by means of writing. But he does so not in the way he intended when he set out on his *erfahrungsseelenkundliche* journey. It is not the narrator who gains knowledge about himself, but rather the implicit reader who can become aware of the narrative problems arising in *Anton Reiser* from a meta-perspective. While both the narrator and Anton lose themselves and their agency (to different degrees and from different baselines), narration or the text itself gains power—again, on both the *discours* and *histoire* level. The narrator's declared intention to observe and report facts objectively about Anton's life is not only thwarted from the beginning by his reliance on assumptions and pre-conceived ideas, it is also compromised even further as the story unfolds. Overall, there seems to be a mismatch in *Anton Reiser* between the intention of presenting a subjective story in the form of an objective narration and the capability to do so. The impossibility of this kind of *objective subjectivism* is, however, beyond the narrator's (and author's?) awareness. The interplay and mutual influence going on between *histoire* and *discours* is an unacknowledged and unwanted one. The narrator does not yet have the capability to deal with the intricacies that develop out of the relationship between both levels of narration. The implicit reader, however, can become aware of the impossibility of an *objective subjectivism* and actively approach this dilemma. So reading on this meta-level does indeed serve as a knowledge-producing tool, enabling successive writers to evolve literature further. But the process of writing can produce insight and facilitate learning, even personal growth also for the narrator. While Anton's narrator fails in his attempt to distance himself from his protagonist maybe precisely because of his rigorous attempt to do so, the narrator in Jean Paul's *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* allows Wutz and his writing about his protagonist to have an affect in him, to change him and his writing. As a result, he does not

experience an “Ich-Verlust.” Much to the contrary: his intentionally more personal, subjective approach to his task as narrator lets him develop and enhance his own personality. At the end of his text, he is very aware of what he learned from Wutz by writing his *Lebensbeschreibung*.

CHAPTER 2: OPEN WORLD – LIMITED BLISS: JEAN PAUL'S *LEBEN DES VERGNÜGTEN SCHULMEISTERLEIN MARIA WUTZ* AS LITERARY TESTIMONY OF AN ERA OF CHANGE

Jean Paul wrote his narration *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal*.

Eine Art Idylle (*The Live of the Gleeeful Little Schoolmaster Maria Wutz in Auenthal. A Kind of Idyll*)

between mid-February and the beginning of March 1791.⁸⁴ He revised it in October of the same year

before it was published in 1793 as a supplement to his *Unsichtbare Loge* (*Invisible Lodge*).⁸⁵ Written

briefly after the French Revolution and close to the turn of the century, the composition of

Schulmeisterlein Wutz, hence, coincides with traditional authorities offering explanations of the world losing their universal validity.

The claim of the Enlightenment to rely on one's own reason to determine how to act, the risks of guilt and failure such a demand implies, a new perception of nature, the quest for its domination, but also the experience of it is threat—Christian Begemann speaks of “Naturfurcht”—as well as the social and economical changes of that time render the world more open and more threatening at the same time.⁸⁶ In it, the individual becomes the agent of the creation of meaning and has to choose between several competing ways of understanding the world and making sense of it. As a result, the individual that later would be called the modern one and who emerges at this time, is confronted with the opening

⁸⁴Paul Jean: *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz. Eine Art Idylle. Mit einem Nachwort von Peter Bichsel. Insel taschenbuch 1685* (Frankfurt a. M./Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1995).

⁸⁵Cf. for the text's genesis and circumstances of its publication Werner Schnabel, „Erzählerische Willkür oder säkularisiertes Strukturmodell? Jean Pauls ‚Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal‘ und die biographische Form,“ in *Athenäum* 11 (2001): 139-158, here 142, ann. 20.

⁸⁶ Cf. for an overview of all these aspects of change in the eighteenth century in relation to literary history Begemann, *Furcht und Angst*.

of a universal and normative understanding of the world and has to relocate itself in a world that has become ambiguous and is in need of explanation. The need for explanation does not only apply to the other," the outside world and other people. It also applies to each individual's own life since the church and the feudal society no longer serve as the authorities that determine life courses and identities. According to Taylor et al., literature and philosophy assume an important role in this process.⁸⁷ Likewise, scholarship on Jean Paul's *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* frequently points out the contrast between a closed, normative, and universally valid world view on the one hand and an open one with restricted validity that can be filled with more individualized explanatory models. Within Jean Paul's narration, this contrast is impersonated in the contrast between the character of Wutz in the narrated, diegetic world and the narrator. While the schoolmaster is enduringly and imperturbably in constant bliss and content in his here and now, the narrator has been understood as disillusioned and displaying a far from joyful outlook on his life at the end of his narration. For, as Wutz neither ponders his past nor worries about the future and his ultimate death, the narrator is painstakingly aware of his own and everyone else's mortality. This contrast has repeatedly been identified as "das zentrale Element einer Struktur- und Sinnbildung" in the narration.⁸⁸ Critics have identified the source for the differences of Wutz's and the narrator's world

⁸⁷Cf. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. – Cf. also for an evaluation of the last quarter of the eighteenth century as brink to modernity with respect to historical, social, economical, and artistic developments, for instance, Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft* and Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik* as well as Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Die Selbstorganisation der Sozialsysteme Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1989). – Cf. with regard to the separation of a private from a public sphere, the development of the bourgeois nuclear family and new models of identity formation Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. – Cf. particularly with regard to the crisis of the individual and identity in *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* Hanns-Josef Ortheil, "Idylle und Reflexion. Zur Geschichtlichkeit von Jean Pauls 'Wutz'," in *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, N. F. 17 (1976):83-97, esp. 83-85. – About Jean Paul's general scepticism toward philosophical systems and his Leibniz reception cf. Monika Schmitz-Emans, "Der Bau des wahren Luftschlosses. Studien zur Leibniz-Rezeption des jungen Jean Paul," in *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 1985: 49-91, esp. 87.

⁸⁸Schnabel, "Erzählerische Willkur," 142-143, here 143. – For a contrast of both levels also cf. Ortheil, "Idylle und Reflexion," 88-89, Gonthier-Louis Fink, "Der proteische Erzähler und die Leserorientierung in Jean Pauls *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz*," in *Bild und Gedanke. Festschrift für Gerhart Baumann zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Günter Schnitzler in Verbindung mit Gerhard Neumann und Jürgen Schröder (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1980). 271-287. – Roger Ayrault, "Jean Paul: „Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal. Oder die Anfänge des Dichters Jean Paul," in *Interpretationen*, ed. by Jost Schillemeit. Vol. 4: Deutsche Erzählungen von Wieland bis Kafka. Fischer-Bücherei 721 (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, 1966). 75-

views first and foremost in their different degrees of self-consciousness. Both of them differ greatly in their conceptions of the world and their resulting relationships to their environments: Wutz is trapped in his narcissistic and subjectivistic solipsism. He conceives of his own identity as absolute and the only frame of reference. He doesn't perceive objects in the external world as independently existing entities, but rather as extensions of his own consciousness. As Kathleen Blake states, "Wutz is capable of imagining others' feelings only so long as they coincide with his own; for example, he enjoys his mother's joy. But, being happy, he cannot imagine other people's pain; it does not exist for him."⁸⁹ With regard to Wutz's love for Justine the narrator remarks: "er [Wutz] war nur froh, daß er selber verliebt war, und dachte an weiter nichts..." (24). Wutz did not fall in love with Justine as much as with his own feeling of being in love,⁹⁰ and as a result of his narcissism he is not aware of his own mortality. Unburdened by the knowledge of his ultimate death he is able to savor life's pleasures with unclouded joy—a stark contrast to the narrator who is painfully aware of his and everyone else's death and the final decay of everything around him and forebodes of "die schwarze Gottesacker-Erde unter den Rasen- und Blumenstücken" under the treacherous surface of all "Erden-Eitelkeit" (39).⁹¹

86. – Richard W. Hannah, "The Tortures of the Idyll: Jean Paul's *Wutz* and the Loss of Presence," in *Germanic Review* 56 (1981): 121-127.

⁸⁹Kathleen, Blake. "What the Narrator Learns in Jean Paul's *Wutz*," in *The German Quarterly* 48 (1975) 1: 52-65, here 60.

⁹⁰About Wutz's subjectivism also cf. Schnabel. "Erzählerische Willkür," 141 and Fink, "Der proteische Erzähler," 276. – Against a reading of Wutz as a solipsistic subjectivist cf. Andrea Gnam. "'Und Gott tanze vor': Der Sprung in die Subjektivität im Modus des Traums. Jean Pauls Konzeption gewitzten Schreibens im ‚Schulmeisterlein Wutz‘", in *Athenäum* 5 (1995): 57-70, here 59-60.

⁹¹About the central topic of mortality cf. Wuthenow, Ralph-Rainer: „Gefährdete Idylle,“ in *Jean Paul (Wege der Forschung 336)*, ed. by Uwe Schweikert (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974): 314-330 [first in *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 1 (1966): 79-94].– Cf. as well Blake, "What the Narrator Learns," 60: "The narrator is hyper-conscious of his being as a finite object. He uses his imaginative powers of empathy to try to transcend the limits of self. Instead of ignoring the autonomous existence of others, as Wutz does, the narrator attempts to get inside them as subjects. This is what he tries to do in regard to Wutz."

The symptom in which the different perceptual paradigms manifests themselves most poignantly is the narrator's and Wutz's literary production.⁹² For the differences between their literary modes of creation result from their divergent concepts of identity. According to the genre of biography,⁹³ the narrator's writing focuses on the life of another individual and, for the most part, appeals to sources. It follows very different rules than the schoolmaster's writing whose sole source is his own fantasy. Critics have seen the narrator's report predominantly as an attempt to not only portray Wutz's "Kunst, stets fröhlich zu sein" (22), but also to adopt it himself—in spite of his knowledge of his own mortality. In the end, however, as Blake and Richard Hannah somberly conclude, he fails in this attempt to become more like Wutz and free himself from seeing the decayed and dead in all living. He is not able to utilize his writing about Wutz in order to make up for the joy that is missing in his own life. Writing fails to serve as a surrogate for genuine, personal experience.⁹⁴ Hence, his story-telling on the

⁹²Cf. Ortheil, „Idylle und Reflexion," 88-89: „Das Schulmeisterlein verschließt die Umwelt, auf die es sich einlassen muß, in das Bild seiner Subjektivität; [...]. Von dieser [der Umgebung] zieht die identische Subjektivität des Wutz nur in sich hinein, was sich in ihr auflösen läßt. Die Auflösung ereignet sich räumlich, indem der vorhandene Raum der Umwelt durch den Raum der Phantasie erweitert wird. [...] So verwandelt Wutz die Fremdheit der Objekte in die Geschlossenheit der Subjektivität. Dafür hat Jean Paul ein deutliches Bild gefunden: er läßt Wutz ‚Wutzsche' Bücher schreiben. [...]: auf den Buchdeckeln stehen die Namen der fremden Autoren, innen aber sieht es ‚Wutzisch' aus."

⁹³On the genre of biography and the two models which Jean Paul draws on that he modifies cf. Schnabel, "Erzählerische Willkür," 147-158.

⁹⁴Cf. the narrator's reflexion on his motivation for writing in the primary text 39: „[A]ber warum macht doch mir und vielleicht euch dieses Schulmeisterlein so viel Freude? – Ach, liegt es vielleicht daran, daß wir selber sie nie so voll bekommen, weil der Gedanke der Erden-Eitelkeit auf uns liegt und unsern Atem drückt und weil wir die schwarze Gottesacker-Erde unter den Rasen- und Blumenstücken schon gesehen haben, auf denen das Meisterlein sein Leben verhüpft? –"

– For scholarship cf. Hannah 123, who talks about the narrator's "shattered identification" with Wutz, as well as *ibid.* 124: "In this idyllic scene [Wutz's stroll in the garden at the morning of this wedding, S.N.] Wutz is immediately within his world; he has no thought except of that which is immediately around him. The narrator, on the other hand, cannot achieve this same presence, because he is drawn out of the moment by his reflections on death. As the biographer of Maria Wutz, he writes after the fact of Wutz's death, yet in his text he attempts to depict a moment and a consciousness within that moment which are not tainted by the knowledge of inevitable mortality. The tension inherent in the task results in an openly acknowledged contrast between Wutz's ability and his own. The narrator projects himself into Wutz's pre-lapsarian situation [...]. The confrontation between Wutz's ability to live unmindful of his fate and the narrator's own tortured hyper-consciousness of death leaves the narrator depressed and saddened." – Similarly Blake, "What the Narrator Learns," 60-63 and 63: "The narrator has led us through a study of the 'Wutzischen Kunst, stets fröhlich zu sein.' But the study closes off rather than opening

level of *discours* mainly has been seen as a counterpart to Wutz's writing within the *histoire* that forgoes all external written sources—apart from the mere titles in the bibliographic inventories of the Frankfurt and Leipzig Book Fairs. The “Diskrepanz,” “Zweistimmigkeit” and “Wertungsdifferenzen” of both characters are highlighted in these views.⁹⁵

However, identifying the differences between world views as just between the two levels of the narrator and the narrated world falls short of adequately recognizing the complexity of Jean Paul's text. In his study from 1980, for example, Gonthier-Louis Fink illustrated the detail the “Proteische der Erzählerinstanz” and showed how the narrator jumps back and forth between different attitudes or *Erzählhaltungen*—how he takes over changing perspectives on his story and how he “je nach Laune oder nach dem Dargebotenen die Maske wechselt.” He changes his roles between biographer, commentator, satirist and moves into the foreground himself occasionally “so daß die Gestalt des Erzählers durch dieses schillernde Spannungsverhältnis und die Vielfalt der Masken fast unbegreifbar wird.”⁹⁶ These contrasts within the different levels of narration culminate in the narrator's conclusion at the end of the

up the hero's world of illusion. We, the readers are the ones who most fully realize the joke on the narrator: that the more he studies Wutz' happiness the further he finds himself from the possibility of enjoying such happiness himself.”

⁹⁵Quotes from Schnabel, “Erzählerische Willkür,” 143. – Cf. also Blake, “What the Narrator Learns,” 53, who—referring to Schiller's reflections *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*—sees of the narrator as the embodiment of the sentimental and Wutz as the embodiment of the naïve poet.

⁹⁶Fink, “Der proteische Erzähler,” 272, quotes *ibid.* – Before Fink, Ayrault, “Jean Paul,” 81 already pointed to the back and forth of the narrator between oral and written narration. – Also Martin Huber. “Der Text als Bühne. Zu Jean Pauls Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz,” in *Schnittpunkt der Romantik. Text- und Quellenstudien zur deutschen Literatur des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts. Festschrift für Sybille von Steinsdorff*, ed. by Wolfgang Bunzel, Konrad Feilchenfeldt und Walter Schmitz (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 23-35, here 26 emphasizes the „bewusste[] Störung der mündlichen Erzählfiktion“. – Hannah, “The Tortures of the Idyll,” 121-122 as well as 126, ann. 10 even wants to identify two different narrators and differentiates between the narrating bookmaker from the one in the “Großvaterstuhl” who begins the narration – in my view, based on poor textual evidence and without convincing arguments. – Blake, “What the Narrator Learns,” 53 talks about two levels of consciousness: “There is a division between subject matter and treatment. Such a division is found in Wutz, where we have the narrator, the sentimental, attempting to reconstitute for his readers the life and happiness of Wutz, the naïve.”

story. Due to his involvement with the schoolmaster and his philosophy of life he makes the decision, “ein so unbedeutendes Leben zu verachten, zu verdienen und zu genießen” (63). At first glance, this comment appears to be irritating and contradictory, and scholarship on *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* has long failed to explain it adequately. Blake, for instance, takes the end of the narration as a concession of the narrator’s failure:

By the end it seems that the narrator has indeed learned a lesson from Wutz about the proper attitude towards life. He swears ‘Leben ... zu genießen.’ However, it is important to notice the two other parts of his oath, namely, ‘Leben zu verachten, zu verdienen, ...’ (461). [...] It becomes evident that a study of Wutz’ philosophy of happiness, instead of enabling the narrator to apply it in his own life, in fact produces just the opposite effect: it makes him more than ever incapable of being happy as Wutz was happy. This is true because of the radical difference between the imaginative visions of Wutz and of the narrator, a difference which becomes more pronounced as the tale progresses and to which indeed the telling of tale itself contributes.⁹⁷

Blake, however, overlooks in her argumentation that the narrator does not contrast the three verbs in his sentence. Rather, he enumerates them and places them next to each other. While it is true that the narrator is not able to adopt Wutz’s all-encompassing bliss, his undertaking does not fail entirely either. Instead, he is able to augment his repertoire of life skills with additional and new perspectives on the world and partially adopts Wutz’s way of living—as much as it is possible for him. Neither Blake nor Hannah sufficiently considers the narration’s end for their conclusions when they declare the narrator’s

⁹⁷Blake, “What the Narrator Learns,” 55.

writing project as failed.⁹⁸ By contrast, Fink aptly recognizes that the narrator rather reconciles the pursuit of happiness in life with the insight into his mortality and does indeed learn to enjoy life by letting both only seemingly mutually exclusive attitudes coexist.

Schließlich empfiehlt der Erzähler durch die Schlußmoral, die sich ihm beim Abschied von Auenthal aufdrängte, die beiden gegensätzlichen Haltungen miteinander zu verbinden. Es gilt weder die Widerwärtigkeiten noch das bürgerliche Glück allzu wichtig zu nehmen, vielmehr sie beide zu verachten und sich so darüber zu erheben. Diese Haltung, die sich durch ihre Reflektiertheit von derjenigen des naiven Helden unterscheidet, garantiert zwar kein 'Vollglück,' auch nicht 'in der Beschränkung,' es erlaubt jedoch das Leben zu 'genießen.' Der Blick auf den Tod schließt das Glück nicht aus; er gibt diesem Glück nur eine andere Dimension, denn es gilt zugleich das Leben zu bestehen, es zu verdienen, wie Jean Paul im Anklang an den christlichen Eudämonismus sagt: 'so fühlt' ich unser aller Nichts und schwur ein so unbedeutendes Leben zu verachten, zu verdienen und zu genießen.'⁹⁹

Just as the narrator takes on different masks over the course of his biographical narration, tells his story from different perspectives and changes between them, he connects different ways of life at the end of *Schulmeisterlin Wutz*. He does not oppose them with one another conceiving of them as mutually exclusive and irreconcilable perspectives on life. The stance the narrator takes over at the end, is

⁹⁸Cf. quotes in ann. 94.

⁹⁹Fink, "Der proteische Erzähler," 286.

reminiscent of mottos of the baroque period: *carpe diem* and *memento mori* were not seen as representing opposing mantras either, but as two sides of the very same coin. Rather than being conceived of as mutually exclusive concepts they were understood as necessitating each other, one not being able to exist without the other. Fink's analysis offers decisive insights into Jean Paul's complex and admittedly somewhat weird text. But central questions still remain unanswered. For from Fink's analysis it is not clear how the narrator finally arrives at his more comprehensive, less tormenting new stance on life. While he begins his literary journey in good spirits,¹⁰⁰ he does actually reach a low point half-way through the text after he has recounted Wutz's wedding for his readers; "die vorige Beschreibung eines großen Vergnügens" became "so traurig" (53) that his initial intent to become happy by devoting himself to studying and narrating the life of blissful Wutz seems to have failed. Richard and Hannah finish their analyses at this point. At the end of *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, however, the narrator has not only opened up the schoolmaster's horizon by use of his reflection and laid bare its narrowness by means of his "Entlarvungstechnik."¹⁰¹ He has also broadened his own perspective when he recognizes his own narrow-mindedness as stemming from his awareness of mortality and comes to see that he is able to enjoy life in spite of it. Jean Paul's dictum about the "Vollglück in der Beschränkung" has usually been connected to Wutz's contentment with life, who defies all unfavorable life circumstances and does not let them diminish his zest for life.¹⁰² But just as justifiably, the stance at which the narrator arrives by the end of the text can be described as a "Vollglück in der Beschränkung," for, considering the given circumstances, he attains the highest possible happiness—limited not by external life circumstances like

¹⁰⁰See ann. 94.

¹⁰¹Cf. Fink, "Der proteische Erzähler," 276 and similarly – about the breaking up of the hitherto limited view of the genre of idyll – 285, here 276.

¹⁰²Cf., for instance, Hannah, "The Tortures of the Idyll," 123, Wuthenow, "Gefährdete Idylle," 318 and 323 as well as Blake, "What the Narrator Learns," 53.

poverty, violence, and social immobility, as in the case of Wutz, but by his own reflective and intellectual capacities.¹⁰³

But how can we tell that the narrator has changed his views about life and death and happiness and the meaning of life? How exactly does his engagement with Wutz, his writing about his life lead to a change of himself and of his writing? And how can particular breaking points and inconsistencies in his writing be seen as symptomatic of the changes at the end of the eighteenth century described at the beginning of this chapter?

In what follows, I want to open up the dichotomous interpretations of, for instance, Richard and Hannah that contrast the schoolmaster's world with the one of the narrator as irreconcilable antagonisms. I seek to continue Fink's reflections and to show that the narrator—while exposing himself to and writing about Wutz's writing—partially adopts the schoolmaster's paradigm of literary production and integrates it into his own. For, it is only at first sight that the narrator continuously follows a completely separate paradigm of writing than Wutz. The narrator does not do this consistently at all. However, inconsistencies in his report and changes in his narration over time become comprehensible if one tries to make sense of them based on the hypothesis that the tension in the text between *histoire* and *discours* – between narrated, diegetic world of Wutz and the narrator's (mainly) extra-diegetic world (including intradiegetic interludes) – reproduces the process of societal and cultural change taking place at the end of the eighteenth century. The transition from a closed (Wutz-like) world-view in which the external world presents itself in the form of a static and stable order promising safety

¹⁰³Differently Fink, "Der proteische Erzähler," 286, who—with regard to the narrator—does not want to talk about „Vollglück', auch nicht ‚in der Beschränkung'“ and who considers the narrator's assurance to want to enjoy („genießen“) life in the future as being subordinate to "Vollglück." – If, however, one considers how the following specifying attribute „in der Beschränkung“ modifies „Vollglück“—namely the maximal obtainable happiness under the given circumstances—, then, as I will elaborate on later with regard to the ending of the narration, one can indeed apply the dictum about a "Vollglück in der Beschränkung [i.e., his knowledge about mortality, S.N.]" to the narrator as well.

toward a more open understanding of the world in which each individual has to create his or her own organizing and guiding principles and in which the external world can therefore appear as a threatening chaos.¹⁰⁴ Writing aids the process of the narrator's reorientation and facilitates his development of a modified world view. Thus different strategies of writing in *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* mirror the world views of their authors and can be seen as indicators of them, as much as—in the narrator's case—can be tools for changing them.

