

# GOETHE'S ›DER WANDRER‹

## Portrait of a Modern Man

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In 1772, when he was not yet twenty-three, Goethe studied Petrarch, while composing poems as radically different from one another as the ballads ›Heidenröslein‹ and ›Der König in Thule‹, the satirical songs in ›Auerbachs Keller‹, the free rhythmic ›Wandrer's Sturmlied‹ and the idyllic poetic dialogue ›Der Wanderer‹, which is often cited as an early expression of Goethe's classicism. ›Der Wanderer‹, in the free verse often employed by Goethe in his Sturm und Drang years, is so different from his ballads and from the raucous ›Es war eine Ratt' im Kellernest‹ that one would hardly guess that it came from the same pen or the same time in the author's creative life. Yet the underlying paradigm, as in several other poems of the time, is that of a seeker underway toward rest. Readers of this poem have too often been drawn into the wanderer's point of view, seen only what he sees, and understood only what he understands.<sup>1)</sup> As the eponymous title indicates, however,

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<sup>1)</sup> See HERBERT THIELE, Frühe Andacht vor Antiken. Hinweise zu einer Interpretation von Goethes Gedicht ›Der Wanderer‹, in: Sammlung 15 (1960), pp. 232–240; – WALTER SILZ, Goethe: ›Der Wanderer‹, in: Stoffe, Formen, Strukturen. Studien zur deutschen Literatur, eds. ALBERT FUCHS and HELMUT MOTEKAT. Hans Heinrich Borchardt zum 75. Geburtstag, München 1962, pp. 139–150; – ROLF CHRISTIAN ZIMMERMANN, Das Weltbild des jungen Goethe. Studien zur hermetischen Tradition des deutschen 18. Jahrhunderts. T. 1. Elemente und Fundamente, München 1969, pp. 229–233; – DIETER BREUER, Goethes Gedicht ›Der Wanderer‹. Zur Programmatik eines Textes, in: Wirkendes Wort 20 (1970), pp. 302–313; – and ARND BOHM, From Politics to Aesthetics. Goldsmith's ›The Traveller‹ and Goethe's ›Der Wanderer‹, in: The Germanic Review 57 (1982), pp. 138–142. – Also HANS JOACHIM SCHRIMPF, Gestaltung und Deutung des Wandermotivs bei Goethe, in: Wirkendes Wort 3 (1952f.), pp. 11–23: p. 14; – and EMIL STAIGER, Goethe, Zürich 1956, vol. 2, p. 294. GERHARD KAISER, who says about Werther that he is a spectator, “der letzten Endes Betrachter bleibt”, is an exception. G. K., Wanderer und Idylle. Goethe und die Phänomenologie der Natur in der deutschen Dichtung von Geßner bis Gottfried Keller, Göttingen 1977, p. 45. “Der von außen Kommende [stellt] die Idylle *anschauend* her” (ibid., p. 37; my emphasis). The wanderer is a stock figure in Romanticism through Nietzsche and beyond. Cf. the movement out into the world and then homeward in Hölderlin's ›Der