For the following analysis, Friedrich Kittler's theory on the development of a new discourse network (*Aufschreibesystem*) around 1800 helps explain how divergences of the narrator and Wutz from this new communication network can be conceived of as symptoms of literary, cultural, and historical change. In his monograph (*Habilitationsschrift*) *Aufschreibesysteme 1800–1900*, Kittler investigates characteristics of the production, distribution, and reception of language in the time around 1800 and demarcates an *Aufschreibesystem um 1800* from an older, pre-hermeneutic discourse network and the later *Aufschreibesystem um 1900*. He defines a discourse network as „das Netzwerk von Techniken und Institutionen bezeichnen, die einer gegebenen Kultur die Adressierung, Speicherung und Verarbeitung relevanter Daten erlauben.“¹⁰⁵ Building on poststructuralist theories—mainly Michel Foucault's and Jacques Lacan's—Kittler pursues the question of how people are influenced by certain discourse networks, i.e., the linguistic practices, institutions and technologies that make up the discourse networks. With regard to literature, the question that arises for Kittler is how non-literary discourse networks and mechanisms of language acquisition form literary production. For Kittler, discourse-

¹⁰⁴See ann. 86.

¹⁰⁵Cf. Kittler's definition in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 – 1900. 4th, edited ed.* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), 501: „Das Wort Aufschreibesystem [...] kann auch das Netzwerk von Techniken und Institutionen bezeichnen, die einer gegebenen Kultur die Adressierung, Speicherung und Verarbeitung relevanter Daten erlauben.“

analytical literary scholarship has to get to the bottom of the factors that determine the form and content of texts. Fundamental for Kittler's understanding that non-literary discourse networks shape literary production is the assumption that linguistic practices antecede the formation of people's modes of perception and expression and that it is language conveyed by media that determines the shape of the human perceptual apparatus and forms of expression—not the other way around. It is not the people who shape language as an instrument and expression of a chosen way to approach and see the world. Rather linguistic practices, institutionalized in media, provide the lenses or the mold through which not only the world in general is perceived, but through which other language is produced and made sense of. Discourse networks within which literary production takes place are not static, but change over the course of history along with the practices, institutions and technologies that build those networks. Kittler examines the discourse network or sets of rules that underlie literary texts and distinguishes an *Aufschreibesystem um 1900* that is characterized by technical information processing from an *Aufschreibesystem um 1800* which Kittler see characterized by a new relationship to language and, hence, also to the reading of books. According to Kittler, the increase of general literacy at the end of the eighteenth century and a following automatization of reading and writing let the mechanics of reading and writing took a backseat. As a consequence, more attention could be paid to the meaning of the written word itself. In addition to general alphabetization, the establishment of the bourgeois nuclear family in the second half of the eighteenth century and the new roles of mother and children within it facilitated a new—the hermeneutic—concept of language. Birthplace, quite literally, for this new understanding of language is for Kittler the new and close relationship between mother and child. By closely interacting with its mother and within a relationship that is emotionally meaningful, the child experiences sounds as carrying meaning from the very beginning. Having been socialized this way, the child generalizes its experiences from its interactions with the mother and continues to search for meaning in oral and written language later in life. A hermeneutic approach to language is born. Readers

later apply what they learned right from the cradle to the reading of literature. They approach the text hermeneutically and search in it for meaning the text conveys—beyond its word-for-word meaning. As Kittler says, they search for “eine Stimme zwischen den Zeilen.”¹⁰⁶ New literature comes into being because other literature is being read in this new, hermeneutic way. Someone becomes an author by reading other texts. As a child, he or she learned to listen to and understand from the mother. Later the author produces new meaning in the form of literary texts by reading foreign texts in this new way coming about around 1800, i.e., by reading and searching for meaning between the lines. According to Kittler, one can, hence, describe the genesis of literary production in the form of the triad author – reader – author.

The narrator of *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* realizes many textualization and narrative strategies of the discourse network around 1800, but he also shares several commonalities with Wutz’s writing. As we will see, this leads to inconsistencies in his report, and the narrator himself as a source of information about his own writing process is anything but reliable.

Jean Paul’s narration—written around the turn of the century—cannot only be seen as the beginning of a new phase in the work and life of its author. Jean Paul himself, two months before he began writing *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, conceived of his *Schwarzenbacher Todeserlebnis* on November 15, 1790 as a turning point in his life, and in scholarship it is commonly seen as the end of his satirical period.¹⁰⁷ More than being an important document of a new phase in Jean Paul’s life and his writing, it is also a literary testimony of a transitional period whose societal and cultural changes reemerge in the text as the differences between the narrator and the character of Wutz, but also—and especially so—as the

¹⁰⁶Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme*, 45.

¹⁰⁷Cf. Schnabel, „Erzählerische Willkür,” 156, who talks about a „grundlegende Umorientierung des Autors nicht nur im Hinblick auf den Wechsel von ‚essigsaurer‘ Bissigkeit zu verständnisvoller, humoristischer Menschenliebe, sondern auch in literarisch-formaler Hinsicht.“

inconsistent report of the narrator, i.e. his “protean” nature. More precisely, they become apparent in the form of the narrator’s deviations from the *Aufschreibesystem um 1800*. Due to those deviations which I will show in detail, Jean Paul’s narrator takes on a middle position between Wutz’s “solipsistic writing”¹⁰⁸ that Martin Huber sees as a parody of the genius cult at the end of the eighteenth century¹⁰⁹ and the discourse network around 1800 in which writing is the result of a hermeneutic process of interpretation. The narrator is neither the only source for his own writing like Wutz is for himself, nor, however, is his writing solely based on the hermeneutic reading of other written sources. It is much more than the product of intertextual synergy effects.

Chronologically, Jean Paul’s narration about the schoolmaster Maria Wutz falls right into the period that Friedrich Kittler sees characterized by the *Aufschreibesystem um 1800*. In his text, Jean Paul has the narrator tell the biography of Maria Wutz and exemplifies what a little later in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* from 1804 he would call “Vollglück in der Beschränkung.” In paragraph 73 on the “Idylle,” Jean Paul describes the schoolmaster’s „Vollglück” as his capacity to always be happy and content despite the impoverished circumstances in which he lives by focusing exclusively on the positive and the immediate presence.¹¹⁰ Although Wutz is so poor that he does not have more in his wallet “als zwei schwarze Hemdknöpfe” (17) and is not able to buy himself other authors’ books, he does not have to forgo the possession of a rich library. Out of monetary constraints, he creates his own library by writing the books

¹⁰⁸With regard to the X. program of Jean Paul’s „Vorschule der Ästhetik,” in *Werke, part 1, vol. 5*, ed. by Norbert Miller und Gustav Lohmann (Munich: Hanser, 1963), 257-262 in which Jean Paul, in paragraph 57, writes about the „Entstehung poetischer Charaktere”, Gnam, “Und Gott tanze vor,” 59 does not characterize Wutz’s world view as solipsistic and instead states that Jean Paul tries „im Hinblick auf die Dichtung innere und äußere ‚Natur’ gerade als Resultat wechselseitiger Austauschprozesse zu formulieren.” – This is, as I will show, correct if one does refer Jean Paul’s statement not to the *histoire* with Wutz, but to the *discours* where we can indeed find a interaction of external and internal world of the poet instead of a projection of the latter onto the first like in Wutz’s case.

¹⁰⁹Huber, „Der Text als Bühne,” 31.

¹¹⁰ Paul, „Vorschule,” 257-262, quote 258.

himself. These books then serve as the source for the narrator's account of Wutz's life as he relates it to his readers.

If we look at how exactly in the diegetic world Wutz creates his books, it becomes apparent that the story's protagonist deviates in many important ways from the hermeneutic model that Kittler finds to be characteristic for both the reception and production of texts around 1800. For there is not hermeneutic reading and understanding of other texts at the beginning of his writing. Wutz does not create meaning by reading and he does not transform it into new meaning by writing himself. After all, he does not even have access to other authors' books as the books that he is writing and that his private library comprises are based solely on the titles he sees in the *Messkatalogen*—bibliographic catalogues that list the books that appeared before the book fairs in Frankfurt and Leipzig (14—16): “[J]edes neue Meßprodukt, dessen Titel das Meisterlein ansichtig wurde, war nun so gut als geschrieben oder gekauft: denn es setzte sich sogleich hin und machte das Produkt und schenkt' es seiner ansehnlichen Büchersammlung, die, wie die heidnischen, aus Handschriften bestand” (14). Hence, it is literally impossible for Wutz “to read between the lines” because he does not consume meaningful texts: “Er war kein verdammter Nachdrucker, der das Original hinlegt und oft das meiste daraus abdruckt: sondern er nahm gar keines zur Hand” (15). The narrator emphasizes *expressis verbis* that the term catalogs are the only books that Wutz—besides his own writings—owns.¹¹¹ Hence Wutz does not generate meaning out of meaning. Rather, he creates meaning from non-meaning and pulls his writings out of “seinem eignen Kopfe” (14). Producer and recipient of literature collapse into the same individual. The narrator alludes to this congruence when he states that the titles in the bibliographic indices were “so gut als geschrieben oder gekauft” the moment in which Wutz received the catalogs (14). Both—writing/production and buying/consumption of literature—are one and the same in Wutz's case.

¹¹¹ „Nur *ein* Buch ließ er in sein Haus, den Meßkatalog, [...]“ (15)

Since writing does not take place in the context of an engagement with other texts, what is substantial for the schoolmaster's literary production is solely his fantasy drawing on itself. Apart from his fantasy and the titles in the bibliographic catalogs, Wutz can only resort to sensory impressions, i.e., primary experiences of his immediate, rather narrow environment as the source for his writing. The narrator, however, does not place any special emphasis on those when he tells us how Wutz writes. On the contrary, he even describes it as obstructive to draw on own experiences for writing—particularly with regard to the very genre that is most intricately linked to genuine, personal experiences, namely travel accounts. Indeed, he claims that travel accounts were “überhaupt unmöglich auf andre Art zu machen,” i.e., *without* real travelling (16) and that “Wutz zerrete sein Reisejournal auch aus niemand anders als aus sich” (17). Wutz enters into something like a hermeneutic circle and engagement with other texts when the narrator reports how Wutz reads his own texts. For Wutz is not content with writing books, giving his fantasy free rein and eventually incorporating his books into his own library. He returns to them, takes them out of his library and reads them—as if they were foreign to him and written by someone else and with the goal of educating himself: “[I]ndem er die Freimäurer-Reden, die er schreibe, genau durchlese, und zu verstehen trachte: so merk' er zuletzt allerhand Wunderdinge und komme weit und rieche im ganzen Luntten” (18). That is, Wutz creates new meaning by means of his perusal which is, according to Kittler, the prerequisite for literary production. But he does not do so on the basis of foreign texts. He writes on the basis of having read his own books, which is where he is critically deviating from the *Aufschreibesystem um 1800*. For the process of writing within the *histoire* the narrator conveys to his readers, it is therefore critical that Kittler's model is, on the one hand, reversed in its order and, on the other hand, collapses into one individual. Instead of reading first and then writing as a consequence, Wutz begins by writing with himself as the source and has his truly circular version of the hermeneutic process follow his own production as a result. Texts of others do not enter this circle.

The content of Wutz's books—interesting to Wutz as it might be—cannot really entail more than information about himself and fantasies based upon his very limited horizon. Wutz neither learns from other authors' books nor has he received a solid education in school (cf. 29-32). Therefore, what he *learns* from his own books can hardly broaden his horizon. The narrator says so himself when he tells his readers that the process of writing proves difficult at times—it “haperte” (15)—since Wutz is not able to write anything that transcends his own limited sphere and since he “von Chemie und Alchemie so viel wisse wie Adam nach dem Fall, als er alles vergessen hatte” (18). The narrator illustrates this aptly when he reports what precisely it is that Wutz gains from reading his own books. For, after reading one of his books, the narrator assures us that, “sollt' ers [it, the book he is reading, S.N.] nur einmal ordentlich begreifen, frappant wissen [werde], wo Bartel Most hole” (18). According to Adelung's *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch*, this saying refers to someone “im gemeinen Leben” who knows more about something “als man glaubt.”¹¹² The narrator's ironic tone, however, is unmistakable, and the quote follows right after the quoted passage that Wutz had forgotten everything just like Adam after the Fall. Rather than conveying confidence that Wutz gains profound knowledge or insights from his readings, the flippancy remark indicates that all content of Wutz's writing and reading alike is down-to-earth and firmly grounded in his everyday experience. Whatever Wutz learns from his reading, is related less to the titles Wutz found in the catalogs than to banalities from his life. The triviality of the content of Wutz's books becomes even clearer in the narrator's description of the schoolmaster's version of *Das Federsche Traktat*, originally a polemic pamphlet by the philosopher Johann Georg Heinrich Feder against Kant. For Wutz does not treat space and causality as abstract philosophical concepts beyond

¹¹²Cf. „Barthel,” in *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart mit beständiger Vergleichung der übrigen Mundarten, besonders aber des Oberdeutschen*, vol. 1 by Johann Christoph Adelung (Leipzig: J. G. I. Breitkopf, 1793), 740, accessed June 12, 2016, http://lexika.digitale-sammlungen.de/adelung/lemma/bsb00009131_4_0_506.

empirical observation. He understands both categories in terms of his concrete everyday experience: “und daß er z. B. im ganzen Federschen Traktat über Raum und Zeit von nichts handelte als vom Schiffs-*Raum* und der *Zeit*, die man bei Weibern Menses nennt” (15). The blatant opposition between abstract philosophical theory in the original and mundane everyday world (shipping and female menstruation) in Wutz’s version makes it very clear what is inherent in and inducible from the nature of his writing anyway: In the end, Wutz writes and reads only about himself—regardless of the title under which he is writing.¹¹³

His writing is not the only expression of Wutz’s self-centered way of being in the world—which becomes apparent in his general oblivion towards his surroundings¹¹⁴—but it is probably the purest one as Wutz takes over several roles at once. By being both producer and recipient of his own literature, the triad Kittler sees as the basis of the discourse network around 1800—author [subject A] – reader [subject B] – author [subject B]—is reduced to a dualism with the second subject eliminated. Furthermore, an inversion takes place. Since Wutz reads his own writings, writing doesn’t succeed reading anymore but becomes its foundation: subject = {author—reader}.

Moreover, several times in the narration allusions are made to the philosophy of Kant and Leibniz as Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* is one of the books Wutz writes for himself (16). Kant’s work that had appeared only shortly after Jean Paul’s *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* in 1781 (first edition) and 1787 (second edition) did away with the hope for knowledge of the thing in itself. *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* is an

¹¹³Cf. also Fink, “Der proteische Erzähler,” 275 who particularly points out the satiric tone and perspective: „[I]n kaum versteckter Ironie weist jedoch der Erzähler schon durch die volkstümliche Redensart darauf hin, daß es mit diesem Geheimnis nicht weit her sein konnte; [...]. So benutzt der Erzähler manchmal die Aussage des Helden, um ihn anscheinend ohne Übertreibung oder fremde Verfälschung lächelnd – bloßzustellen.“ – Gnam. “Und gott tanze for,” 64 talks about a „Umcodierung der konstituierenden Kategorien der Erfahrung von Raum und Zeit zu Alltagsspezifika.“

¹¹⁴Cf., for instance, Blake, “What the Narrator Learns” 58 who emphasizes Wutz’s self-centeredness who enjoys his life happily, but does not perceive other people’s (or animals’) needs, revolves narcissistically around himself, and does not consider things or people as existing independently outside of him.

exaggerated illustration of the elusiveness of absolute knowledge: Wutz eliminates the external world—in the context of Jean Paul's narration first and foremost knowledge about the world *out there* by means of books—from the very beginning as he posits his own subjectivity as absolute. His solipsistic world view can be seen as drastic consequence of Kant's epistemological reflections.

Even more obvious is the text's references to Leibniz's theory of pre-established harmony.¹¹⁵ In his *Monadology* from 1714, Leibniz formulated the idea that monads or entelechies—indivisible simple substances and building blocks of the universe—exist self-sufficiently and without any interactions to other monads or entelechies. The impression of them interacting with each other is a misleading one and based in the fact that God, when he created the world, shaped it in such a way that all monads *appeared* as if they exerted influence onto one another. While their arrangement gives the picture of a harmonic whole, the monads themselves do not change. Leibniz's analogy of the perfectly synced clockworks proceeding on their own, but being orchestrated in such a way as to perfectly mesh like cogwheels that together make up a smoothly functioning huge mechanism is well-known. Following this thought, the relationship between body and soul is not one of direct interactions either; rather, both follow their own paths. Due to God's pre-established harmony, however, both work in unison.¹¹⁶

The narrator references Leibniz's *Monadology* in a popular version when he tells us that Wutz is able to write his travel accounts precisely *because* he does not have any sensory impressions of the countries available: "denn so viel hat auch der Dümme noch aus Leibnizens vorherbestimmten

¹¹⁵For Jean Paul's Leibniz reception see Schmitz-Emans, "Der Bau des wahren Luftschlosses."

¹¹⁶Cf. Leibniz's §78 in Robert Zimmermann, *Leibniz' Monadologie. Deutsch mit einer Abhandlung über Leibniz' und Herbart's Theorien des wirklichen Geschehens* (Wien: Braumüller und Seidel, 1847), 29: „Diese Grundsätze geben uns nun auch ein Mittel an die Hand, auf sehr natürliche Weise die Einheit, oder besser, die Uebereinstimmung der Seele und des organischen Körpers zu erklären. Die Seele folgt ihren eigenen Gesetzen, der Körper den seinigen, und beide treffen kraft der zwischen den Substanzen vorherbestimmten Harmonie (harmonie préétablie [sic – instead harmonie préétablie]) zusammen, weil sie beide Darstellungen desselben Universums sind.“

Harmonie im Kopfe, daß die Seele, z. B. die Seelen eines Forsters, Brydone, Björnstähls—insgesamt seßhaft auf dem Isolierschemel der versteinerten Zirbeldrüse—ja nichts anders von Südindien oder Europa beschreiben können [sic], als was jede sich davon selber erdenkt und was sie, beim gänzlichen Mangel äußerer Eindrücke, aus ihren *fünf Kanker-Spinnwarzen* vorspinnt und abzwirnt” (16–17).¹¹⁷

The character of Wutz is presented as his own monad that is creative without being dependent on the external sensory world or texts by others. And when the narrator sees Wutz’s self-sufficiency and self-centeredness precisely as the cause for his ability to write, Leibniz’s idea about monads functioning within pre-established harmony comes to mind once more. “Freilich du, mein Wutz, kannst Werthers Freuden aufsetzen, da allemal deine äußere und deine innere Welt sich wie bei Muschelschalen aneinander löten und dich als ihr Schaltier erfassen” (27). The narrator contrasts Wutz’s self-sufficiency with himself and his implicit readers and identifies the lack of such an extreme subjectivism as the cause for his (and his readers’s) inability to be as happy as Wutz and to live in such unshakable harmony with the world. For,

[...] bei uns armen Schelmen, die wir hier am Ofen sitzen, ist die Außenwelt selten der Ripienist und Chronist unserer inneren fröhlichen Stimmung; höchstens dann, [...] wenn wir eine verstopfte Nase haben, so setzt sich ein ganzes mit Blumen überwölbtes Eden vor uns hin, und wir mögen nicht hineinriechen. (27)

For all those subjects who are burdened with self-consciousness and the knowledge of death, the external world confronts them antagonistically. Instead of having a “sich zunehmend verselbständigenden solipsistischen Filter”¹¹⁸ by means of which Wutz imbibes the external

¹¹⁷It should be mentioned here that Leibniz’s idea about pre-established harmony and the pre-critical Kant did not ‘harmonize’ at all and that Kant rather harshly criticized Leibniz. For the concepts of subjectivity, writing and reading in Jean Paul’s text, however, it is in my opinion not relevant. – For Kant’s critique of Leibniz cf. Klaus Erich Kaehler, “Kants frühe Kritik an der Lehre von der ‘prästabilierten Harmonie’ und ihr Verhältnis zu Leibniz,” in *Kant-Studien* 76 (1985): 405-419.

¹¹⁸Schnabel, “Erzählerische Willkür,” 141.

world and assimilates it to his subjectivity, the narrator and his fellow extra-diegetic comrades in suffering are not able to create this unity and harmony of internal and external world. Their capacity for self-reflexivity stands in the way and forestalls closure of the two seashells and a harmonious amalgamation of the two worlds or subject and object.¹¹⁹ For them the external world is not an extension of their ego, it is the *non-ego* and as such problematic. Wutz by contrast “ignores the independent existence of anything outside his own sphere” as Blake aptly describes.¹²⁰

The idea of a self-sufficient, creative subject reappears in other literary and philosophical works that the narrator mentions and that Wutz rewrites for himself on the basis of their titles. For example, he enjoys “äußerst gefährliche Blätter aus dem Robinson, der ihm lieber war als Homer” (22). Since the narrator previously emphasized that Wutz did not have any other books at home except for his self-authored ones and the catalogs from the book fairs (15), one can assume that the title refers to Wutz’s version of *Robinson Crusoe*, not Defoe’s. Jean Paul’s allusion to Wutz’s way of life and writing that is made here is clear: Wutz’s admiration is for the man who (until Friday’s arrival) lives on an otherwise uninhabited island and basically reinvents civilization by himself—as opposed to Homer who evokes the counter image of an organized community in the form of the Greek polis. In order to present the schoolmaster’s biography, the narrator also points out Wutz’s version of the *Rousseausche Spaziergänge* (13) as well as the *Rousseauschen Bekenntnisse* (17).

¹¹⁹About the relationship between external world narrator and his fictive listeners also cf. Fink, “Der proteische Erzähler,” 282-283.

¹²⁰Blake, „What the Narrator Learns,” 58.

By referencing the *Confessions* and *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, the narrator chooses two texts by Rousseau in which the author focuses on subjectivity and solitude as well as intellectual production in solitude. Paragraph 73 of the chapter on the idyll in Jean Paul's *Vorschule der Ästhetik* makes clear that the reference of Rousseau's works is not so much intended to evoke the philosophical concept of the natural state, but rather to point to Rousseau's biography, as also Roger Ayrault points out.¹²¹ In that section, Jean Paul writes about *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*:

Das Schulmeisterlein Wutz des uns bekannten Verfassers ist eine Idylle, aus welcher ich mehr machen würde als andere Kunstrichter, wenn es sonst die Verhältnisse mit dem Verfasser erlaubten; dahin gehört unstreitig auch desselben Mannes Fixlein und Fibel.—Sogar das Leben des Robinson Crusoe und das des Jean Jaques auf seiner Peters-Insel erquickt uns mit Idyllen-Duft und Schmelz.¹²²

Scholarship on *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* has concerned itself with the question as to how much Wutz's extreme subjectivism illustrates an escape from "der grausamen sozialen Wirklichkeit" and thus pillories societal grievances of his time—particularly the ones related to the feudal and school systems; and it also has debated the question of a possible reference to and critique of a tradition of the novel whose authors suggest or at least permit an identificatory reading.¹²³ However, for what concerns us here—the analysis of concepts of writing and reading the text conveys—it is more important to point out is that Wutz's production of texts has little to do with the concept of writing that Kittler understands to be characteristic of the time around 1800. Rather, in his writing—based on (a) the relocation of the

¹²¹Cf. Ayrault, „Jean Paul,” 78-79.

¹²²Paul, „Vorschule,” 259.

¹²³Cf., for instance, Fink, „Der proteische Erzähler,” 279, 285-286, including references to literature for further reading.

complete cycle of writing into one and the same subject and the confinement of the entire hermeneutic process of interpretation within it and (b) the inversion of the production of new meaning and hermeneutic interpretation—Wutz predates the discourse system of around 1800.

Additional proof for that can be found in the description of how Wutz learned to read. For it is precisely according to the method that Kittler describes for the time preceding the *Aufschreibesystem um 1800*, i.e., by means of a method of spelling that is per se not intended to focus on meanings: “[U]nser Maria Wutz dozierte unter seinem Vater schon in der Woche das Abc, in der er das Buchstabieren erlernte, das nichts taugt” (9–10). Moreover, Wutz does not seem capable to take in and comprehend knowledge that comes from the outside. He merely memorizes information, but is not able to transfer it into meaning. While he is able to reproduce knowledge he cannot connect it to any other knowledge or make productive use of it—for example, he can “die ganze Geschlecht-Ausnahme thorax caudex pulexque vor der Quinta wie ein Wecker abroll[en]—bloß die Regel wußt’ er nicht” (18). From the outset Wutz seems to be incapable of comprehending written information. Instead, he makes up his own meaning, independent of and far from the intended one. With that, Wutz can be seen as the narrator’s counterpart whose writing is, too a large part, the result of a hermeneutic process of understanding and meaning production. He does, however, also resort to Wutz-like strategies of writing, as we will see.

What is, at first glance, striking on the *histoire* is first and foremost what allows the narrator to appear as Wutz’s counterpart and it seems as if Kittler’s model is far more accurately and directly applicable to the narrator than to Wutz. Speaking to group of fictive

listeners, the narrator presents Wutz's life story. Time after time, he refers to Wutz's writings as the source of his knowledge about the schoolmaster and out of which a clear picture about his life arises. Several assertions of authenticity and mention of specific sources in his narration assert his listeners the veracity of his report (cf. 13, 17, 25, 27, 32, etc.). The text, however, is not at all consistent with regard to this fiction of authenticity. Repeatedly, we find the narrator telling us about events out of Wutz's life of which he earlier claimed to have no knowledge whatsoever—more specifically, that he can't know about them because there is no mention of them in Wutz's writings. For example, the narrator tells us first that he is unable to provide any details about the schoolmaster's wedding which Wutz did write about in one of his books, his *Messiade*, but intentionally illegibly: "ganz *unleserlich*" so that he "dem Verstehen ungezwungen vor[beugte]" (35). Here we find partly mirrored what is happening on the *histoire* with regard to Wutz's writing: Wutz writes on the basis of bare titles that *a priori* elude deep understanding. Similarly, the narrator on the *discours*, wants to base his narration on sources in order to give an authentic report and, according to his own protestations, he does so for long parts of the narration. But for several events the body of source material lets him hit the wall and does not provide the desired information. In these instances, he has to rely on himself similarly to Wutz. As a consequence of this blank space in the records, the narrator does not adhere to the sources and keeps the blank space in his biography. Instead, he fills the gap out of his own fantasy when he, after all, does tell us about Wutz's wedding in quite some detail and speculates what might be the content of the illegible passage in Wutz's *Messiade*: "In seiner [Messiade] wird es episch ausgeführt sein, daß [...]" (40).

In the entirety of the text we find the coexistence of (a) real assertions of authenticity that refer to existing sources (given we believe the narrator); (b) *empty assertions* of authenticity that turn out to be false; and (c) pure fiction. On several occasions, the narrator even points out the fictionality of his account: “alles das [hier: Wutz’ Hochzeit] ist von fremden oder eigenen Fingern bloß—gemalt mit Dinte oder Druckerschwärze” (43, cf. 45, 46). The narrator also seems to be aware of many of the mentioned inconsistencies in the text when he claims that he wants to describe Wutz’s wedding precisely *because* he did not attend it himself or has any sources about it—contrary to the intention not to lie that he declared at the beginning of his text: “Aber wahrhaftig ich bin weder seinem Ehrentage beigewohnt, noch einem eignen; ich will ihn *also* bestens beschreiben” (42, my emphasis). As with Wutz’s writing of travel accounts, the absence of experience and knowledge offer precisely the reason and the inducement for writing. But other than Wutz, the narrator fills the gaps by himself being fully conscious of what he is doing. He knowingly complements the hermeneutic text production employing Wutz’s method of writing—a writing being grounded in the fantasy of a creative subject.

The narrator, hence, does not take over such a clear-cut counter-position to Wutz as it might appear at first sight and as Blake claims.¹²⁴ Rather, he combines elements of Wutz’s writing born out of pure subjectivity with other concepts and positions himself on a middle ground between Wutz and the discourse network around 1800. His reference to written sources, i.e., other authors’ texts, has been mentioned already and can be described utilizing

¹²⁴Cf. Blake, “What the Narrator Learns,” 54 and 56.

Kittler's triad of *subject 1 as author – subject 2 as reader – subject 2 as author* as a creation of written meaning by reading. He reconstructs Wutz's life on the basis of the schoolmaster's own writings, "so wie alle große [sic] Skribenten ihren Lebenslauf, ihre Weiber, Kinder, Äcker, Vieh in ihre opera omnia stricken" (40). But beyond that, he also utilizes his fantasy like Wutz does when he cannot draw on other documents for his narration. As a third component of the narrator's writing we have to add his own sensory experiences. For the narrator informs us that he indeed personally witnessed the last days in Wutz's life and that he has even been instructed by Wutz himself to write down an account of this life (53-59).

Instead of fully adopting Wutz's one-sided paradigm of literary production out of his own subjectivity and for the purpose of his own instruction, the narrator opens up Wutz's ego-centered and "solipsistic subjectivism." As additions to writing solely based on one's own fantasy and imagination, he adds two strategies to Wutz's repertoire: on the one hand, a writing that is based on texts of others, on the other hand a writing that draws mainly on primary sensory experiences and that therefore integrates the external world into the process of writing and lets it influence its content. This means that his writing does not only follow one paradigm, but is a conglomerate of several different paradigms. This also explains the narrator's ambiguity, his back and forth between different strategies of textualization.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ This ambiguity—the back and forth between different strategies of textualization—can also be found with regard to the narrator's shift between fictive orality (cf., for instance, 9, 27, 42, 53, 64) and literality (cf., for instance, 43, 45, 46, 59) both of which equally coexist without one could identify a development from one to the other. Likewise, the narrator intermittently assumes Wutz's confusion of original and copy (cf. 15) when he remarks at one point that it is irrelevant if his sources (Rousseau's *Confessions*) were written by Rousseau or Wutz: „so wundert sich niemand weniger über die gelehrte Welt als ich [der Erzähler, S.N.]; denn wie kann sie Rousseaus Bekenntnisse gesehen oder gelesen habe, die Wutz schrieb und die dato noch unter seinen Papieren liegen? In diesen spricht aber J. J. Rousseau oder Wutz (**das ist einerlei**) so von sich, allein mit andern Einkleid-Worten: [...].“ (17, my emphasis) – This passage is clearly attributable to the narrator, not to Wutz since he refers to the latter. Ayrault 84 overlooks this in his interpretation of the passage. Important for the back and forth of the narrator is

Hence while Wutz finds himself completely outside of the *Aufschreibesystem um 1800*, the narrator follows it to a large extent since he is conscious of himself as a subject that exists separately from the external world and other people and is confronted with objects and other subjects. His internal and external worlds do not seamlessly blend into one another and built one hermetically closed-off microcosmos or monad. They are irreversibly separated from each other through the consciousness of the difference between ego and non-ego. This leads to the narrator's uncertainty since he is unable to experience the full, unclouded bliss with which Wutz wrote and led his life. At the same time, however, the narrator is not to be seen as the complete counter-image to Wutz. He rather expands the repertoire of the discourse network around 1800 by adding fantasy and personal, genuine experiences that have been acquired in the knowledge of the separation of the self and external world as sources for literary writing. With that the narrator adopts Wutz's fantasy-based writing with the important modification that he is conscious about his fantasy being fantasy that is rooted in his own subjectivity that does not (have to) concur with the surrounding world. In this way, Jean Paul's *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* can be seen as an interesting bridge between different writing strategies that finds its expression in the differences, but also—and most importantly—in its partial overlapping between Wutz's world of *histoire* and the narrator's world of *discours*. It has already been noted that Huber understands the exaggerated subjectivism in the character of Wutz as parody of the cult of genius at the end of the eighteenth century.¹²⁶ Fink comes to a similar conclusion

that his confusion does not continue over the entirety of his narration. Rather, at another point in the text, he distinctively describes and understands Wutz's writing (15).

¹²⁶Cf. ann. 108.

when concedes that the narrator is largely a benevolent one—being “herzlich gut” (39)—but also points out that he at times assumes an ironic and reserved stance towards Wutz and that *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* can be read as a cautionary tale. Fink sees Wutz as a negative example that the narrator presents “als wollte er den zeitgenössischen Leser vor der hier großartig vertretenen Introvertiertheit, dem Subjektivismus warnen und ihm bedeuten, daß er Wutz nicht als Vorbild hinstellen will.”¹²⁷ Fink continues that “[m]it der Flucht in die Privatsphäre, in die Innerlichkeit, wie sie der Schulmeister vorlebt, hypostasiert Jean Paul im Grunde eine dem zeitgenössischen Bürger wohl vertraute Idee, aber im Gegensatz zur bürgerlichen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts erscheint sie nicht mehr als Wunschtraum, sondern fast als pathologische Notlösung, gleichsam als sei sie durch das Beispiel der französischen [sic] Revolution plötzlich antiquiert geworden.”¹²⁸ Schnabel joins this critical view of Wutz and claims that the narrator conceives of Wutz’s “eskapistische Kauzigkeit [als] durchaus problematisch”—particularly since he portrays it as a reaction to a cruel social reality that Wutz seeks to escape.¹²⁹

The present analysis of *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* does not oppose these interpretations. But it claims that Jean Paul’s text goes beyond the portrayal of a solipsistic Wutz, be it critical or satiric or both. The question that arises in the wake of observations made by Fink, Schnabel, and others is: How is it possible for the narrator and his contemporaries to find happiness within (and despite) the given circumstances and limitations that are imposed on them by the awareness of transience, inescapable mortality, and the non-identity and incongruence of

¹²⁷Fink, “Der proteische Erzähler,” 276.

¹²⁸Fink, “Der proteische Erzähler,” 285f.

¹²⁹Cf. Schnabel, “Erzählerische Willkür,” 141, quote *ibid.*

internal and external world? Jean Paul's dictum about "Vollglück in der Beschränkung" that the idyll is supposed to portray cannot only be applied to the schoolmaster, but just as justifiably to the narrator. The narrator himself sums up this "Vollglück in der Beschränkung" at the end of the narration when he takes stock what his engagement with Wutz's life has taught him: "[S]o fühlt ich unser aller Nichts und schwur, ein so unbedeutendes Leben zu verachten, zu verdienen und zu genießen" (63). The narrator cannot possibly return to the state in which Wutz lived his life—in harmony with the world, doubtless about his place in it, and completely free of worries about the future. One might describe Wutz's state of being as a pre-lapsarian one—or, in modern terms, borrowing language from today's wellness and meditation community (and ancient Eastern wisdom traditions) as the mastering of persistent mindfulness, the non-judgmental full awareness of just the present moment. But for the narrator, the external world is not his home anymore. He feels separated from it, he has to find his place in the world by himself and with effort. He cannot free himself from the awareness and consciousness, as Adam and Eve could not undo their Fall after eating from the tree of knowledge. The external world will remain *the other* for the narrator, in the form of writing as well as in the form of his own, direct experiencing of the world. He won't be able to reintegrate the world into his own ego. He cannot free himself of a world that, at times, might be hostile and frightening. What he *can* do, however, is to cope with it. He has to find his way and happiness within the given world, and the end of *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* shows us how this is possible: He can cope and realize happiness by means of his writing. Through his engagement with Wutz, he does not forget about his and everyone else's mortality. He still is painfully aware of it. On the contrary, through the hermeneutic part of his writing based on extensive exposure to Wutz's writings he

might even feel it—"unser aller Nichts"—more intensely than ever before. And as the first verb of the narrator's résumé instructs us, this *nothingness* or *insignificance* of the individual has to be despised, is "zu verachten." But the narrator does not conclude with this statement. The "Nichts" is not alone anymore, it is neither followed by a period nor a qualifying "oder." The narrator's perspective has broadened. Although his (and human life in general) might be „unbedeutend" it is necessary to enjoy it, "zu genießen." Wutz's view of life continues alongside despise and despair—on equal footing with it, accompanied by the coordinating "und." And despite insecurity and knowledge of mortality—maybe exactly because of it—life has to be enjoyed too. Wutz's guarantee for this view on life is his fantasy by means of which he created his own world and transforms all non-ego into ego. With modifications, the narrator adopts this view, as we have seen by analyzing his writing strategies. But one verb remains to be explained, and it is the one in between the two I already mentioned. Happiness within the limitations of the narrator's world does not fall into one's lap. The *carpe diem* does not follow the *memento mori* naturally. The verb that links "verachten" with „genießen" is „verdienen." For the narrator and others in his world, happiness is something one has to work for and earn. It is based on instrumentalizing what can be both boon and bane: on hermeneutic work of the mind like the one the narrator performs by engaging with Wutz's writings.

Where there are gaps, where consultation of Wutz's texts does not provide any information, the narrator uses his own fantasy and experience to fill them. As opposed to the schoolmaster, however, he does so consciously and being aware of the fictionality of what he writes as well as of the fact the he faces a world that does not entirely disclose itself to him, that is not entirely legible anymore. While the monad Wutz lives in harmony with the world,

securely enclosed by his seashell and shielded from everything that could question his utter bliss and self-sufficiency, the narrator does not have such an armor anymore. Considering his final résumé, however, it seems as if the relationship between him and the world has changed a little. He certainly has not returned to Wutz's perfect harmony, but narrator and world do not oppose one another as antagonistically anymore as they did at the beginning of the narration. Rather, the antagonism has given way to a dualism as the enumeration with its polysyndetic use of "und" shows.

The necessity to work for his happiness, can also be applied to the fact that it does not suffice for the narrator to deploy just one writing strategy. For it is exactly where the gaps are, where the world presents itself in need of explanation that he has to rely on his own subjectivity to patch the cracks that have opened up in a world after the Fall, but also—speaking historically—after old authorities have lost their power to provide explanations. Thus Jean Paul's *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* can be read as an answer to the crisis of the individual from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century—when the burden was on individuals to give orientation and meaning to their lives and make sense of the world after traditional authorities and organizing principles like the church or the feudal system had lost power or had vanished entirely and the enlightenment—with Kant and his call to "sapere aude" leading the way—had propagated the courage to use one's reason as guiding principle. The narrator of Jean Paul's text shows us that it takes indeed not only courage, but also work to do so. And the solution the text offers to a disorientation in the aftermath of historical change is neither the return to pre-enlightened time—a state that Wutz exemplifies (a futile endeavor anyway)—nor, however, is it the one-sided resort to reason and an *Aufschreibesystems um*

1800, that is able to provide a full narrative. It is a middle way, a peaceful coexistence of both—to be both gained and earned (as the German “verdienen” alluded to both English meanings). This also relativizes the critique of Wutz that Fink, Schnabel, and others found in the text. What the narrator and the text as a whole show at the end is that Wutz’s way of writing and living is not to be refused entirely, but it is to be modified and supplemented to make it a viable option.

The middle way we find alluded to at the end is the result of a learning process. For the narrator, this learning process happened by means of an engagement with his narrative material. In this process—necessitated, for instance, by the incompleteness of the material—his own writing strategies changed. In this sense, the content of his narration changed the process of narrating itself. Inconsistencies in the narrator’s account (like, for example, empty assertions of authenticity) are symptomatic of a process of the narrator’s reorientation for whom Wutz’s monadic self-sufficiency and his well-structured, easy to grasp, idyllic world are irretrievably lost. It is precisely the narrator’s flexibility that “saves” his ego from losing itself in someone else’s narrated consciousness like Anton Reiser’s narrator does. The abandonment of the pursuit of objectivity seems to allow both the narrator’s and Wutz’s unique personalities to emerge from the text much clearer than Anton’s and his narrator’s personalities do from Moritz’s novel fragment. In Jean Paul’s *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* the two personalities do not seem to be in competition with one another. Rather, for the narrator, writing about Wutz seems to be an enriching task. One might say that Wutz’s narrator is infected by his protagonist too. But it is not a sickening infection that destroys its host. It is more of an inoculation against the meaningless of life.

What both narrators—Wutz's as well as Anton's—have in common, however, is that they do not represent full-fledged representatives of a modern, autonomous subject that has a sense of his or her own self as being separate and different from others and also does not feel destabilized and disoriented by this fact. Maybe, at the end of the narration, Wutz's narrator is on his way towards becoming such an individual, but he certainly does not start out like this. The narrator in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*n is different in that he, from the very beginning up until the end of the novel, is very present as a distinct, palpable individual with empathy toward, but also distance from his characters. He does not seem to undergo a development. He appears to be fairly stable, and seems to be a genuine representative of a modern subject. But as we will see, his agency is also limited without him noticing. What functions as a corrective force in Goethe's novel is the structure of the novel itself: are different levels and narrative authorities within the novel that produce meaning the narrator does not. This way, the limitations of the modern subject become apparent without them causing the disorientation, even despair, as in *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*. The construction of meaning rather seems to have become an ever-ongoing play.

CHAPTER 3: THE NARRATIVE NETWORK OF SPIEGELUNGEN IN *WILHELM MEISTER LEHRJAHRE*

Introduction

In Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser*, we encountered a narrator who seems to be omniscient and confident at first, but at closer inspection reveals himself as not as sovereign over the story as it first appeared. The more the narration progresses, the more the line between him as a subject and Anton as his narrative object blurs. He aligns his speech with Anton's and gets wrapped up in contradictions of his report that can't be resolved and that do not seem to serve any narrative purpose. Although written in distanced and seemingly objectivize third person, the narrator does not possess complete mastery over his material. Rather, to a certain degree, his material gains mastery over him and takes on a life of its own when it changes the way in which the narrator delivers the story of Anton without the narrator noticing. Third-person narration and the narrative exploration of a subject's identity development seem to be at odds with one another here and, drawing on Dorrit Cohn's work, we can see a development from one type of psycho-narration to another type within the same novel: from a narrator whose own consciousness is distanced and clearly distinguishable from the figurative one he seeks to portray to a narrator who is fused with his protagonist which manifests in 'stylistic contagion.'¹³⁰ While it is "modern" and true for *Anton Reiser* that a

¹³⁰Cf. Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 26-33.

personalized narrator, aware of his role as a mediator, tells a story to readers that is explicitly marked as a mediated and non-identificatory narration with individualized characters, the narrator himself does start to identify himself with Anton. Despite third-person narration and the narrator's intentions to report objectively, the narrator's realm of *discours* and he himself as a subject do not assert themselves as independent from the *histoire*. Although, of course, *Anton Reiser* is still far from first-person *Erlebnislyrik* or Pietist confessional literature with regard to the degree of the blending of *discours* and *histoire*, we do not find a clear narratological distinction between these two levels in the novel.

Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*—published in 1795/96, only a few years after the publication of *Anton Reiser's* last book—presents to us a very different narrator and narrative structure in general. Rather than a narrator who struggles to narrate “*the other*” and, at the same time, to assert himself as a separate subject, in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* we encounter a narrator with a developed sense of self who is capable of narrating Wilhelm's life journey without losing his distance and sense of his own subjectivity. He seems to tell the story so confidently that, at first glance, there is little doubt of him being an omniscient, authoritative narrator who competently guides his readers through Wilhelm's story and aims to do his best to present it as clearly as possible. In this chapter I aim to show, however, that a closer look at how reliably the narrator presents Wilhelm's story to us does not fully support the impression of a full and accurate account that is conveyed to the reader throughout the novel. On the one hand, *Leerstellen* in the narrator's account are revealed by retroactive corrections the readers themselves must do based on additional, later-presented information. On the other hand, connections suggested by the way the narrator presents information to us, are later proven

wrong by following narrative material, without the narrator informing his readers accordingly. Rather, it is up to the readers themselves to be active, critical, and on guard. Wilhelm's narrator does not change over the course of the narration. Neither does his material gain mastery over him by changing him as a subject. But—this is my thesis—the material or the text itself makes it clear to the attentive reader that, in the final analysis, it is the text itself that provides more information and more reliable information. The narrative authority above the narrator, the text as a whole, functions as a corrective with regard to what the narrator tells his readers. As I will show, it is not malice on the part of the narrator that leads the readers to draw connections that are later proven wrong. Rather, it is a structural feature of the novel that is repeated on several structural levels. Interesting in this context is the fact that in first editions of the novel, Goethe's name does not appear as an author.¹³¹ He is only declared as the editor on every single book's title page. Labeling the author as the editor is a common practice of the time and is also found in *Anton Reiser*. However, as I will lay out in detail, the *Herausgeberfiktion* in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* lacks the functionality it still fulfills in *Anton Reiser*. While the latter fictitious editorship still serves the traditional purpose of attesting to the story's veracity, *Wilhelm Meister's Herausgeberfiktion* seems indeed to not fulfill any purpose—which might be one reason it has usually been overlooked in scholarship on the novel. The narrator in Goethe's

¹³¹The novel was first published in 4 separate volumes, each of which contained two books. Volumes 1 (with books 1 and 2), volume 2 (with books 3 and 4), and volume 3 (with books 5 and 6) appeared in 1795, the last volume 4 (with books 7 and 8) appeared in 1796. – See the scans of the first editions at Google Books, accessed March 2, 2015, [Books 1/2:] https://books.google.com/books?id=dbNeAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, [books 3/4:] https://books.google.com/books?id=l44NAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false; [books 5/6:] https://books.google.com/books?id=mA0-AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, [books 7/8:] https://books.google.com/books?id=Dp9cbXKD1N8C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false. – Quotes from Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004).

novel is not concerned with proving his credibility by pointing to other sources for legitimization. He does not have to assure his competency as he presents himself as an authorial narrator who naturally possesses the authority and competence to be the one presenting Wilhelm's story. In his self-confident demeanor, he does not need to be explicit about his authority, unlike *Anton Reiser's* narrator. It has become an implicit assumption that his authority is to be accepted. This makes the inclusion of a fictitious editor seem even more archaic. Instead of simply conceiving of it as a relict from an older tradition of novel writing, devoid of function, I want to take the fictitious editor seriously and show that this often overlooked fact of the *Herausgeberfiktion* plays, indeed, an important role when we want to understand how the fictive editor and the narrator of the novel present Wilhelm's story to the reader, how the relationship between them and the implicit readers has to be understood, and what kind of implicit or ideal reader the novel addresses. As we will see, this structural relationship between narrator and editor replicates itself on several more levels and continues the narrative technique of *Spiegelungen* we find on the level of *histoire*. What seems to be true according to one narrative authority stands corrected by another one—one that usually is on a higher logical level. We find this structural principle with respect to the relations between *histoire*/the novel's characters and *discours*/narrator, between *discours*/narrator and fictitious editor/text as a whole, as well as between fictitious editor and the author Goethe. This shift of authority from one level to the next can be conceived of as the struggle over the privilege to determine meaning and it calls for suspicion toward narratives of whatever origin on the part of the attentive reader. With regard to its structure, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* can, hence, be seen as an educational *Bildungsroman* that calls to the reader's attention that the process of

mediation cannot be a flawless and entirely authentic one per se. It diverts our attention away from the narrator and toward the text's own agency.

While literary criticism on Goethe's first *Meister* novel has been voluminous ever since its publication, structural analyses of the novel are relatively rare, and only recently some scholarly work on this aspect has been published. Before delving into the analysis of the primary text, I will thus present main tendencies in the scholarship on and criticism of *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre*. My goal in doing this is twofold. First, I want to give an overview of how the novel has been understood in the past. Second, I aim to show how more recent scholarship has taken a different path to approach the novel, i.e., its narrative structure. After a review of scholarship on *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, I will tend to an analysis of the structure of the novel and demonstrate how different narrative authorities or levels in the novel play together to create meaning. The role of the narrator and other narrative authorities in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* will also add to the ways we have seen consciousness being narrated in *Anton Reiser* and *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* and show us another way to "deal with" the burden of the claims for agency and subjectivity.

III.1 Scholarship on *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre*: An Overview

Nicht bloß ein Tag lehrt den andern, sondern jede Minute des Tages die andere, jeder Gedanke den andern. [...] Solche eine Kette geht im Menschen bis an den Tod fort. Nie ist er gleichsam der ganze Mensch, sondern immer in Entwicklung, im Fortgang, in Vervollkommnung. [...] Wir wachsen immer aus einer Kindheit, so alt wir sein mögen, sind immer im Gange, unruhig, ungesättigt. Der Wesentliche unsres Lebens ist nie Genuß, sondern immer Progression [...]. (Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, 1772)¹³²

¹³²Johann Gottfried Herder, „Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache,“ in *Werke in fünf Bänden*, 4th ed., vol. 2 (Berlin/Weimar: Aufbau Verlag 1969): 77-190, quote 153.

Critics of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* have taken opposing stances ever since the novel appeared in 1795 and 1796. Already Goethe's contemporaries could not agree on what the novel *really* was about. In a letter to his friend Friedrich Schiller, dated November 5, 1796, Christian Gottfried Körner (1756-1831) considers Wilhelm's development as the focus of the novel when he writes:

Die Einheit des Ganzen denke ich mir als die Darstellung einer schönen menschlichen Natur, die sich durch die Zusammenwirkung ihrer inneren Anlagen und äussern Verhältnisse allmählich ausbildet. Das Ziel dieser Ausbildung ist ein vollendetes *Gleichgewicht* – Harmonie mit Freiheit. [...] Für ein solches Wesen musste nun eine Welt gefunden werden, von der man die Bildung nicht eines Künstlers, eines Staatsmannes, eines Gelehrten, eines Mannes von gutem Ton – sondern eines *Menschen* erwarten konnte.¹³³

Although not explicitly, Körner thinks along the same lines as Blanckenburg in his *Versuch über den Roman* (1774) in which he sought to render the genre of the novel reputable by applying poetological principles of the enlightenment—first and foremost Lessing's theory of the drama in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*—to a genre which “von jeher der Unglaubwuerdigkeit und Formlosigkeit beschuldigt wurde.”¹³⁴ Referring to Christoph Martin

¹³³The letter is quoted in Hans Gerhard Gräf, *Goethe über seine Dichtungen. Versuch einer Sammlung aller Äußerungen des Dichters über seine poetischen Werke* (Frankfurt a.M. 1902: Rütten & Loening), vol. I, 2, 858-68 (ann. 2), quotes 860 and 862. Fulltext available at HathiTrust, accessed July 20, 2015, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008618445>. In the downloadable pdf document cf. 379-389, quotes 381 and 383). Körner's letter was, then, anonymously published by Goethe in Schiller in the *Horen* in 1796, Stück 12 under the title “Über Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (aus einem Brief an den Herausgeber der Horen).”

¹³⁴Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur und Bildungsroman*, 28.

Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* and its three editions (1766-1767, 1773, 1794) as the genre's paradigm, Blanckenburg wants the novel to deal with one protagonist, his development and "innren Zustand" in a way that enables readers to track and comprehend the formation of the hero's character along a flawless chain of causal relations between inner and outer world.¹³⁵ Körner's letter, which Goethe and Schiller published anonymously in the *Horen*, became enormously influential for the novel's reception and interpretation as a *Bildungsroman*. Karl Morgenstern, professor of classical philology at the University of Dorpat (Tartu), coined the term for the genre as early as 1817 by referencing Körner's letter in the *Horen*.¹³⁶ While Körner sees Wilhelm as the novel's protagonist who fits Blanckenburg's notion of the hero and serves as the structural, as well as content-related focal point of the text, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) conceives of *Wilhelm Meister* as a decentralized novel in which Wilhelm's characterization remains rather vague despite the narration of the trials and tribulations of the young man. Humboldt sees Wilhelm's character serving as a surface for the projection of the readers' own *Lehrjahre* and as a structural hub around which a kaleidoscope of the human experience is clustered. In a letter to Goethe, dated November 24th, 1796, Humboldt disagrees

¹³⁵Friedrich von Blanckenburg, *Versuch über den Roman. Faksimiledruck der Originalausgabe von 1774. Mit einem Nachwort von Eberhard Lämmert. Sammlung Metzler 1682. Realienbücher für Germanisten, Reihe a: Aus der Geschichte der Literaturwissenschaft, Abt. G: Dokumentationen* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), 18. – Cf. for a more detailed discussion of Blanckenburg's theory of the novel Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 27-30.

¹³⁶Karl Morgenstern was the first to use the term *Bildungsroman* in 1817 in a lecture titled "Über den Geist und Zusammenhang einer Reihe philosophischer Romane" in which Morgenstern referred to work of Friedrich Maximilian Klinger. The lecture was followed by two more lectures on the *Bildungsroman*: one in 1820 "Über das Wesen des Bildungsromans" and one in 1824 "Zur Geschichte des Bildungsromans." – Both texts can be found in the text collection *Zur Geschichte des deutschen Bildungsromans, Wege der Forschung 640*, ed. by Rolf Selbmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988): 45-99. – For a more detailed report on Morgenstern's reflections on the *Bildungsroman* cf. Fritz Martini, "Der Bildungsroman. Zur Geschichte des Wortes und der Theorie, in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 35 (1961): 44-63.

with Körner regarding the distinctiveness of Wilhelm's character when he writes about Wilhelm:

[D]agegen hat er [Körner, SN], wie mich dünkt, seine [Wilhelm Meister's, SN] durchgängige Bestimmbarkeit, ohne fast alle wirkliche Bestimmung, sein beständiges Streben nach allen Seiten hin, ohne entschiedene natürliche Kraft nach einer, seine unaufhörliche Neigung zum Raisonieren, und seine Lauigkeit, wenn ich nicht Kälte sagen soll, der Empfindung, ohne die sein Betragen nach Marianens und Mignons Tode nicht begreiflich sein würden, nicht genug getroffen. Und doch sind wohl diese Züge für den ganzen Roman von der grössten Wichtigkeit. **Denn sie sind es, die ihn zu einem Punkte machen, um den sich eine Menge von Gestalten versammeln müssen, die ihn zu einem Menschen werden lassen, der ewig Knoten schürzt, ohne fast je einen durch eigne Kraft zu lösen. Das aber ist eigentlich, meiner Ansicht nach, das hohe Verdienst, das den Meister zu einem einzigen Werk unter allen seinen Mitbrüdern macht, dass er die Welt und das Leben, ganz wie es ist, völlig unabhängig von einer einzelnen Individualität schildert.** In allen übrigen, auch den Meisterwerken dieser Gattung, trägt alles durch Aehnlichkeit oder Contrast den Charakter der Hauptperson. Im ‚Meister‘ ist alles und für alle und doch jedes Einzelne und das Ganze für den Verstand und die Phantasie durchaus bestimmt. Darum wird auch jeder Mensch im ‚Meister‘ *seine* Lehrjahre wiederfinden. Auch in ganz andern Situationen, als der ‚Meister‘ schildert, wird er das Leben geniessen und benutzen lehren. Denn es sind nicht einzelne Exempel und Fälle,

es ist die ganze Kunst und Weisheit selbst, poetisch dargestellt: **der Dichter, um völlig bestimmt zu sein, nöthigt den Leser, diese Weisheit sich selbst zu schaffen, und das Product in dieser letztern hat nun keine andern Grenzen, als die seiner eigenen Fähigkeit.** [my emphass]¹³⁷

Körner read *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* as the story of the life span of one specific, although exemplary, young, bourgeois man. Humboldt, however, conceives of the novel's meaning as a work in progress inviting readers to create their own meaning by choosing from the novel's offerings like from a buffet rather than receiving the readily cooked meal. Schiller, with whom Goethe maintained a vivid correspondence during the years of his writing the first *Meister* novel, takes a position located in the middle between Körner and Wilhelm von Humboldt. On November 28, 1796, Schiller writes to Goethe:

Körner hat diesen Charakter zu sehr als den eigentlichen Held des Romans betrachtet: der Titel und das alte Herkommen, in jedem Roman etc. einen Helden haben zu müssen, hat ihn verführt. Wilhelm Meister ist zwar die nothwendigste, aber nicht die wichtigste Person; eben das gehört zu den Eigenthümlichkeiten Ihres Romans, dass er keine solche wichtigste Person hat und braucht. An ihm und um ihn geschieht alles, aber nicht eigentlich *seinetwegen*; [...]. Hingegen finde ich Humboldt gegen diesen Charakter [Wilhelm, S.N.] auch viel zu ungerecht, und ich begreife nicht recht, wie er das Geschäft, das der Dichter sich in dem Romane aufgab, wirklich für geendet

¹³⁷The letter is quoted in Gräff, *Goethe über seine Dichtungen*, 869-871, ann. 2, quote 870-871.

halten kann, wenn der Meister das bestimmungslose und gehaltlose Geschöpf wäre, wofür er ihn erklärt. Wenn nicht wirklich die Menschheit, nach ihrem ganzen Gehalt, in dem Meister hervorgerufen und in's Spiel gesetzt ist, so ist der Roman nicht fertig, und wenn Meister dazu überhaupt nicht fähig ist, so hätten Sie diesen Charakter nicht wählen dürfen. **Freilich ist es für den Roman ein zarter und heikeliger [sic] Umstand, dass er, in der Person des Meister [sic], weder mit einer entschiednen Individualität, noch mit einer durchgeführten Idealität schliesst, sondern mit einem Mitteldinge zwischen beiden. Der Charakter ist individual, aber nur den Schranken und nicht dem Gehalt nach und er ist ideal, aber nur dem Vermögen nach.** [my emphasis]¹³⁸

Along with other prominent appraisals of Goethe's novel—one of which is Friedrich Schlegel's often-quoted dictum of the novel's decentralized and thus *republican* fictive world¹³⁹—these few examples of contemporaries characterizing *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* already show the gamut of opinions on the novel that have remained diverse up until today's scholarship. In the more than 200-year long history of *Wilhelm Meister* interpretations, Lisa Saariluoma identifies several different camps to which scholarship on the novel can be

¹³⁸The letter is quoted in Gräff, *Goethe über seine Dichtungen*, 871-872, ann. 1, quote *ibid*.

¹³⁹Cf. Friedrich Schlegel, „Über Goethes Meister,“ in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Vol. 2, ed. by Hans Eichner (Munich-Paderborn-Wien: Ferdinand Schöningh, Zürich: Thomas Verlag, 1967), 126-146. – Cf. about a more detailed review of contemporary critics cf. Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 206-8, 222-223. (on Schlegel and Schiller), 164-165 (on others, including Christoph Martin Wieland) as well as 315 on Goethe's own ambivalent utterances on his first *Meister* novel. – For more contemporary (e.g. by Novalis and Jean Paul) and nineteenth-century appraisal cf. *Erläuterungen und Dokumente. Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Reclam Universal-Bibliothek 8160, ed. by Ehrhard Bahr (Stuttgart: Reclam jun., 1982).

assigned. In large part, the contemporary tendencies of the novel's reception reflect those of Goethe's contemporaries, which is why they have been presented in more detail.

In the last decades, the perhaps most-debated question about the *Lehrjahre* has been the question as to whether the novel belongs to the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. Up until the 1960s, however, Wilhelm Dilthey's definition of the genre of the *Bildungsroman* in 1906¹⁴⁰—based on Goethe's novel as its first representative and its successors—remained the mainstream conception of the novel as the narration of the development of a young man who “mit den harschen Realitäten der Welt in Kampf gerät und so unter mannigfachen Lebenserfahrungen heranreift, sich selber findet und seiner Aufgabe in der Welt gewiß wird.”¹⁴¹ Following the classical humanistic ideal, Wilhelm supposedly undergoes a “Reife zur Harmonie”¹⁴² and develops all his individual dispositions fully and equally.¹⁴³ Dilthey's “Auffassung des teleologischen Charakters der Gattung”¹⁴⁴ is an utterly optimistic one and particularly Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* shows the reader the story of a struggle with a

¹⁴⁰As mentioned above, it was not Dilthey, however, who first used the term *Bildungsroman*, but Karl Morgenstern.

¹⁴¹Wilhelm Dilthey, „Hölderlin,” in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 26, ed. by Gabriele Malsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005 [1906]): 224-296, quote 252. Dilthey's work can be accessed online at *Digitale Sammlungen*, accessed June 15, 2015, http://digi20.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb00064547_00001.html.

¹⁴²Dilthey, “Hölderlin,” 253.

¹⁴³Cf. for an overview on the conceptual history of bourgeois *Bildung* Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 7-26 as well as Georg Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur. Glanz und Elend eines deutschen Deutungsmusters. Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur* 56 (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1994) and Fotis Jannidis, *Das Individuum und sein Jahrhundert. Eine Komponenten- und Funktionsanalyse des Begriffs ‚Bildung‘ am Beispiel von Goethes „Dichtung und Wahrheit“* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1996).

¹⁴⁴Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 27.

harmonious and complete happy ending: “Nie ist dieser Optimismus der persönlichen Entwicklung [...] heiterer und lebenssicherer ausgesprochen worden als in Goethes Wilhelm Meister: ein unvergänglicher Glanz von Lebensfreude liegt auf diesem Romane und denen der Romantiker.”¹⁴⁵ Like Körner and Blanckenburg, Dilthey understands the Bildungsroman as a novel concerned with the *individual* development of a young hero, consolidates a line of interpretation that ties in with Blanckenburg’s ideal of a novel as a *Charakter- or Entwicklungsroman* and conceives of the *Bildungsroman* as one of its subgenres—an interpretation that dominated the *Wilhelm Meister* reception up until the 1960s.¹⁴⁶

Another branch of scholarship on *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* does not see the novel as being primarily concerned with Wilhelm’s individual *Bildung* and the balanced unfolding of all his dispositions, but rather with his development into a socialized, well-adapted citizen. The assumption underlying this appraisal is that the novel’s focus is on the fundamental conflict between individual and society. This understanding of the novel can be traced back to Hegel, the „dritte Hauptquelle der Theorie zum Bildungsroman.“¹⁴⁷ In his *Vorlesungen zur Ästhetik*, he distinguishes an ideal and past „Heroenzeit“ and its poetic world („poetischer Weltzustand“) from his contemporary, modern bourgeois society in which world and individual („der Einzelne und das Allgemeine, das Individuum und die Welt“) have been separated and in which the

¹⁴⁵Dilthey, “Hölderlin,” 253.

¹⁴⁶Cf. Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 30-31.

¹⁴⁷Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 31.

individual as the particular has to become reconciled with the state as the general.¹⁴⁸ The genre of the novel is for Hegel the equivalent of the epic of the ancient world. It deals with this conflict and demonstrates the reconciliation which occurs when the hero accepts the rationality of the existing state as the representative of the general and fits himself into them. While the novel is, hence, the most adequate literary form to depict the time he lives in, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in particular¹⁴⁹ is for Hegel a genuine expression of his time, ideally showing the "Konflikt zwischen der Poesie des Herzens und der entgegenstehenden Prosa der Verhältnisse."¹⁵⁰ While Humboldt does not talk about the conflict between individual and society, the part and the whole, he does have some commonalities with Hegel since both see the novel as a mirror of their time. Saariluoma coins this understanding of the novel (which later Georg Lukács picked up on in his *Theorie des Romans*)¹⁵¹ the "'Konfliktmodell' des Bildungsromans" and contrasts it with Blanckenburg's and Dilthey's "Modell der Entwicklung der Anlagen."¹⁵²

These two different understandings of the kind of development or *Bildung* Wilhelm undergoes remained the dominating ones up until the 1960s, and modern scholarship can

¹⁴⁸Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, „Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik. Vol. I-III (1832),“ in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 13-15 (Frankfurt a.M. 1970), esp. vol. I, pp. 236-252.

¹⁴⁹It is, actually, Hegel's only example.

¹⁵⁰Cf. Hegel, „Ästhetik,“ vol. III, 392-393.

¹⁵¹Cf. for a summary of Lukács's understanding of the *Bildungsroman* Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 33-34. – Cf. also in addition to his *Theorie des Romans*: Georg Lukács, „Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,“ in *Goethe und seine Zeit* (Bern: A. Francke, 1947), 31-47.

¹⁵²Cf. Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 33, quotes *ibid.*

roughly be assigned to one of the two main lines of interpretation.¹⁵³ In 1968, however, Lothar Köhn was the first one to dispute the appropriateness of the label *Bildungsroman* for single works, including Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, arguing that the goal of humanistic *Bildung* was not actually achieved in the novels commonly assigned to the genre.¹⁵⁴ More contemporary scholarship has even denied the claim that *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is a novel about *Bildung* at all.¹⁵⁵

Regardless of the camps to which past scholarship belongs, however, the vast majority of critics have concentrated on content and topics rather than on structure.¹⁵⁶ Only relatively

¹⁵³Following the Körner-Blanckenburg-Dilthey line—the conception of the novel as one about Wilhelm's individual *Bildung* and evolvment—one can name critics like Max Wundt, *Goethes Wilhelm Meister und die Entwicklung des modernen Lebensideals* (Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1932 [1913]), Hermann August Korff, *Geist der Goethezeit. Versuch einer ideellen Entwicklung der klassisch-romantischen Literaturgeschichte. Vol. II: Klassik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979 [1930]), and Günther Müller, *Umgestaltung in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahren* (Halle/Saale 1948).

In the footsteps of Humboldt-Hegel-Lukács, the second main line of interpretation—"nach der Wilhelm das neuhumanistische Persönlichkeitsideal nicht realisiert, sondern sich vielmehr zur nützlichen Mitgliedschaft in der Gesellschaft hin entwickelt" (Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, p. 37)—, one can cite, for instance, Friedrich Kittler, „Über die Sozialisation Wilhelm Meisters,“ in Friedrich Kittler and Gerhard Kaiser, *Dichtung als Sozialisationsspiel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), Kurt May, "'Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre', ein Bildungsroman?," in *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift* 31 (1957): 1-37, Helmut Koopmann, „Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795/96),“ in *Interpretationen: Goethes Erzählwerk. Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 8081*, ed. by Paul Michael Lützel and James E. McLeod (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1985): 168-191. – As Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 37-38, 34 points out: What facilitated this understanding of *Wilhelm Meister*, was the "Einbeziehung der soziohistorischen Perspektive" (38) and the works particularly by Jürgen Habermas (esp. the excursus „Das Ende der repräsentativen Öffentlichkeit, illustriert am Beispiel Wilhelm Meisters,“ in Habermas: *Strukturwandel und Öffentlichkeit*: 25-28) and Niklas Luhmann, *Liebe als Passion. suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft 1124* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994) about the separation of the public from the private sphere and the private person from the functional public. Cf. for an extensive overview on the scholarship Jürgen Jacobs, *Wilhelm Meister und seine Brüder. Untersuchungen zum deutschen Bildungsroman* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972), 9-23.

¹⁵⁴Lothar Köhn, „Entwicklungs- und Bildungsroman. Ein Forschungsbericht,“ in *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift* 42 (1968): 427-473.

¹⁵⁵Koschorke, „Identifikation und Ironie.“

¹⁵⁶Cf. Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 42-43 who also points out that the few existing formal studies on *Wilhelm Meister* are concerned with "Erzählen als eine Frage des Stils" (42), not narrative structure.

recently have some critics turned to the novel's structure. In 2004, Saariluoma investigated the relationship between narrative structure und *Bildung* in Goethe's *Meister*. Rather than looking for character development on the content level of the novel, she identifies three characteristics about Wilhelm's being in the world that render him a modern subject. These are reflected in the novel's structure and justify for her the classification of *Wilhelm Meister* as a *Bildungsroman*: „Das Individuelle, das Perspektivische und das Dynamische machen das Dasein Wilhelms modern.“¹⁵⁷ Instead of an omniscient narrator who synthesizes the many steps of Wilhelm's development and explains his progression to the reader, Goethe introduces a narrator who presents single observations out of the perspective of the protagonist and his current state (“[d]as Individuelle”).¹⁵⁸ But although Wilhelm is the main character of the novel, Saariluoma emphasizes that the reader often sees events through the eyes of other characters—a structural feature of the novel she calls “Individualisierung der Sinnggebung” and „Individualisierung der Welterfahrung.“¹⁵⁹ Neither the concept of one universal truth nor reason as a structuring principle are valid in Wilhelm's world anymore, thus each character has to look for the *Zusammenhang* her- or himself—a process that is represented by the novel's

¹⁵⁷Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 312.

¹⁵⁸Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 312: „In einem Bildungsroman, so wie wir ihm in den *Lehrjahren* begegnen, wird die Geschichte des Helden nicht von einem überlegenen Standpunkt eines anderen Subjekts – des Erzählers – aus definiert. Statt die Geschichte von Wilhelms Bildung zu erzählen, vermittelt der Erzähler der *Lehrjahre* Wilhelms Erfahrungen, [sic] so wie dieser selbst sie erfährt und seine Versuche, sein Leben als ein Ganzes zu interpretieren. Der Held steht im Mittelpunkt des Ganzen, aber nicht als Objekt der Darstellung für den Erzähler, sondern als autonomes Subjekt, das sich selbst und die Ordnung in seinen Erfahrungen selbst bestimmt. Statt einer Geschichte mit einem übersichtlichen, vom Erzähler festgelegten inneren Zusammenhang werden nur die Ereignisse vermittelt, die der Held und parallel zu ihm der Leser bemüht sind, in einen Zusammenhang zu bringen.“

¹⁵⁹Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 13, 14.

change between perspectives (“das Perspektivische”).¹⁶⁰ Contrary to contemporary novels by, for instance, Christoph Martin Wieland in his *Agathon*, the narrator is not giving any one of these perspectives more credibility than the other. No interpretation of events is favored over another one, and multiple perspectives coexist.

The individualization of an active and constructive creation of meaning and coherence carries with it the fact that this process never ends. As Wilhelm’s experience changes, he must revise interpretations of his world and life, and since the novel does not end with Wilhelm’s death, its end must open, and the answer to the question as to what Wilhelm is going to do with his life must remain open. The same is, of course, true for all other characters (“das Dynamische”) and instances, including the reader.¹⁶¹ According to Saariluoma, the latter undergoes a development too inasmuch he is taught a new, active way of reading in which he has to do the work of building connections¹⁶² and, this way, is prevented from slipping into a

¹⁶⁰Cf. Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 312: Er ist das Subjekt der Welterfahrung und –deutung (auch wenn die anderen selbstverständlich ebensowohl die Stellung des Subjekts in ihren ‚Romanen‘ haben). Auf der ‚ontologischen‘ Ebene trifft so die Behauptung der ‚demokratischen Verfassung‘ zu: alle [sic] sind das Zentrum ihrer eigenen Welt, aber nicht auf der epistemologischen, auf der Wilhelm in diesem Roman perspektivisch bevorzugt ist. Statt aller dieser vorgeschlagenen Alternativen sind die *Lehrjahre* tatsächlich ein Bildungsroman in dem Sinne, den der Goethe’sche Begriff ‚Bildung‘ impliziert, der sich auf den natürlichen, ungezwungenen, individuellen Werdegang eines ‚Organismus‘ im tätigen Zusammenhang mit seiner Umgebung bezieht.“

¹⁶¹Cf. Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 315: „Ebensowenig wie Wilhelm wird der Leser mit seiner Interpretation von Wilhelms Erfahrungen fertig. Auch wenn er den Hinweisen des Autors im Aufbau der fiktiven Welt – der Erfindungsfunktion des Autors – folgend die Struktur des Romans und die Ereignisstruktur der fiktiven Welt eher als der Held selbst entdecken kann, sind ihm keineswegs alle Zusammenhänge der Ereignisse klar geworden. [...] Es gilt für die Interpretation des Lesers, die ebenso wie die Wilhelms perspektivisch bedingt ist, dass sie auch [sich] auch weiter verändern wird, je nachdem, wie seine eigenen Erfahrungen etwas Neues bringen. Denn wenn auch die meisten Stränge des Geschehens am Ende der *Lehrjahre* zu Ende gebracht werden, so dass der Roman sich vielfältig zu schließen scheint, ist der Sinn über dieses Ende hinaus offen: Ebenso wie dies auf Wilhelms weitere Erfahrungen und Interpretationen hinweist, überlässt es vieles den sich ändernden Interpretationen des Lesers.“

¹⁶²Cf. Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 315: „Es gilt für die Interpretation des Lesers, die ebenso wie die Wilhelms perspektivisch bedingt ist, dass sie [sich] auch weiter verändern wird, je nachdem, wie seine eigenen Erfahrungen etwas Neues bringen. Denn wenn auch die meisten Stränge des Geschehens am Ende der *Lehrjahre* zu Ende gebracht werden, so dass der Roman sich vielfältig zu schließen scheint, ist der Sinn über dieses Ende hinaus offen:

solely empathetic, identifying reading.¹⁶³ In the same way Wilhelm's work of drawing connections and creating meaning never ends as new information is incessantly provided, the reader has to readjust the opinions, evaluations, conclusions all over again until the end of the novel. Herder's notion of *Entwicklung*—which the introductory quote contains *in nuce*—also summarizes what Saariluoma concludes about the concept of development or *Bildung* in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. This is hardly surprising given Herder's influence on late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *Geistesgeschichte* in general and on the young Goethe whom he had met in Straßburg.¹⁶⁴

The narrator, however, remains in Saariluoma's otherwise seminal, thorough, and convincing analysis strangely passive and weak. The organizing force that shapes the narration into the form in which we read it is for her not the narrator. It is solely the principle of an individualized perception the narrator can only report, without any authority as to what the thread or meaning of the story might be:

Das merkwürdige Ganze der *Lehrjahre*, in dem der Erzähler lediglich eine
„Maschine“ zur Vermittlung von Wilhelms Erfahrungen ist, ist somit trotz des

Ebenso wie dies auf Wilhelms weitere Erfahrungen und Interpretationen hinweist, überlässt es vieles den sich ändernden Interpretationen des Lesers.“

¹⁶³Cf. Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 316 „Das Prosaische besteht darin, dass das Werk den Leser ‚aus dieser wirklichen Welt nicht ganz herauslässt‘, d.h. ihn nicht vollkommen, so wie die eigentliche Dichtung, in ‚eine göttliche Dichterwelt‘ hinüberführt. [...] Intuitiv hat Goethe sich aber gegen Schillers Wunsch verwahrt, die Idee des Ganzen deutlicher auszudrücken, und dabei mehr von der ‚Formlosigkeit‘ der Erfahrung der ‚realen Welt‘ bewahrt. Wie er aber verfahren ist, indem er eine neue künstlerische Form geschaffen hat, und zwar den Roman des autonomen Subjekts, der den Leser ‚aus der wirklichen Welt nicht ganz herauslässt‘, auch wenn er Hinweise gibt, wie man in der Formlosigkeit der erfahrenen Welt nach Zusammenhängen suchen soll, – [...].“

¹⁶⁴Cf. regarding the relationship between Herder and Goethe and the influence of the former on the latter Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 10-13, 20-24, and 311.

Anscheins keine lose oder fahrlässige Komposition. [...] Eigentlich folgt der Roman aber einer strengen Logik. Diese gründet auf der Logik der Welterfahrung eines modernen Individuums, das selber für die Interpretation seiner Erfahrungen und der Gestaltung seines Lebens als eines Ganzen sorgen muss. Ein wesentliches Ergebnis der vorliegenden Untersuchung ist, dass Goethes *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* ein Bildungsroman sind und dass dieser [sic] auf dem Dasein des individuellen, autonomen Menschen in der Welt beruht, wodurch der Bildungsroman eigentlich als eine unendliche Konstruktionsaufgabe der Bildungsgeschichte zu verstehen ist (my emphasis).¹⁶⁵

In other words, what Saariluoma identifies as the key characteristic of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* as a Bildungsroman is first and foremost its structure—shaped by the characters' perception of and being in the world—not so much its content. *Bildung* on the structural level is marked as an open, non-teleological, ongoing process.¹⁶⁶ For Saariluoma, the narrator is a mere mediator without any substantial influence on the story, colorless and without contours.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵Saariluoma, Erzählstruktur, 315.

¹⁶⁶Cf. Saariluoma, Erzählstruktur, 317: „Die vorliegende Untersuchung ergibt, dass die Lehrjahre, im Gegensatz zu dem, was in der heutigen Forschung häufig vermutet wird, zwar ein Bildungsroman sind, dieser aber nicht so verstanden werden soll, wie es die traditionelle, blanckenburgisch-diltheysche Auffassung voraussetzt. **Statt des Inhalts der Bildung ist das Entscheidende die Struktur, in der der Held als autonomes Subjekt der Welterfahrung im Mittelpunkt steht** (wobei ‚Autonomie‘ nicht im Sinne der Selbstgenügsamkeit, sondern im Sinne der Nicht-Unterwerfung einer äußeren Autorität zu verstehen ist); die Bildung erscheint als das Sinnmuster, das dem dynamischen Sein dieses Subjekts eine Gestalt gibt. [...] Es stellte sich heraus, dass **die entscheidenden Änderungen in der Wende zur Moderne sich am ehesten an der Erzählstruktur und – damit zusammenhängend – an der Gestaltung der fiktiven Welt und des Romanganzes zeigen**. Diese Änderungen sind ein Pendant der Änderungen in der Auffassung des Subjekts und der Erfahrung der Welt.“ [my emphasis]

¹⁶⁷Saariluoma, Erzählstruktur, 320: „Der Erzähler zieht sich als Deuter der Ereignisse zurück und vermittelt nur die Lebenswelt des Helden. Auch wo er gelegentlich die Ereignisse kommentiert, spricht er nicht-absolute Ansichten

The second more recent study analyzing the novel's structure arrives at a similar conclusion with regards to the narrator. Albrecht Koschorke examines this in his article from 2010 on the temporal organization of the *Lehrjahre*. Starting from general reflections on possible manifestations of the triad of narrator-protagonist/characters-reader in narrative texts, he outlines the two possible reader attitudes of identification with or distant observation ("Fremdbeobachtung")¹⁶⁸ of the protagonist and correlates both with a specific temporal organization of the relationship between narrator and protagonist. Temporal closeness of the narrator to the protagonist—for example by means of the direct report of Wilhelm's introspection—facilitates an identificatory reading. On the other hand, temporal distance, where a narrator reports about a protagonist in the past, looking back at a succession of events from a point with a surplus of knowledge, creates distance (or an "ironic perspective") between narrator and reader on the one hand and the protagonist on the other:

Dann ist es nicht nur eine Frage der externen oder internen Fokalisierung, in welchem Maß dem Leser Teilhabe am Innenleben des Helden gestattet ist. Mindestens ebenso wichtig scheint zu sein, wie sich der Erzähler *zeitlich* im Verhältnis zum Helden positioniert. Die Verwendung des epischen Präteritums macht der Erzähler (und mit ihm den impliziten Leser, dessen Sichtweise vom Erzähler (und mit ihm den impliziten Leser, dessen Sichtweise vom Erzähler

aus, und es reicht dazu nicht, aus seinem Bericht eine einheitliche Geschichte zu machen, in der die Funktion jeder Einzelheit klar ist, so wie in der *Sendung*."

¹⁶⁸Koschorke, „Identifikation und Ironie," 175. – Here, Koschorke refers to Martinez's and Scheffel's twofold epistemic structure in narrative texts—which, in Gerard Genette's terminology I use in my study, corresponds to the concepts of *discours* and *histoire*. – Cf. Martinez and Scheffel, *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*, 122.

gelenkt wird) ‚älter‘ als seinen Helden in der jeweiligen Situation. Ob und wie sich die Subjektivität des Helden im Erzählprozess aufschließt, hängt davon ab, wie dieser Altersabstand modelliert wird. [...] Es sind also der Verzug zwischen der erzählten Zeit und der Erzählzeit und die Art, wie der Erzähler davon Gebrauch macht, die über den Grad von Distanznahme bzw. Annäherung an den Helden entscheiden.¹⁶⁹

With regards to the narrator, Koschorke echoes the common view of him as a classic, omniscient force and sees the reader in alliance with him. Splendidly informed about the discrepancy between Wilhelm's reflections on himself and the people around him and the *real* state of affairs, the reader takes over a stance of superior knowledge. Wilhelm, one might paraphrase, is being shown up by the narrator before a smug audience which self-complacently enjoys its feeling of serene wisdom:

Goethes Erzähler weiß mehr als sein Held, er ist, entwicklungslogisch gedacht, ‚weiter‘ als jener, und er teilt dieses Besserwissen mit der Leserschaft. Zuweilen individualisiert er sich zu einem auktorialen Erzähler, der in der Ich-Form persönliche Einschätzungen abgibt, die allerdings meist den Charakter allgemeiner psychologischer Maximen tragen. Aber auch wenn er als personaler Erzähler agiert, der sich häufig (keineswegs durchgängig) der Perspektive und Erlebensweise Wilhelms anbequemt, verfügt er doch über das klassische Merkmal der Allwissenheit, und das setzt ihn zu dem beschränkten Wissen

¹⁶⁹Koschorke: „Identifikation und Ironie,“ 174-175.

seines Helden in ein *ironisches* Verhältnis. Die berühmte Ironie des Goethe'schen Erzählers hat den Effekt, dass sie auch uns zu *ironischen Lesern* macht. Wir sind durch die Erzählerkommentare erst über die Kindlichkeit, später die schwärmerische Blindheit des heranwachsenden Helden erhaben; wir kennen die Verhältnisse, in die er sich begibt, besser als er; wir begleiten ihn auf seinem Weg, der durch viele Fehler und Irrtümer hindurch endlich auf die vom Text selbst eingenommene Reflexionsstufe führt. *Für uns* ist dieser Roman also, wenn diese Beschreibung zutrifft, kein Entwicklungsroman, weil uns durch das Einverständnis mit dem Erzähler ein Beobachtungsstandort jenseits des Entwicklungsganges garantiert scheint.¹⁷⁰

As mentioned above, however, I want to argue that Koschorke puts too much trust in the narrator as the reader's guide. His analysis remains within the realm of the implicit reader. The critical reader must dismantle the implicit reader's gain of knowledge as an illusion. Since the implicit reader is not an identificatory, but already a distanced and seemingly critical one, we would more correctly have to talk about a second-degree critical reader. This, too, sets *Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* apart from other eighteenth-century novels like the ones by Christoph Martin Wieland which are directed against an identificatory reading and seek to promote a critical distance from the presented story. The possibility and superiority of this critical stance is free of doubt and irony, however. Only Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* subjects this enlightened position to further critical scrutiny. Goethe achieves this additional layer of critical

¹⁷⁰Koschorke: „Identifikation und Ironie,“ 179.

readership of his novel by adding an additional structural layer—a fictitious editor—to his novel and reappropriating this conventional trope.

III.2 Fictitious Editorship before *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*

The last two examples of the work by Saariluoma and Koschorke prove that innovative and illuminating research on the novel's structure has added new perspectives to Goethe scholarship. They also show that the conception of the narrator in the *Lehrjahre* runs the whole gamut from a weak, non-creative arranger to an authoritative, omniscient, transparent and almost fatherly tour guide through Wilhelm's inner and outer world. No critic, however, considers (or even mentions) the fact that the novel is introduced with the fiction of an editor as the four books' title pages of the first edition read: "Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre. Ein Roman. Herausgegeben von Goethe."¹⁷¹ The first thing we read on the title page is, hence, the novel's title, not Goethe's name, and, more importantly, Goethe relegates himself to the role of the editor by masquerading as the editor. While the first observation by itself should not be overemphasized and is not too unusual, the fact that Goethe makes himself the fictional editor is an important choice to consider when we analyze how narration in the novel works—something we do not see in the first edition of the first, incomplete version of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* from 1821 where Goethe is labeled as the author and no fictitious editor exists.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹See ann. 131.

¹⁷²Cf. Google Books, accessed June 15, 2015, <https://books.google.com/books?id=7tkFAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Wilhelm+Meisters+Lehrjahre:+Ein+Roman&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CEIQ6AEwBDgKahUKEwjgtbeGp5bJAhXC4iYKHQ9DCOI#v=onepage&q=Wilhelm%20Meisters%20Lehrjahre%3A%20Ein%20Roman&f=false>.

Again, the mere fact of a fictional editor is hardly new or rare. In his monograph from 2008, Uwe Wirth analyzes the history and changes of fictive editorship and authorship in eighteenth-century novels and differentiates types of fictive editorship and their respective narrative functions. According to Wirth, the basic topos of fictive editorship creates a distance between the editor and the narration itself, for it fictively marks the narration as consisting of or stemming from authentic documents the fictive editor did not create, but that had already *naturally* existed before the editor came upon them. As for the implicit reader, the fiction of an editor suggests the documents' authenticity and the narration's credibility, but the frame established by means of fictive editorship also compounds a simple identificatory reading.¹⁷³

Arata Takeda, who (also in 2008) published a study on the genesis of the fictitious editor specifically in the epistolary novel of the eighteenth century and who confirms and adds to Wirth's results, points out that the authors of novels of the Enlightenment and Baroque periods demote themselves "freiwillig vom Werk-Schöpfer zum bloßen Text-Vermittler

¹⁷³Cf. Uwe Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors aus dem Geiste der Herausgeberfiktion. Editoriale Rahmung im Roman um 1800: Wieland, Goethe, Brentano, Jean Paul und E. T. A. Hoffmann*. Trajekte. Eine Reihe des Zentrums für Literatur- und Kulturforschung (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2008), 151: „Aus der Perspektive der Erzähltheorie ist der fiktive Herausgeber eine Instanz, die den Akt der ‚Narration‘ als Akt der Edition vollzieht. Der fiktive Herausgeber, der ‚nicht aus vorgeblicher Allwissenheit, sondern aus (ebenso fiktiven) Dokumenten schöpft‘, tritt als ‚Kollege‘ des fiktiven Erzählers auf. Der Rahmen der Herausgeberfiktion verkörpert dabei einen Zitatrahmen, von dem her sich ‚aus den Dokumenten schöpfen läßt‘. Das heißt, der Herausgeberrahmen hat die Funktion eines Anführungszeichens. Dadurch wird eine ‚minimaler Erzählrahmen‘ etabliert, von dem her ‚wichtige Fingerzeige für Rezeption und Deutung des Textes‘ gegeben werden können. Die Nähe zwischen fiktivem Erzähler und fiktivem Herausgeber wird bereits von Voßkamp betont: ‚Je mehr ein ‚Herausgeber‘ die Möglichkeit des Eingreifens und Kommentierens nutzt, desto eher gerät er in die Nähe eines Erzählers, dessen Mitteilungsfunktion zur ‚auktorialen‘ Vermittlerrolle sich wandelt, bei der dann Fiktionsprobleme des epischen Erzählens wieder zum Vorschein kommen‘.“

bzw. -Bearbeiter”¹⁷⁴ and that one should speak of “Autorfiktion” rather than “Herausgeberfiktion.”¹⁷⁵

But the fiction of editorship does not only limit the author’s agency and ascribed creative responsibility. It also opens up the possibility for the editor to comment on the material. These comments can support the fiction of authenticity. They can also question it and create a counterpart to the suggestion of authenticity of the frame if the editor’s comments give rise to doubts about the narration’s credibility.¹⁷⁶ The more the fictive editor makes use of the possibilities to come into the picture within the narration proper by, for instance, commenting on the presented material, the more he actually gains “epische Überlegenheit” and steps out of the passive role of a fictitious editor. Or as Takeda puts it, the “Instanz” of the fictive editor becomes a “Figur.”¹⁷⁷ Both Wirth and Takeda (using different terminology) see the first representative of such an emancipation of the fictitious editor to an editor-narrator (“Herausgeber-Erzähler”) in Goethe’s *Leiden des jungen Werthers* in which the narrator of the reporting part of the (epistolary) novel takes over “narrative Funktion”¹⁷⁸—a narratological

¹⁷⁴Arata Takeda, *Die Erfindung des Anderen. Zur Genese des fiktionalen Herausgebers im Briefroman des 18. Jahrhunderts*“ *Epistemata. Würzburger wissenschaftliche Schriften. Reihe Literaturwissenschaft 656* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008), 32.

¹⁷⁵Takeda, *Die Erfindung des Anderen*, 32.

¹⁷⁶Cf. Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 145: „Der Herausgeberfiktion kommt gerade auch aufgrund der Möglichkeit textinterner Kommentierung eine doppelte Aufgabe zu: Zum einen schafft sie Distanz zu der vermeintlichen Quelle, um ‚die Absichten und Schwierigkeiten‘ des Projekts zu thematisieren, zum anderen dient der Kommentar des fiktiven Herausgebers dazu, die Authentizitätssuggestion der Quellenfiktion ironisch in Frage zu stellen und so eine ‚Parallelfiktion‘ ins Werk zu setzen.“

¹⁷⁷Takeda, *Die Erfindung des Anderen*, 38.

¹⁷⁸Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, p. 235.

event Wirth coins “die Geburt des fiktiven, auktorialen Erzählers aus dem Geist der fingierten Herausgeberschaft.”¹⁷⁹ Wirth sees the editor-narrator’s function in *Werther* as a synthesizing and comparing one. He serves as the organizing hub (“die auktoriale Zentralperspektive”)¹⁸⁰ around which the material is arranged in a coherent way. He achieves „eine perspektivenvergleichende und kohärenzsitftende Funktion [...]. Die Kohärenz zwischen den verschiedenen Erzählungen wird dadurch hergestellt, daß der Herausgeber für sich die auktoriale Zentralperspektive reklamiert. Nur dadurch kann der Herausgeber zu einem auktorialen Erzähler der inneren Geschichte Werthers werden.”¹⁸¹ As Takeda points out, the separation between fictitious editor and narrator is made possible only because the skepticism the fictitious editor of the Baroque and the Enlightenment periods kindled towards the story disappears and makes way for the “Fiktionalisierungsprozess der Herausgeberinstanz,”¹⁸² i.e., the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic editor becomes an extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator¹⁸³ or, in simpler terms, what takes place is the „Integration [des fiktiven Herausgebers] in die Figurenkonstellation des Romans.”¹⁸⁴ The editor does not remain limited to a preface or a line

¹⁷⁹Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 270. The respective paragraph reads: „Der Herausgeber bewegt sich aus dem *editorialem Raum* des Fußnotenkomentars heraus und tritt nun im Rahmen des Haupttextes als maßgebliches Subjekt der Aussage auf: Er wird zu einem ‚Herausgeber-Erzähler‘, der sich ‚die Möglichkeiten eines vermittelnden, überlegenen Erzählers zunutze [macht]‘. Anders als im *Agathon* ist der Herausgeber am Ende des *Werther* nicht nur eine quasi-auktoriale, sondern eine narrative Aussageinstanz: Im letzten Viertel des *Werther* läßt sich die Geburt des fiktiven, auktorialen Erzählers aus dem Geist der fingierten Herausgeberschaft beobachten.“ – Cf. also Takeda, *Die Erfindung des Anderen*, 80-99.

¹⁸⁰Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 273.

¹⁸¹Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 273.

¹⁸²Takeda, *Die Erfindung des Anderen*, 38.

¹⁸³Cf. Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 276.

¹⁸⁴Takeda, *Die Erfindung des Anderen*, 41-42. – Another crucial development happening alongside with the transformation and differentiation of the editor/narrator is the split of the body of readers or the

on the title page, but takes over more and more narrative functions in the narrative proper and is no longer the cautioning entity of novels of the Enlightenment (alerting readers' skepticism and their critical capacities toward what is presented), but rather he as an authority vouching for the novel's credibility. For Wirth, the year of the publication of Goethe's *Werther* (1774) marks an important narratological caesura for it is the first novel that completes the transformation of a fictitious editor into an authorial narrator so that it finds itself between the genres of the epistolary novel and the novel proper.¹⁸⁵

However, this new authority takes its toll on the autonomy of the reader who is no longer requested to do the critical work of evaluating the narration's plausibility and credibility as he was expected to by Enlightenment authors who frequently made use of fictive editorship. The narrator's increased competence at the end of the eighteenth century has to be seen in conjunction with an extension of the content and expressive modes that were acceptable for literature to include. As Wirth notes with regard to *Werther*, the narrator's increased leeway allows him to include different modes of literary knowledge production instead of "just" referring to written documents. Where those are no longer available—as for the end of *Werther*—he turns to testimonials of eye witnesses or employs empathy to comprehend and

"Leserbestimmung," cf. Takeda, *Die Erfindung des Anderen*, 38-39, particularly the following passage on p. 38: „Der eigentliche Fiktionalisierungsprozess der Herausgeberinstanz setzt mit dem Verschwinden der bei Rousseau und Laclos eingetretenen Skepsis ein, welches dadurch zustande kommt, dass Autor und Herausgeber langsam sich voneinander zu trennen beginnen. Die Trennung wird möglich, da hier gleichzeitig die explizite Leserbestimmung und somit die bewusste Leserspaltung [into the imagined or ideal and the anti-reader] beginnt.“

¹⁸⁵Cf. Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 233: „Die Feststellung, daß es sich bei den *Leiden des jungen Werthers* nicht mehr im einen Briefroman im eigentlichen Sinne handele, gehört zu den Gemeinplätzen der Forschungsliteratur.“

convey Werther's inner feelings and thoughts. He becomes an "auktoriale[r] Psychologe[]"¹⁸⁶ and empathy becomes an acceptable "Authentizitätsstrategie."¹⁸⁷ These developments imply a valorization not only of the imagination, but of literature in general—with the result that, over the course of the remainder of the eighteenth century and even more so the nineteenth century, strategies for authentication like fictitious editorship become more and more obsolete.¹⁸⁸ This process begins for Wirth with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in which he sees the „erste[] Beispiel für durchgängiges, auktoriales Erzählen.“¹⁸⁹ At the same time, Wirth finds in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* "die Instanz des fiktiven Herausgebers in Auflösung" who does not have a real function anymore, but rather is an artifact reminiscent of the times when readers had to be reminded of the fictive character of literature.¹⁹⁰ Like Wirth, Takeda conceives of *Werther* as the first example of a fictional editor ("fiktionale[r] Herausgeber").¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 274.

¹⁸⁷Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 276.

¹⁸⁸Cf. Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 423-424: „Folgt man der These, der Roman des 18. Jahrhunderts forcire eine Form der Selbstbeobachtung, deren Effekt einer Präzisierung des ‚Fiktivitätsbewußtseins‘ ist, so läßt sich die erste Frage dahingehend beantworten, daß diese Entwicklung offensichtlich ‚um 1800‘ ihren Abschluß findet. Der Roman muß sich nicht mehr mit Hilfe einer Authentizitätsfiktion als ‚wahre Geschichte‘ tarnen, sondern findet als poetisch wahre Fiktion und als Spiel mit der Form Anerkennung. [...] Im Verlauf des 19. Jahrhunderts weichen die expliziten Formen paratextueller Markierung zunehmend impliziten Rahmungsverfahren ‚sans guillemets‘, ja der nach-romantische Romanautor kann es sich erlauben, auf die paratextuelle Rahmung des fiktionalen Diskurses ganz zu verzichten, ‚weil er weiß, daß der Leser das Ganze des Systems aus der literarischen Tradition kennt‘.“

¹⁸⁹Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 283.

¹⁹⁰Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 424. – His paragraph of an outlook on the development of editorship and narrator figure reads as a whole: „Noch bevor sich der moderne Roman des 20. Jahrhunderts daran macht, ‚die letzten Spuren der narrativen Instanz zu tilgen‘, gerät im 19. Jahrhundert die Instanz des fiktiven Herausgebers in Auflösung. Dieser Prozeß setzt mit *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* ein, wird begleitet von Briefromanen ohne Herausgeberfiktion wie Tiecks *William Lovell*, Manuskriptfiktionen ohne Herausgeber wie Hölderlins *Hyperion-Fragmenten* und gipfelt in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften* – einem auktorialem Roman, der, anders als die *Lehrjahre*, ohne den Untertitel: ‚Herausgegeben von Goethe‘ erscheint.“

¹⁹¹Cf. Takeda, *Die Erfindung des Anderen*, 80-99 as well as 38: „Man bewohnt [sic] hier einem romanpoetologisch umwälzenden Prozess bei: In dessen Mittelpunkt steht der fiktionale Herausgeber *in stau nascendi*.“ – Takeda

She conceptualizes this shift as „Die Erfindung des Anderen,“ i.e., the split between an author and an editor who face one another as the other and as two separate entities.¹⁹²

III.3 Fictitious Editorship in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre

Wirth's and Takeda's classifications and considerations on fictitious editorship refer to novels with prefaces that function as paratexts, to use Genette's term, framing the main texts, determining their boundaries and marking them as "Werk[e]," i.e., as fabricated entities calling for reception.¹⁹³ Goethe's *Lehrjahre*, however, have no preface. The fictitious editorship becomes evident only through the words "herausgegeben von" preceding Goethe's name on the title pages of the eight single books of the novel. While Wirth, likely for these reasons, sees fictitious editorship in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* as already "in Auflösung," I argue that it takes over a very important structural function being congruent with the narrator's function, but working on a different narratological level. As the history of scholarship on the novel shows, Wirth is one of the few scholars who at least acknowledges its existence. Beyond that, the fiction of an editor has not been taken seriously. Although I think that this history has been obfuscating a more in-depth appreciation of the structural complexities and dynamics of the

differentiates between „angeblich/fiktiv“ and „fiktional,“ a distinction, however, that is not crucial for the current considerations, cf. 15-16. – Wirth, however, uses the terms "fingiert" and "fiktiv," cf. Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 146-148.

¹⁹²Cf. Takeda, *Die Erfindung des Anderen*, 100: „Die Entstehung des fiktionalen Herausgebers implizierte eine narratologische Kompetenzverlagerung von einer pseudoauktorialen Herausgeber-Instanz auf eine fiktionale Herausgeber-Figur – d.h. von dem Anderen des Autors auf den Anderen des Erzählers.“

¹⁹³ Cf. for much more detailed and in-depth reflections on this Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 81-85.

novel, it should be likewise acknowledged that the fictitious editorship appears in Goethe's novel in its most minimalized form. And, in accordance with its appearance, it is fair to say that this fiction is a much subtler, hidden one than more traditional fictive (and fictitious) editors appearing as authors of prefaces, introductory frames, etc., in works on which Wirth and Takeda base their studies. As I hope to show in a later section on the narrator in the novel, however, this subtlety is by itself a structuring principle in the novel and, I argue, part of a larger narrative agenda. The fact that the relationship between the narrator and the fictitious editor is one that can also be found on several other levels within the novel suggests that the *Herausgeberfiktion* in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is more than just the narrative appendix of a past literary convention or nostalgia.

With this historical and theoretical overview on *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* scholarship and the concept of fictitious editorship in mind, I would like to turn to the novel proper and structurally descend to the levels of *histoire* and *discours* before returning to the function of the fictitious editor and the structure of the novel as a whole. My thesis is that the narrator is, indeed, an authoritative and omniscient one for most parts of novel. Particularly with regard to its protagonist it is certainly fair to say that the narrator does have a much more accurate judgment of Wilhelm than the young man has about himself. A very close look, however, reveals that he does not provide the implicit reader with all the necessary information needed to make all the right connections and fully understand the story (contrary to how Koschorke conceives of the same narrator). In other words, he misjudges the relevance of information for the story as a whole when he explicitly claims to make connections clear, but withholds information that later turns out to be important. This information is provided much later

without the narrator commenting on his earlier explicit omission in any way. Rather than a narrator who is overly confident in his abilities, like in *Anton Reiser*, or one who maliciously misleads or betrays his readers completely, the narrator in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* creates only mildly irritating gaps of knowledge that do not alienate the readers when they become aware of them, but nevertheless educate them to stay alert and not to buy into an identificatory reading even if the story seems to be authentic and is mediated by a benevolent, competent, and omniscient narrator. With regard to the information's provenance, it is actually the same authority that earlier claims to omit superfluous information and then, later, provides the very same information in a different context. The readers, however, can become aware of the inconsistencies in the narrator's report only when they move up structurally to the level of the fictitious editor. As long as they read along and do not step back and critically evaluate what they are reading, the illusion of "being in the know" persists—and very easily so due to the impression of being guided by the narrator so well. The readers must evaluate the text as a whole in order to spot limits of the narrator's competence. Recognizing the text as a seemingly edited one then works opposite to traditional *Herausgeberfiktionen*. It does not increase trust in the text and its veracity as an original document. It rather raises suspicion in the texts' reliability. The fact that the *Herausgeberfiktion* is not obvious at first glance instead increases the suspicion.

III.3.a Fissures in The Narrator's Power of Judgment and Omniscience in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*

As we have seen in the quotes from Wirth and Saariluoma, the narrator in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* has traditionally been seen as the poster child for an omniscient, sincere narrator who informs his readers to the best of his ability and keeps them on a par with him hierarchically and up to speed informationally. Divergent assessments like those of Saariluoma tend to be at the opposite end of the spectrum and do not grant the narrator any authority. In this section, I argue for a view that is somewhat in the middle. While the narrator leads his readers to believe that he is indeed omniscient and confidently makes editorial decisions to move away from characters at certain points in time or leave out information that is supposedly irrelevant for the story, it turns out—upon closer examination and only retroactively—that his confident and allegedly competent affirmations about the justification of editorial decisions are not entirely warranted after all. While he shows himself as a benevolent and somewhat fatherly figure throughout the novel and does indeed provide much background information, he repeatedly and tacitly withholds important information. He leads his implicit readers to believe that they are “in the know,” but as the story progresses it becomes evident that this is untrue. When moving up hierarchically from the implicit reader (letting oneself confidently be guided by the narrator) to a reflective reader or *Anti-Leser* (overlooking the whole of the novel and the narrator's guidance critically), it becomes apparent that the implicit reader's belief in knowing the *Zusammenhänge* does not bear examination. The narrator's omissions that undermine his self-presentation as an omniscient narrator who shares all his knowledge with his readers, pretending to unfold the story on a level playing field, are revealed by the text itself—a story

the fictitious editor Goethe provided, the next higher authority. In what follows I want to give examples for what I call the narrator's omissions.

Although Wilhelm Meister is clearly marked as the protagonist in the novel's title, he is not the character through whom Goethe introduces his readers to the story. Rather, the first character we meet is "[d]ie alte Barbara" (9), the female servant of Mariane, Wilhelm's love interest who is awaiting Mariane to return from the theater. The third-person narrator starts out the novel with a short descriptive sentence and locates the following scene in Mariane's home: "Das Schauspiel dauerte sehr lange. Die alte Barbara trat einigemal ans Fenster und horchte, ob die Kutschen nicht rasseln wollten" (9). But immediately after these two sentences the narrator retreats from describing what is empirically observable. Rather, he immediately establishes himself as an omniscient narrator, alleging to know everything about the characters. Already before the end of the first paragraph, he broadens the perspective, introducing Mariane and Norberg, informing us about their relationship ("seine Geliebte," 9) and Mariane's current whereabouts as well as her profession ("die heute im Nachspiele als junger Offizier gekleidet das Publikum entzückte" (9). And he is in the know about the household's routine when he states that this is not an evening like any other; it is not "als sonst" (9) with Barbara waiting to show Mariane Norberg's present that just arrived. Thus, the narrator begins the story in *medias res* and has already established one of the character figurations when he concludes the first paragraph.

The second paragraph continues his *in medias res* approach. It informs us about the variety of Barbara's roles in her relationship with Mariane ("alte Dienerin, Vertraute, Ratgeberin, Unterhändlerin und Haushälterin")—each of which will be proven accurate over the

course of the story. And the subsequent narrator comment that “ihr [Barbara, S. N.] die Gunst des freigebigen Liebhabers [Norberg, S. N.] mehr als selbst Mariane am Herzen lag” (9) alludes to the influence she possesses. A little later, in the middle of this about three-page long chapter and after Mariane has returned from the theater, the narrator reports a dialog between Barbara and Mariane objectively, presenting it in the form of direct speech although he dispenses with the punctuation marking it as such. We now hear out of Mariane’s mouth what the narrator already alluded to. Mariane refuses to look at Norberg’s present and calls on Barbara to spare her any reminders of the lover she does not love and succumbed to only to satisfy Barbara’s wishes: “Fort! Fort! heute will ich nichts von allem diesen [all of Norberg’s presents to her, S. N.] hören; ich habe dir gehorcht, du hast es so gewollt, es sei so! Wenn Norberg zurückkehrt, bin ich wieder sein, bin ich dein, mache mit mir, was du willst, aber bis dahin will ich mein sein, [...]” (10). In retrospect, the narrator’s previous remarks on Barbara’s influence appear almost as prophecy immediately proven right by the first interaction between Mariane and Barbara that is represented in the story. Wilhelm Meister, the protagonist proper is indirectly introduced by the narrator who goes on to present Barbara’s and Mariane’s conversation. Having expressed her disdain for Norberg, Mariane counters these negative feelings with the love she feels for Wilhelm whose visit she expects at any moment. The reader gains his first impression of Wilhelm through the eyes of Barbara who describes him with hardly flattering words, calling him “den jungen, zärtlichen unbefiederten Kaufmannssohn” (10-11) and reproaching Mariane for her poor choice of acquaintances. Neither Barbara nor Mariane, however, mention Wilhelm’s name. It is the narrator who concludes his presentation of the two women’s dialog with the prosaic statement: “Wilhelm trat herein” (11). The following

sentences of the last short paragraph concluding the first chapter return to the descriptive mode of narration from the beginning when the narrator describes how Wilhelm and Mariane greet each other effusively: “Mit welcher Lebhaftigkeit flog sie [Mariane, S. N.] ihm [Wilhelm, S. N.] entgegen! mit welchem Entzücken umschlang er die rote Uniform! drückte er das weiße Atlaswestchen an seine Brust!” (11)

What becomes evident already at the very beginning of the novel is that the narrator oscillates between two perspectives. On the one hand, he is the authorial narrator who knows the characters, their scenery, and the unfolding of the story and regards all of this from a removed stance. This perspective is brought to bear at the beginning of the chapter and the narrator’s descriptions of Barbara’s visible behavior, her position in the household, and Norberg’s present to Mariane which Barbara opens. On the other hand, he presents his material from a more removed point of view when he recites his characters’ dialogs verbatim and in the form of direct speech without, however, setting it clearly apart from his own narration by means of punctuation. Although the novel’s narrative tense is the simple past, the incorporated direct speech in the present tense renders the story present. In these passages it is the material itself that temporarily takes over some authority from the narrator, despite the latter still presenting it to us. The narrator remains by no means distanced from his characters but moves closer to them while narrating. This second perspective in the text becomes tangible in the otherwise so prosaic statement about Wilhelm’s appearance. He “trat herein,” the narrator states, describing Wilhelm’s arrival from the perspective of Mariane and Barbara as if standing next to them. He doesn’t say that Wilhelm “trat hinein”—entering the space of the two women in front of our and the narrator’s eyes. The readers seem to look not only upon the

three characters, but also the narrator next to them. They do not look at the scene through the narrator's eyes. The repeated use of exclamation marks in otherwise descriptive sentences spoken from an outward perspective supports this impression as it adopts some of Mariane's and Wilhelm's excitement to see each other. At the end of the chapter, the narrator seems to deliberately look away when he concludes: "Wer wagte es hier zu beschreiben, wem ziemt es, die Seligkeit zweier Liebenden auszusprechen! Die Alte ging murrend beiseite, wir entfernen uns mit ihr und lassen die Glücklichen allein" (11). His reference to the *Unsaybarkeitstopos* in these last sentences employs a strategy we will find again: the explicit and deliberate editorial decision not to include something into his narration for good reasons. The readers are forced to leave the scene just after Wilhelm's arrival and their first encounter with the protagonist. But they do not gain the impression that it is due to lack of the narrator's knowledge of what will happen next. Rather, it seems to be the decision of a tactful and caring narrator who takes care of his characters and makes decisions for their benefit. Rather than passively being drawn into and pushed away from the plot he seems to change his perspectives very deliberately and playfully.

The first chapter already encapsulates the dynamic and protean personality of the narrator in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*—something the rest of the chapter of the dissertation will elaborate on. On the one hand, the narrator evokes the impression of an omniscient narrator who lets the reader in on Wilhelm's story and gives additional information to fill gaps and brings separate parts of the story together. On the other hand, he deliberately withholds information in order not to transgress the laws of discretion and good manners or lose the main threads of the story in unnecessary digressions. These seemingly two contradicting narrative

strategies fulfill one and the same purpose for the narrator: to build a whole out of a widespread narration with several storylines, spanning over a period of roughly four years, three of which are skipped between the first and second books and caught up with in a fast-track race at the beginning of the latter. What I intend to show is, however, that the narrator does not entirely live up to the impression of a not only omniscient, but also competent, wise, and fatherly tour guide he establishes so well within the first three pages of the roughly 650-page long novel. Although he seems to bring the readers into the loop with a lot of background information, as informing his readers about skipping parts of the story for good reasons, he actually only creates the illusion for the reader of sharing the narrator's knowledge and following Wilhelm's story from an elevated point of view. For as we will see, the parts of the story deliberately and explicitly left out are rather benign, whereas crucial information to make sense of the story is tacitly being held back although known—only to be subsequently delivered in the eighth book. The narrator's stance in *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre*, I argue, is one that deliberately evokes the illusion of authority and omniscience. Wilhelm's ignorance that is often thematized in the plot is mirrored back to the readers, who—like Wilhelm at the beginning of the story—think “they know it all,” only to discover that, the further they get along, the less they really understand and that misapprehension and delusion have been their loyal companions all along.¹⁹⁴ And this is true, I would argue, even at the end of the eighth book since all the minutiae about the previous five books hide the fact that the narrator indeed failed to answer the really crucial questions that make sense of the story as a whole, for example, why

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 234. – Mathias Mayer. *Selbstbewußte Illusion. Selbstreflexion und Legitimation der Dichtung im „Wilhelm Meister“* (Heidelberg: C. Winter 1989), 53. – Liselotte Dieckmann, „Repeated Mirror Reflections. The Technique of Goethe's Novels,” in *Studies in Romanticism* 1, (1962): 154-174, here 173.

it was the bourgeois merchant's son Wilhelm whom the aristocratic *Turmgesellschaft* chose to follow and educate—that is the very origin of this eight-book long fiction. It should be discussed if the narrator falls prey to the very same illusion, being unaware of himself misleading his readers to some degree and deceiving himself with his confident statements or if he consciously follows a narrative strategy. Ultimately, I think, the question is unanswerable. As we have seen, however, it is a characteristic of the novel that events that are described by one narrative authority are later retold by another—are mirrored somewhere else in the story. It is for this reason that I lean toward the former view, i.e., that the narrator does not consciously mislead his readers, but that he does not see the full picture—despite his belief that he does.

One of the categories that comes up repeatedly on both *histoire* and *discours* is *Zusammenhang* and the illusion thereof. Right at the beginning of the novel, Wilhelm tells Mariane about his passion for the puppet theater as a child. Wilhelm describes the fascination that overtook him after the first puppet show he saw on Christmas Eve. Not understanding how the inanimate puppets move and speak, Wilhelm conceived of the theater as “das magische Gerüste” (18) and of its curtain as “der mystische Schleier” (18) that transformed with “viel Zauberei” (18) what had previously been a mundane passage door in old Meister's house. It is this lack of knowledge that entices Wilhelm and kindles a “Wollust des Aufmerkens and Forschens” (19), or more accurately: his consciousness of his lack of knowledge. For, although Wilhelm is enchanted by the puppet show and “eilte wie betrunken and taumelnd zu Bette” (19) afterwards, he is not entirely absorbed in the illusion of the puppet show. And even after having seen the same play twice, he still wonders about its inner constitution:

Daß die Puppen nicht selbst redeten, hatte ich mir schon das erstemal gesagt; daß sie sich nicht von selbst bewegten, vermutete ich auch; aber warum das alles doch so hübsch war, und es doch so aussah, als wenn sie selbst redeten und sich bewegten, und wo die Leute und die Lichter sein möchten, **diese Rätsel beunruhigten mich um desto mehr, je mehr ich wünschte, zugleich unter den Bezauberten und Zauberern zu sein, zugleich meine Hände verdeckt im Spiel zu haben und als Zuschauer die Freude der Illusion zu genießen** [my emphasis]. (19)

It is exactly Wilhelm's ignorance of the inner working of the puppet theater that makes him want to be part of both worlds and take over two contradictory perspectives at the same time: knowing how to enchant others and, nevertheless, still being able to be enchanted himself by something that has lost its mysteriousness for him. And it is the same state of not knowing that positions him between both worlds: neither being fully inside nor outside of any of the two worlds, but right on the brink between them. His consciousness there must be something that he does know yet then serves as a driving force for further investigations:

Das Stück war zu Ende, man machte Vorbereitungen zum Nachspiel, die Zuschauer waren aufgestanden und schwatzten durcheinander. Ich drängte mich näher an die Türe und hörte inwendig am Klappern, daß man mit Aufräumen beschäftigt sei. Ich hub den untern Teppich auf und guckte zwischen dem Gestelle durch. Meine Mutter bemerkte es und zog mich zurück; allein ich hatte doch so viel gesehen, daß man Freunde und Feinde, Saul und Goliath und wie sie

alle heißen mochten, in einen Schiebkasten packte, und **so erhielt meine halbbefriedigte Neugierde frische Nahrung**. Dabei hatte ich zum meinem größten Erstaunen den Lieutenant im Heiligtume sehr geschäftig erblickt. Nunmehr konnte mich der Hanswurst, so sehr er mit seinen Absätzen klapperte, nicht unterhalten. **Ich verlor mich in tiefes Nachdenken und war nach dieser Entdeckung ruhiger und unruhiger als vorher. Nachdem ich etwas erfahren hatte, kam er mir erst vor, als ob ich gar nichts wisse, und ich hatte recht; denn es fehlte mir der Zusammenhang, und darauf kommt doch eigentlich alles an** [my emphasis]. (19-20)

Although Wilhelm catches a glimpse of the inner mechanics of his “Heiligtum,” he is far from understanding the “big picture” or *Zusammenhang*. His main discovery instead is the insight that he lacks a thorough understanding of how the puppet theater works. Having seen the lieutenant being busy in the puppet theater and his knowledge that the puppets cannot move by themselves do not lead Wilhelm to the conclusion that the lieutenant is the one *making* the puppets move. The two discrete parts of information remain separate; they do not come together in Wilhelm’s mind.

It is important to remember at this point that the episode with the puppet theater from Wilhelm’s childhood is remembered by Wilhelm and presented in free direct speech. When Wilhelm tells this story to Mariane and Barbara, he narrates with a certain kind of self-irony, describing childish beliefs and interests:

Es ist eine schöne Empfindung, liebe Mariane, versetzte Wilhelm, wenn wir uns alter Zeiten und alter unschädlicher Irrtümer erinnern, besonders wenn es in einem Augenblick geschieht, da wir eine Höhe glücklich erreicht haben, von welcher wir uns umsehen und den zurückgelegten Weg überschauen können. Es ist so angenehm, selbstzufrieden sich mancher Hindernisse zu erinnern, die wir oft mit einem peinlichen Gefühl für unüberwindlich hielten, und dasjenige, was wir jetzt entwickelt sind, mit dem zu vergleichen, was wir damals unentwickelt waren. (17)

With this statement Wilhelm is involuntarily mocking himself not only because we read this statement at the very beginning of a novel about a very young man. The readers also already know more than the Wilhelm: in contrast to the novel's protagonist, the readers know about Norberg, Wilhelm's rival in love. It is also proven to be wrong by the fact that Wilhelm loses himself so much in his childhood memories that he does not even notice when Mariane falls asleep (31) and that she did not hear most of what he said (35)—a fact ironically highlighted by the narrator's comment: "[E]s ist zu wünschen, daß unser Held für seine Lieblingsgeschichten aufmerksamere Zuhörer künftig finden möge" (35).

The implicit reader is shown the discrepancy between what Wilhelm thinks he understands and what he is actually aware of. He seems to position himself complacently next to the narrator, looking at Wilhelm with some condescending, though benevolent mockery. However, there is more to this episode than revealing Wilhelm's shortcomings. For the short episode from Wilhelm's childhood can serve, I argue, as an allegory of what the narrator does

with the reader: the reader, like the young Wilhelm, get glimpses of linkages between characters and episodes, but he remains unable to put them together into a coherent whole by himself until the narrator clears up identities, relationships, and the connection of episodes at the end of the novel—much like the *Turmgesellschaft* reveals how Wilhelm has been observed and accompanied by its members all along. The narrator, like Wilhelm's mother, pulls the reader away again before he understands too much. More importantly, he even makes the readers think—mistakenly—that they are in the know and know the *connections*. For, at the beginning of the second book, the narrator informs us that it is not worth presenting Wilhelm's sorrows after he has discovered Norberg's letter in Mariane's scarf at the very end of book 1 (79). Therefore, he skips a couple of years in Wilhelm's life:

Deswegen sollen unsre Leser nicht umständlich mit dem Jammer und der Not unsers verunglückten Freundes, in die er geriet, als er seine Hoffnungen und Wünsche auf eine so unerwartete Weise zerstört sah, **unterhalten werden. Wir überspringen vielmehr einige Jahre**, und suchen ihn erst da wieder auf, wo wir ihn in einer Art von Tätigkeit und Genuß zu finden hoffen, wenn wir vorher nur kürzlich so viel, als zum Zusammenhang der Geschichte nötig ist, vorgetragen haben [my emphasis]. (81)

Although admitting leaving out approximately three years of Wilhelm's life, the narrator does, on the side of the implicit reader, evoke the illusion of giving enough information to build a coherent plot line. He does tell us about Wilhelm getting sick after Mariane has left, working in his father's business, and writing poetry. He does not, however, fill in the reader with all the

crucial information about what happened between the end of Book 1 and the beginning of Book 2. At the end of the first book, Wilhelm hires a few musicians to serenade Mariane in front of her house. As Mariane does not respond, Wilhelm leaves the scene and, looking back, sees someone leaving her house without recognizing the person. Back home, he finds Norberg's letter in one of Mariane's scarfs that he took with him earlier that day. In this letter, Norberg notifies Mariane about their plan to leave town. The quotation from Norberg's letter concludes the first book.

By proceeding with the lovesick Wilhelm, the narrator leads the reader to believe that Mariane chose Norberg over Wilhelm and that Norberg left Mariane's house after a romantic tryst. While the narrator creates the illusion of telling everything that is notable in the three-year gap, the most crucial parts of information are left out: that Mariane sent Norberg away, conceived Wilhelm's child, and planned to be with Wilhelm. Only at the end of Book 7—at the same time when Barbara tells Wilhelm about his paternity—does the reader hear what really happened that night (512ff.)—by no means a piece of information that would have been redundant to connect the first and second book. So instead of providing the reader with trustworthy information, the narrator obscures some important connections rather than shedding light on them.¹⁹⁵ The narrator, hence, leaves out an important piece of information, the omission of which does not prevent the reader from following along. The readers have no reason to become suspicious. Only in retrospect, much later, does it become clear that this

¹⁹⁵Cf. similar omissions on pp. 328, 360.

omission hampered a full understanding of what transpired between Wilhelm and Mariane and how the omitted time period is connected to what is narrated in the remainder of the novel.

Another example of the narrator's strategy to omit pieces of information without precipitating the readers' complete confusion is the introduction of characters like the Abbé, the central and leading figure behind the *Turmgesellschaft*. When the Abbé joins Wilhelm, Philine, and the others at the boat trip as a "blinder Passagier" (126), the narrator informs us that "Wilhelm geriet mit dem Geistlichen, wie wir ihn, seinem Aussehn und seiner Rolle nach, nennen wollen, auf dem Spaziergange bald in ein interessantes Gespräch" (127). The narrator does not reveal who the clergyman really is. But in his formulation, he lets shine through the fact that 'clergyman' is not the most precise name, but that he deliberately chooses to call him that way. Along with Wilhelm, the reader later gets to know who the stowaway really was—again by means of a conversation between the Abbé and Wilhelm that is presented in free direct speech: "Ich erinnere mich Ihrer auch, versetzte Wilhelm; haben wir nicht zusammen eine lustige Wasserfahrt gemacht? – Ganz recht! Erwiderte der andere" (453).

So, it is only at the very end of the novel, in the last and eighth book, that things seem to clear up and connections and identities are revealed. It is mainly in free direct speech, not narration or indirect speech that we hear—along both with Wilhelm and the narrator—how key elements of the previous seven books fit together. While both explicit explanations and remarks about what is important to know, as well as free direct speech, have technically the same origin, i.e., the narrator, they assume a different relationship vis-à-vis the implicit readers. The narrator's comments are directly and *expressis verbis* directed at them and have the purpose of instructing the readers of something within the story. They are not part of the

histoire, but originate from a meta-perspective—the *discours*, as a matter of course. Their mediation by means of the authority of the narrator is not explicit as it is in the narrator's comments or direct addresses to the readers. So, ultimately, it is not the narrator's direct guidance which enables the readers to figure out all the connections between the characters and events. Just relying on the narrator's sign-posting will not make the readers understand the novel fully. They have to do some work on their own and, first and foremost, figure out the fact that this task is required of them; indeed, the narrator does not instruct them to do so and leads the readers to believe that they can trust his guidance. What makes possible the best understanding of the novel, i.e., what allows the readers to draw the most connections or *Zusammenhänge*, is, in the end, the story itself, the *histoire*, in combination with the information the narrator provides. The narrator's *discours* does not directly work against the understanding of the reader and he is, in the long run, reliable, but it also does not suffice to rely on him to point out relations and relationships. The reader has to take a critical stance toward both and refrain from identifying with either one of the two levels and its representatives—the narrator for the *discours* and the characters for the *histoire*. Meaning derives equally from both sources. It is this meta-perspective the readers have to take over that transcends the authority of the narrator and leads our attention to the fictitious editor Goethe. As mentioned, free direct speech is, in the end, also attributable to the narrator who is able to and chooses to include it into his narration. But the dissonance between them, only recognizable by overlooking the text as a whole, leads the implicit readers beyond the diegetic world and draws attention to the fictitious editor. It is utterly unclear whether and, if so, to what degree this fictitious editor influenced the *Textgestalt* as it presents itself to the reader.

We do not know whether any editorial decisions are attributable to him. But his mere existence makes it clear to the now suspicious and alert implicit (and ideal) reader that the narrator in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* does not have the last word and sole prerogative of interpretation. Hence, one might call the novel indeed a *Bildungsroman*. However, less so with regard to its protagonist, but rather with regard to the readers who are taught a lesson of being suspicious about narrations presented to them by a narrator, competent and benevolent as he might appear. Ideally, readers of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, after having finished the novel, have undergone an educational program on how to critically read and have learned their lesson that every narration, every mediation per se, is suspicious.

III.3.b The Protagonist's Construction of Meaning as Ongoing Process and Wilhelm's Lack of Discrimination as Negative Model for the Implicit Reader

We have seen that the meaning the reader produces is in constant flux as more information demands its constant reassessment. Moving down the hierarchy from the *discours* of the narrator to the narrated world and the novel's protagonist, this theme reoccurs, is again *mirrored*. What Wilhelm thinks are accurate perceptions of the world around him turn out to be misperceptions. These misperceptions are cleared up for him partly at the end of the novel, within the *histoire*. But also throughout the novel, Wilhelm constantly changes his opinions about himself and the world. Referring to the title and the common understanding of the genre *Bildungsroman*, one expects to meet a protagonist who is an unexperienced young man who has still to develop personally and settle down in bourgeois society—pass his *Lehrjahre*. And, as I summed up in the overview of the scholarship on the novel, scholars have usually conceived of

the genre of the *Bildungsroman* in this way—as novels dealing with a young (male) character who, over time, develops and solidifies a certain belief system and personality. Being assessed from an outside perspective, it might be true that Wilhelm does undergo a development from a single bachelor without profession to a fiancé of a reputable woman with a clearer idea of his role in the world, as many scholars have argued. However, as others have pointed out, the novel ends before the definite execution of the marriage and the start of Wilhelm’s activity in the *Turmgesellschaft*. That Wilhelm changes his game plan all over again is, hence, within the bounds of possibility and, given the readers’ established acquaintance with Wilhelm, should not astound them. But even if we grant Wilhelm the benefit of the doubt and concede that he has indeed undergone some maturation and personal development by the end of the novel—by external standards—it is noteworthy that Wilhelm considered himself already mature and experienced at the very beginning of the novel. According to Wilhelm’s self-understanding we do not start out with the unstable, insecure sense of self we might expect from someone who is still supposed to be molded or *gebildet*. Much to the contrary, Wilhelm’s self-assessment at the very beginning of the novel is strikingly different in that we see a young man who thinks from the very beginning that he is already a fully matured and wise member of society. In conversation with Mariane and her servant Barbara, Wilhelm recalls his passion for a puppet theater he received as a Christmas present twelve years ago (12) and played with as a child, “wo sie ihm noch belebt erschienen, wo er sie durch die Lebhaftigkeit seiner Stimme, durch die Bewegungen seiner Hände zu beleben glaubte” (14). Looking back at this time, Wilhelm describes his fascination with sympathy. At the same time, however, he also emphasizes the distance between himself in the present and his older self at an earlier stage in his life:

Es ist eine schöne Empfindung, liebe Mariane, versetzte Wilhelm, wenn wir uns alter Zeiten und alter unschädlicher Irrtümer erinnern, besonders wenn es in einem Augenblick geschieht, da wir eine Höhe glücklich erreicht haben, von welcher wir uns umsehen und den zurückgelegten Weg überschauen können. Es ist so angenehm, selbstzufrieden sich mancher Hindernisse zu erinnern, die wir oft mit einem peinlichen Gefühl für unüberwindlich hielten, und dasjenige, was wir jetzt entwickelt *sind*, mit dem zu vergleichen, was wir damals unentwickelt *waren*. (17)

Within the first ten pages of the novel—and with about 650 more to follow—the twenty-two-year-old Wilhelm believes to have already reached a state of full development allowing him to look back at his life from a perspective of life experience and serenity in the face of his childish mistakes. “Nuggets of wisdom” like this will be reported by the narrator over and over again. Spoken from someone else with the right life experience to back up the statements, these statements can indeed demonstrate the person’s insight and power of judgment. Nevertheless, in Wilhelm’s case they are debunked as hollow statements that lack a profound foundation of experiences. They are always found in juxtaposition to the narration of Wilhelm’s numerous social faux pas and lack of empirical knowledge about “real life.”

That the reader instantly should become very skeptical about Wilhelm’s self-perception is evident from the scene quoted above. It becomes even clearer if we consider what the reader has come to know about Wilhelm in the few pages preceding the nightly gathering of the two lovers. Briefly before the nightly conversation quoted above with Mariane in which

Wilhelm looks back to his childhood tomfooleries with grandfatherly good-heartedness, the narrator shows Wilhelm in a conversation with his mother who is worried about his frequent attendance of theater performances and alerts him to his father's dislike and his intention to forbid it. In this conversation it becomes clear that Wilhelm does not at all have the wordly-wise distance from his childhood fantasies as he claims. Wilhelm defends himself by retorting with the rhetorical question: "[I]st denn alles unnütz, was uns nicht unmittelbar Geld in den Beutel bringt, was uns nicht den allernächsten Besitz verschafft?" (12). Besides already revealing his discontent with following his father's mercantile footsteps, this remark also causes his mother to ruefully remember that it was she who gave the puppet theater to Wilhelm and sparked his enthusiasm for the theater: „Wie oft mußte ich mir das verwünschte Puppenspiel vorwerfen lassen, das ich euch vor zwölf Jahren zum heiligen Christ gab, und das euch zuerst Geschmack am Schauspiele beibrachte“ (12).

And, indeed, a closer look at Wilhelm's fascination for puppet and "real" theater shows that it is the same fascination that drew him to the puppet theater and then consequently led him to the "real" theater. The impression the first puppet theater performance makes on Wilhelm is a lasting and formative one: it is less the performance itself, though, that impressed Wilhelm the most ("Von jenen wunderlichen Sprüngen [...] ist mir eine dunkle Erinnerung auf mein ganzes Leben geblieben.", 18). Much more so does the theater itself appeal to him in its capacity to transcend the empirical everyday world. Tellingly, he recounts how the theater had been set up between two doorjambs.

In free indirect speech, talking to his mother, Wilhelm recalls his first encounter with the theater:

[I]ch weiß, wie sonderbar es mir vorkam, als man uns [the children attending the Christmas celebration, S.N.], nach Empfang der gewöhnlichen Christgeschenke, vor einer Türe niedersitzen hieß, die aus einem andern Zimmer herein ging. Sie eröffnete sich; allein nicht wie sonst zum Hin- und Wiederlaufen, der Eingang war durch eine unerwartete Festlichkeit ausgefüllt. Es baute sich ein Portal in die Höhe, das von einem mystischen Vorhang verdeckt war. Erst standen wir alle von ferne, und wie unsere Neugierde größer ward, um zu sehen was wohl Blinkendes und Rasselndes sich hinter der halb durchsichtigen Hülle verbergen möchte, wies man jedem sein Stühlchen an und gebot uns, in Geduld zu warten. So saß nun alles still und war still; eine Pfeife gab das Signal, der Vorhang rollte in die Höhe und zeigte eine hochrot gemalte Aussicht in den Tempel. (12-13)

This Christmas experience Wilhelm remembers twelve years later lays the foundation for his relation to reality in his later life. The ten-year-old boy is taken out of his everyday perception. He perceives the puppet theater as something magical and mystical that brings mysteries into his world since it only partly reveals the things it hides (“hinter der halb durchsichtigen Hülle”, 13). It is even something otherworldly, divine when he looks right into a temple. This temple, on the one hand, is a prop belonging to the performed play (“David and Goliath”). On the other hand, however, the use of the word “Tempel” is ambiguous and can refer as much to the theater itself—a proposition that finds support in references to the theater Wilhelm makes by using religious vocabulary.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶Cf., for instance, 20.

In a conversation with Mariane and Barbara, Wilhelm shortly thereafter tells both about his disappointment the next morning when the theater was gone and the door had returned to being just a door:

Den andern Morgen war leider das magische Gerüste wieder verschwunden, der mystische Schleier weggehoben, man ging durch jene Türe wieder frei aus einer Stube in die andere, und so viel Abenteuer hatten keine Spur zurückgelassen. Meine Geschwister liefen mit ihren Spielsachen auf und ab, ich allein schlich hin und her, es schien mir unmöglich, daß da nur zwei Türpfosten sein sollten, wo gestern so viel Zauberei gewesen war. Ach, wer eine verlorne Liebe sucht, kann nicht unglücklicher sein, als ich mir damals schien! (18)

What becomes clear here is that Wilhelm does not remember particulars of the performance, but rather is sobered that the very same place in his parent's house that had been such an exciting miracle the previous night now looks so mundane again. The theater scaffolding divided the two rooms from one another, rendering it in Wilhelm's imagination two different worlds. Now that there are "nur zwei Türpfosten," the connection between the two rooms is reestablished and both are on the same ontological level again. The "Zauber" and space for imagination is gone. Another thing becomes clear here too when this passage closes with Wilhelm drawing a comparison between the dissembled theater with a lost love. Immediately following this quote, the narrator describes Wilhelm's loving glance toward Mariane and clearly connects his experience of the lost love with Wilhelm being in love with the actress:

Ein freudetrunkener Blick, den er auf Marianen warf, überzeugte sie, daß er nicht fürchtete, jemals in diesen Fall kommen zu können. (18)

But there is more at stake here than just the comparison of the theater and Mariane as objects of Wilhelm's love. Not only does Wilhelm compare the theater's effect of reality's enchantment and mystification with a "mystic veil" (18) enrobing everyday experience. The very motif of the veil occurs repeatedly in connection with the women Wilhelm encounters on his journey and with whom he falls in love. This observation already raises the suspicion that it might not really be the woman Mariane Wilhelm fell in love with (and, regarding the second half of the novel, Natalie). Rather than seeing the individual in Mariane it is her role as an actress that fascinates Wilhelm. The narrator recounts his first sight of Mariane:

Auf den Flügeln der Einbildungskraft hatte sich Wilhelms Begierde zu dem reizenden Mädchen erhoben; [...] sie [Mariane, S.N.] war ihm zuerst in dem günstigsten Lichte theatralischer Vorstellung erschienen, und seine Leidenschaft zur Bühne verband sich mit der ersten Liebe zu einem weiblichen Geschöpfe. (15)

Wilhelm sees Mariane not only as actress in a performance ("Vorstellung") which by definition is a "disguised" Mariane behind the surface of a role. In addition to that, her body is staged and does not achieve its effect on Wilhelm alone, but within the context of the stage's effects ("dem günstigen Lichte theatralischer Vorstellung"). But here, again, the ambiguity of the narrator's word choices stresses even more that Wilhelm falls in love with his own illusion and the theater's capacity to create illusion. The German word "Vorstellung" means illusion or

imagination as much as it refers to a performance. The phrase “im Lichte erscheinen” equally can be read as a concrete reference to lights on the stage and, metaphorically, as an indication that an object—here Mariane—subjectively appears in a certain way to a beholder, but not necessarily possesses those attributes per se.

This leads us to the central aspect of Wilhelm’s perception and the way he encounters and perceives the world: It is illusion, both as a fuel and the result of his imagination (“Einbildungskraft”) that attracts his entire interest. This becomes obvious also in his occupation with the puppet theater. Telling Mariane about the second performance he witnessed, he already admits that he not only wants to be enchanted himself, as a viewer, but at the same time longs to produce this illusion himself by playing the puppet theater himself:

Hatte ich das erstemal die Freude der Überraschung und des Staunens, so war zum zweitenmale die Wollust des Aufmerkens und Forschens groß. Wie das zugehe, war jetzt mein Anliegen. Daß die Puppen nicht selbst redeten, hatte ich mir schon das erstemal gesagt; daß sie sich nicht von selbst bewegten, vermutete ich auch; aber warum das alles doch so hübsch war, und es doch so aussah, als wenn sie selbst redeten und sich bewegten, und wo die Lichte und die Leute sein möchten, diese Rätsel beunruhigten mich um desto mehr, je mehr ich wünschte, zugleich unter den Bezauberten und Zauberern zu sein, zugleich meine Hände verdeckt im Spiel zu haben und als Zuschauer die Freude der Illusion zu genießen. (19)

And he soon does so. Later, Wilhelm performs „die Komödie von David und Goliath“ (21) himself with the help of the lieutenant in front of a small circle of his parents and other children. As, for him, he is entering a mysterious world. His excitement is tremendous:

Zitternd vor Freude trat ich hinein [in das Zimmer mit dem Theater, S.N.], und erblickte auf beiden Seiten des Gestelles die herabhängenden Puppen in der Ordnung, wie sie auftreten sollten; ich betrachtete sie [die Puppen] sorgfältig, stieg auf den Tritt, der mich über das Theater erhub, so daß ich nun über der kleinen Welt schwebte. Ich sah nicht ohne Ehrfurcht zwischen die Brettchen hinunter, weil die Erinnerung, welche herrliche Wirkung das Ganze von außen tue, und das Gefühl, in welche Geheimnisse ich eingeweiht sei, mich umfaßten. Wir [der Lieutenant und Wilhelm, S.N.] machten einen Versuch und es ging gut. (23)

With time, Wilhelm's imagination gets more and more caught up in a world that does not set any limits to his *Einbildungskraft* :

Meine Einbildungskraft brütete über der kleinen Welt, die gar bald eine andere Gestalt gewann. (24)

So the reader has come to see, right from the beginning of the novel, that Wilhelm's view of himself and his life-experience is distorted. His introspection is not to be trusted. In addition, the reader is presented with examples of Wilhelm's perception of the external world that demonstrate the origin of the many misperceptions, misjudgments and social faux pas to follow: It is his inability to delineate reality and fiction, particularly fiction in the form of

literature and painting. Carried away by his "Einbildungskraft," he often loses touch with reality and, as a consequence, obviously misses what people say and do. It becomes clear already at the beginning of the novel that Wilhelm is not capable of distinguishing between the real world and the world of theater. Rather, he perceives the former through the lenses of the latter. He perceives empirical reality through the lens of his vivid imagination, fed by his grandfather's paintings and the literature he has read and reads. This pattern continues throughout the novel. In the same way that he does not perceive Mariane as a female individual but rather as a representative of the theater, he perceives Natalie and himself as the embodiment of the story of "Der kranke Königssohn." After Natalie and her entourage have taken care of the wounded Wilhelm, the narrator states: "Er glaubte nunmehr die edle heldenmütige Chlorinde mit eignen Augen gesehen zu haben: ihm fiel der kranke Königssohn wieder ein, an dessen Lager die schöne teilnehmende Prinzessin mit stiller Bescheidenheit herantritt" (252). The myth of the sick prince becomes reality for Wilhelm. On other occasions, Wilhelm is so immersed in the reading of Shakespeare that reality fades away for him.¹⁹⁷ Similarly agitated after reading the French Neo-Classics, he is so eager to discuss them that he is oblivious to the proper social etiquette when he meets the prince. When he asks Wilhelm about these French authors,

¹⁹⁷ „Wilhelm kam indessen, außer in Proben und Spielstunden, wenig mehr zum Vorschein. In einem der hintersten Zimmer verschlossen, wozu nur Mignon und dem Harfner der Zutritt gerne verstattet wurde, lebte und webte er in der Shakespearischen Welt, so daß er außer sich nichts kannte noch empfand. [...] So saß Wilhelm, und mit unbekannter Bewegung wurden tausend Empfindungen und Fähigkeiten in ihm rege, von denen er keinen Begriff und keine Ahnung gehabt hatte. Nichts konnte ihn aus diesem Zustande reißen, und er war sehr unzufrieden, wenn irgend jemand zu kommen Gelegenheit nahm, um ihn von dem, was auswärts vorging, zu unterhalten.“ (198)

Wilhelm does not take his question for a polite gesture that demands no answer, but wants to engage in conversation. Only Jarno's intervening prevents him from further embarrassment.¹⁹⁸

Instead of being a strong personality who acts goal-oriented and exists as an entity with specific describable characteristics, Wilhelm functions like a *tabula rasa* onto which external influences leave their traces. Whatever he engages in—playing with the puppet theater, acting on stage, reading literature—he becomes entirely engrossed and leaves no room for other activities or interests. As little as he can discriminate between reality and fiction, he is able to dissociate himself from external influences. Rather than taking pieces here and there, molding them and integrating them into his personality, he seems rather like a vessel, passively being filled with different ideas. The narrator seems to playfully cap this all off by putting his words into Wilhelm's mouth. When Natalie first enters the plot after the ambush in the woods, the narrator calls her "Amazone": "Philine, die zu dieser Erscheinung [Natalie, S.N.] große Augen machte, war eben im Begriff zu rufen und die schöne Amazone um Hülfe anzuflehen, [...] (242). A little later, he describes how Wilhelm's recollection of the incident with Natalie as Chlorinde and himself as the sick prince. In the same sentence, however, the narrator distinguishes himself from Wilhelm by calling Natalie again "die Amazone":

Unaufhörlich rief er sich jene Begebenheit zurück, welche einen
unauslöschlichen Eindruck auf sein Gemüt gemacht hatte. Er sah die schöne
Amazone reitend aus den Büschen hervorkommen, sie näherte sich ihm, stieg

¹⁹⁸ „[...] und der Prinz ihn fragte, ob er auch fleißig die großen französischen Theaterschriftsteller lese, darauf ihn denn Wilhelm mit einem sehr lebhaften Ja antwortete. Er bemerkte nicht, daß der Fürst, ohne seine Antwort abzuwarten, schon im Begriff war, sich weg und zu jemand andern zu wenden, er faßte ihn vielmehr sogleich und trat ihm beinah in den Weg, indem er fortfuhr: [...]“ (191).

ab, ging hin und wieder, und bemühte sich um seinen Willen. Er sah das umhüllende Kleid von ihren Schultern fallen; ihr Gesicht, ihre Gestalt glänzend verschwinden. Alle seine Jugendträume knüpften sich an dieses Bild. Er glaubte nunmehr die edle heldenmütige Chlorinde mit eignen Augen gesehen zu haben: ihm fiel der kranke Königssohn wieder ein, an dessen Lager die schöne teilnehmende Prinzessin mit stiller Bescheidenheit herantritt. (252).

While the narrator compares Natalie with an “Amazone” in his report about what happened, he changes this image when he talks about Wilhelm’s recollection of the scene. Later in the novel, the narrator calls Natalie “Amazone” again (257, 315, 457, 554), and also repeatedly emphasizes her beauty by calling her “die Schöne” or the like (256, 257, 259). He also calls her “Dame” (243, 256), “Engel” (247), “Heilige” (244) and “Retterin” (255)—but not once does he call her Chlorinde in his own report or alludes to the painting of the sick prince. Even when he recounts the moment when Wilhelm sees his grandfather’s painting in Natalie’s home, he calls her “Amazone”:

Darauf trat er [Wilhelm, S.N.] in den Vorsaal, und zu seinem noch größern Erstaunen erblickte er das wohlbekannte Bild vom kranken Königssohn an der Wand. Er hatte kaum Zeit einen Blick darauf zu werfen, der Bediente nötigte ihn durch ein paar Zimmer in ein Kabinett. Dort, hinter einem Lichtschirme, der sie eben beschattete, saß ein Frauenzimmer und las. O daß sie es wäre! sagte er zu sich selbst in diesem entscheidenden Augenblick. Er setzte das Kind [Felix] nieder, das aufzuwachen schien, und dachte sich der Dame zu nähern, aber das

Kind sank schlaftrunken zusammen, das Frauenzimmer stand auf und kam ihm entgegen. Die Amazone war's! (551)

It is very clear that the narrator does not compare Natalie with Chlorinde himself. The two images are clearly attributed to the two instances. However, at almost the end of the novel, the narrator recounts Wilhelm's thoughts and his insight that he is in love with her in free direct speech. In this instance it is not the image of Chlorinde Natalie is compared with. In Wilhelm's soliloquy he thinks of her as the Amazon:

[W]irst du nicht immer zu dir sagen: Natalie ist nicht da! und doch wird leider Natalie dir immer gegenwärtig sein. Schließest du die Augen, so wird sie sich dir darstellen; öffnest du sie, so wird sie vor allen Gegenständen hinschweben, wie die Erscheinung, die ein bleibendes Bild im Auge zurück läßt. War nicht schon früher die schnell vorübergegangene Gestalt der Amazone deiner Einbildungskraft immer gegenwärtig? und du hattest sie nur gesehen, du kanntest sie nicht. Nun da du sie kennst, da du ihr so nahe warst, da sie so vielen Anteil an dir gezeigt hat, nun sind ihre Eigenschaften so tief in dein Gemüt geprägt, als ihr Bild jemals in deine Sinne. (609-610)

The last time in the novel Natalie is seen through the lense of cultural tradition, it is the narrator's word that Wilhelm uses. The narrator smuggles in his own image, passing it off as Wilhelm's after he has referenced Natalie numerous times before, always switching between the images depending on their occurrence in either narrative report or the report of Wilhelm's thoughts and words. So overall, Wilhelm does not appear as a very strong character, even at

the very end of the novel. He is highly influenced by external forces and, after all, it is not him in the end who makes sense of his journey. The members of the *Turmgesellschaft* reveal all the connections that he has missed for him and hand him his *Lehrbrief*. Wilhelm's capacity for self-insight are very limited. Insight is provided from the outside.

III.3.c The Implicit Reader's *Bildung* Toward and the Suspicion of Narratives

Hence, if we want to answer the question of whether *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is a *Bildungsroman* by looking at the novel's protagonist, it is indeed hard to see a development or *Entwicklung* at all, let alone a *Bildung*. However, the content of the novel, or its *histoire* stands in stark contrast to the novel's structure. Earlier in this chapter, I already hinted at how the novel's structure demonstrates the dynamic, never-ending process of the generation of knowledge. To end this chapter, I would like to return to the "big picture" and look again at the interplay between *histoire*, the narrator's *discours*, and the fictitious editor in order to support my claim that the *Lehrjahre* can indeed be called a *Bildungsroman* with regard to the structure and the implicit reader.

I already mentioned that Goethe scholars have hardly taken the fictitious editorship in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* seriously. I claim, in contrast, that it is indeed a meaningful part of the novel's structural composition and functions differently than fictitious editorships in novels preceding *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. The inclusion of a fictitious editor has, of course, consequences for the authority of the narrator. The fact that Goethe chose to camouflage himself as editor instead of using a fictive editor other than himself transfers authority and

responsibility for the narration to the text itself and the narrative entity within it—a strategy we have already seen in the dynamics between *histoire* and *discours*. The story about Wilhelm presented by a personal but anonymous and heterodiegetic third-person narrator gains autonomy since the creative function of the author is concealed.¹⁹⁹ Allegedly, the novel existed before and independently from the author. The author as well as the “editor” Goethe only provide the frame or stage upon which Wilhelm’s story unfolds. This metaleptic structure of the novel is continued within the *histoire*—something Bernd Hamacher points out in his concise introduction to Goethe’s œuvre without elaborating on this observation in his short introductory text:

Der Erzähler scheint schrankenlos souverän zu sein, sein Wissen nach Belieben preisgeben oder zurückhalten zu können, und so wurden denn die *Lehrjahre* häufig als Musterbeispiel für allwissendes oder auktoriales Erzählen angeführt. Die Position des Erzählers wird jedoch im letzten Buch gezielt verunklart, und man muss sich fragen, in welcher Beziehung er zu der geheimnisvollen Turmgesellschaft steht. In deren Archiv nämlich findet Wilhelm ein Regal mit Schriftrollen: “Wilhelm ging hin, und las die Aufschriften der Rollen. Er fand mit Verwunderung: *Lothario’s Lehrjahre, Jarno’s Lehrjahre* und *seine eigenen Lehrjahre* daselbst aufgestellt, unter vielen andern, deren Namen ihm unbekannt

¹⁹⁹Cf. Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*,“ 147-148 about the case in which the real author declares himself a narrator: „Die Fiktionalität des Herausgebers und seines Vorworts kennt unterschiedliche Grade. Wird das fiktiv allographe Vorwort mit dem Namen des realen Autors unterschrieben, so nährt dies den Verdacht, daß sich der reale Autor als Herausgeber ‚tarnt‘. Diese Form fingierter Herausgeberschaft, die im Namen des realen Autors vollzogen wird, läßt sich mit *Oura* als ‚semi-fiction‘ bezeichnen.“

waren.“ (I, 9, 875) Der Roman enthält sich selbst als *mise en abyme*, das Erzählen wird selbstreflexiv. [...] Das im *Werther* bereits erprobte narrative Spiel mit Metalepsen wird also hier auf andere Weise fortgesetzt. Erzähltechnisch weist der Roman damit voraus in die Moderne und gar die Postmoderne; narrative Verfahren, die ungefähr zu [sic] selben Zeit etwa bei Jean Paul offen zutage liege, werden von Goethe verdeckt und subtil eingesetzt, wobei gerade diese in der Rezeptionsgeschichte lange Zeit nicht bemerkte Subtilität zu denken geben sollte.²⁰⁰

To the *mise an abyme* structure Hamacher identifies within the novel we should add the additional levels I just talked about—the fictitious editor and the author. For, as Wilhelm’s story is mirrored or multiplied by means of the scroll that contains his story, so the author Goethe is

²⁰⁰Cf. Bernd Hamacher. *Einführung in das Werk Johann Wolfgang von Goethes. Einführungen Germanistik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, 2013), 114: „Der Erzähler scheint schrankenlos souverän zu sein, sein Wissen nach Belieben preisgeben oder zurückhalten zu können, und so wurden denn die *Lehrjahre* häufig als Musterbeispiel für allwissendes oder auktoriales Erzählen angeführt. Die Position des Erzählers wird jedoch im letzten Buch gezielt verunklart, und man muss sich fragen, in welcher Beziehung er zu der geheimnisvollen Turmgesellschaft steht. In deren Archiv nämlich findet Wilhelm ein Regal mit Schriftrollen: ‚Wilhelm ging hin, und las die Aufschriften der Rollen. Er fand mit Verwunderung: *Lothario’s Lehrjahre*, *Jarno’s Lehrjahre* und *seine eigenen Lehrjahre* daselbst aufgestellt, unter vielen andern, deren Namen ihm unbekannt waren.“ (I, 9, 875) Der Roman enthält sich selbst als *mise en abyme*, das Erzählen wird selbstreflexiv. [...] Das im *Werther* bereits erprobte narrative Spiel mit Metalepsen wird also hier auf andere Weise fortgesetzt. Erzähltechnisch weist der Roman damit voraus in die Moderne und gar die Postmoderne; narrative Verfahren, die ungefähr zu [sic] selben Zeit etwa bei Jean Paul offen zutage liege, werden von Goethe verdeckt und subtil eingesetzt, wobei gerade diese in der Rezeptionsgeschichte lange Zeit nicht bemerkte Subtilität zu denken geben sollte. Die Neigung, der Zuverlässigkeit eines vermeintlich auktorialen Lesers [sic] bedenkenlos zu vertrauen und sich seiner Leitung anzuvertrauen, ist auch eine Form der Autoritätsgläubigkeit. Kann der Erzähler als unzuverlässig entlarvt werden, sind die *Lehrjahre* der Leserinnen und Leser abgeschlossen, die sich vom Erzähler ebenso manipulieren ließen wie Wilhelm von der sich durchaus dubios erweisenden Turmgesellschaft. Im Blick auf die Lektüre gewinnt damit auch der ‚Begriff‘ Bildungsroman eine neue Konnotation und wird wieder aktuell. Dass die Frage, wer den Roman erzählt, durchaus von Anfang unklar ist, hätte schon ein Blick auf das Titelblatt der Erstausgabe lehren können, das freilich in heutigen Ausgaben nur selten reproduziert wird. *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* trugen dort den Untertitel: ‚Ein Roman. Herausgegeben von Goethe‘. Der Autor trat also nur als Herausgeber auf. Diese Herausgeberfiktion wurde im Unterschied zu derjenigen des *Werther* noch nicht mit gebührender Aufmerksamkeit bedacht.“

mirrored or contained within the fictitious frame of the editor Goethe. This adds up to a four-layered narrative network in which each layer or level points away from itself and shifts responsibility for what is told onto the next level in a never-ending deflecting chain: (1) the real author Goethe; (2) the fictitious editor Goethe; (3) the *discours* or anonymous heterodiegetic narrator; (4) the *histoire* with Wilhelm and the other characters; and (5) the metalepse with the *Lehrbriefe* that Wilhelm finds. Just like Wilhelm, the child, is fascinated by the marionettes' play in front of his eyes and cannot explain why they move until he discovers the thin, almost invisible strings attached and the puppet player above the puppet theater, the eyes of the reader of the *Lehrjahre*, in search for the causal authority, move from one layer to the next. The narrative technique of *Spiegelungen* that has been identified on the content-level of the novel repeatedly,²⁰¹ is thus reproduced on the structural level.

In this way, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is in no way inferior to the multi-layered, complex structural play with metalepses that is usually associated with texts from the period of early Romanticism. What Wirth writes about Clemens Brentano's *Godwi oder Das steinerne Bild der Mutter* (written from 1798 to 1801 and first published in 1800/01) can also be said about Goethe's novel:

Die metaleptische Rahmenkonfusion stellt als besondere Form der *mise en abyme* eine strukturelle Verwilderung des Diskurses dar: Sie inszeniert den

²⁰¹Cf., for instance, Saariluoma, *Erzählstruktur*, 226-234.

“Übergang von einer narrativen Ebene zur anderen”, so daß “Binnen- und Rahmenerzählung einander wechselseitig enthalten” [...].²⁰²

Due to this *mise en abyme* structure of real authorship, fictitious editorship, *discours*, and *histoire*, Goethe’s fictitious editorship works against the impression of the story’s authenticity rather than supporting it—like the conventional topos of a *Herausgeberfktion* does. While the use of a fictitious editor by authors of the Enlightenment acts as validation for the text’s authenticity and implies the existence of one particular and “right” meaning of the text, the described structure of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* precludes exactly this claim. Rather, it demonstrates the dynamic and preliminary character of the production of knowledge and meaning inherent in the text itself. This way, the novel’s structure can be read as an epistemological comment on the possibility of knowledge production by means of narratives, particularly with regard to the narrative possibilities to depict and understand the development of an individual by means of third-person narration. While Jean Paul’s narrator learns and manages to find his place in the world by means of reading and writing and while Moritz in his *Anton Reiser* still advocates for the possibility of understanding by means of literary narration (regardless of how much this, *in realiter*, remained unfulfilled), Goethe incorporates the insight into the problematic nature of this endeavor into the very fabric of his novel. Goethe’s novel teaches its readers that meaning is a matter of perspective and that narratives are not to be trusted. In other words, Goethe’s novel deals with the deconstruction of the construction of

²⁰²Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 310.

meaning. And it is for these reasons, that *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* can rightfully be called a *Bildungsroman*.

Conclusion

To summarize my reflections on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*: The meaning of the novel is that there is no single meaning. It constantly changes. It changes with perspective and it changes with time. Different perspectives render different pieces of information visible; and the lapse of time puts new complexions on old opinions, beliefs, and experiences. Neither Wilhelm, nor the narrator, the (implicit and reflective) reader, the fictitious editor, nor Goethe as the creator of the novel has a complete, 360-degree view that prevents him from misjudging, having blind spots and misperceptions. New information constantly demands to be incorporated and made sense of; and its inclusion rebuilds old constructions of meaning. It is, hence, not surprising that Goethe read all the different views on his novel that his contemporaries offered (often in direct correspondence with him) with interest, but did not exercise his authority to point out the one right view. Pointing out the modernity of the *Lehrjahre* is a truism in Goethe scholarship. The narrative and structural complexity that I hope to have revealed and its epistemological implications, however, appear to be almost postmodern—such as the embrace of ambiguity and multiperspectivity. And contrary to the narrator (and author Jean Paul) of “*Schulmeisterlein Wutz*”—published only a couple of years before *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*—*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is free of the skepticism, disorientation, and despair one finds throughout the short biography of the quaint schoolmaster.

RÉSUMÉ

The analysis of the three representative late eighteenth-century texts by Karl Philip Moritz, Jean Paul, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe have shown that the impression of authorial narrators does not withstand a thorough analysis.

In Moritz's *Anton Reiser*, we see a narrator who claims to be authorial. He wants to portray Anton's life as objectively as possible, i.e., his goal is to reduce the impact of this own subjectivity as much as possible. His observations and the facts are supposed to speak for themselves. The observer making the observations and stating and bringing together the facts is seen to be a negligible factor in what was the declared program of Moritz's project of *Erfahrungsseelenkunde*. The analysis of the narrator presenting Anton's story, however, showed that, in the first three books of the novel fragment, the narrator is not able to fulfill his own maxim of objective observation as a tool for a new discipline of empirical psychology. Rather, he goes far beyond the observable by presenting long stretches of what Cohn would call psycho-narration. Anton's mind is transparent for the narrator. But he goes far beyond narrating Anton's invisible mental activities to us. He extensively comments on them, explains their meaning to the reader, and related them to his views on the human psyche in general. These comments are so dominant that Anton's story rather seems to be an illustration of well-known general truths about the human psyche, not a case study from which such insights are to be induced. What Cohn states with respect to quoted monologue in the context of authorial narrators can be applied to *Anton Reiser's* narrator as well: "In these texts the narrators'

commentaries lead away from psychological characterization toward those generalizations about human nature so characteristic of the authorial mode of narration.”²⁰³

But the narrator does not keep his authorial stance. We have seen that—the longer he occupies himself with the depths of Anton’s mind, the more he as a distinguishable subject disappears. More and more, he adopts Anton’s language and his protagonist’s point of view. He seems to be coopted by his own narrative. Delving so deep into someone else’s psyche seems to be incompatible with the upholding of his own psychological integrity as a subject. Thus, what *Anton Reiser* demonstrates is the power of the narrative that is stronger than the initially authorial narrator. The notion of the subject in Moritz’s novel seems to be a fragile one, both on the *histoire* and *discours*. Below the surface of the seemingly objective report of the narrator and the rich subjective inner life of the protagonist in this self-proclaimed *psychological novel*, there seem to be other forces at work that work against the autonomy of the subject. In Anton’s case, the narrator makes it very clear that the surroundings and living circumstances suppress Anton’s development. With regard to the narrator, the engagement with alterity has very similar effects on the narrator.

Jean Paul’s narrator in *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* starts out from a similarly authorial stance with the intention to narrate Wutz’s life on the basis of the written documents in Wutz’s self-created library that are available to him. In contrast to Anton’s narrator, he does not conceive of himself as being superior to his protagonist. Much to the contrary: While the narrator is miserable and unhappy at the beginning of the narration because he misses meaning in his life

²⁰³Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 67-68.

and is overcome by the knowledge of his inevitable death, he envies Wutz for his positive outlook on life and the unshakable happiness the schoolmaster possesses until the very last second of his life. Similar to Anton's narrator, the process of reading Wutz's library and writing his biography changes Jean Paul's narrator. But contrary to the first, the latter is conscious of this process. He reflects on Wutz way of life, reading, and writing and sums up his new take on life at the end of the narration when he vows to love, disdain, earn, and enjoy life. He has not lost himself entirely. He still disdains life for its transience, but he also partially adopted Wutz joy by means of reflection and hard work. As we have seen, this also becomes visible in the fact that he discovers his own fantasy and imagination as part of the writing process, in addition to the reliance on other's written sources. Compared with Anton's narrator, it seems like less rigid attempts to delineate his own subjectivity from his protagonist's one has actually led to a self that did not lose itself in the encounter with the other, but became a richer and healthier version of itself. Jean Paul's narrator can be seen as a reaction to threats of the Enlightenment with its concentration on reason, but also to the general loss of traditional orienting authorities. Wutz's solipsistic and purely subjectivistic happiness is unattainable, but parts of it can be integrated into the modern identity—and this can have a healing effect.

With *Anton Reiser* demonstrating to us the dangers of narratives and *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* giving us an example of its potentials, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is neither particularly cautious us to the seducing potentials of narratives—at least not as much as *Anton Reiser*, probably involuntarily, does—nor is it mainly focused on their potential positive impact. The narrator as part of a larger, complex narrative structure rather seems to be granted some authority. He doesn't change and over long distances he is a competent and trustworthy

companion for the reader. But there are also larger forces beyond him. Like Wilhelm, he misjudges and has misperceptions he is not aware of or becomes aware of only much later. For the reader, however, context serves as a corrective. As much as Wilhelm's, partly bizarre and comical, misconceptions and misperceptions are rectified by the narrator, the narrative as a whole, provided by a fictitious editor, serves as corrective for the narrator. The power narratives exerted over the narrators in *Anton Reiser* and *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* seems to be absent here. It is rather the incompleteness, its limits that are highlighted—highlighted, however, by other narratives! One narrative and one narrative voice are not enough to obtain an accurate picture of whatever it is that is portrayed. Only in concert, with other narratives, coming from other sources and originating from different perspectives supplement the picture. Instead of the narrator as the authoritative voice, much more is demanded of the readers as they have to do the work of critically comparing and combine the multiplicity of narrative voices. While *Anton Reiser's* narrator approaches his narration with the agenda of an autonomous subject, fails to do so and cannot fall back on any other corrective narrative voices, the narrator in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* can. Similarly to the complementation happening across different narrative levels in Goethe's novel, the narrator in Jean Paul's narration consciously chooses to supplement his repertoire of writing strategies.

The analysis of the narrators in the three text has shown that none of them fulfills the ideal of an autonomous subject like Kant had it in mind. The narrative itself exerts power over the narrators rather than solely the other way around. As the notion of the subject is being brought up, discussed, and developed in verbal, mostly written discourses—i.e., essentially

narratives—, it seems to be worthwhile to put the claim of an autonomous subject to the test where its realization should be the most poignant. In our texts the lives of individuals are told, but they are not told by those individuals themselves. *An other*, a third-person narrator accounts for their lives. An autonomous subject-relying solely on himself or herself and his or her reason, not being influenced by the other, should be able to do so without the narrative exerting power over it and changing it. The act of narration—more so than the narrated content itself—seems to be the place where the narrative of the autonomous subject can be put into practice. The exposure to an alterity, as we have seen, relativizes the power of construction narratives and determine their meaning. More so, it changes their writers, the more so, the more they resist. This post-modern insight seems to be already encapsulated in the analyzed texts. And it sets up the stage for the Romantics who, instead of fighting it and pursuing objectivity and autonomy, affirmed radical subjectivity—and maybe became a little more Wutz-like again.

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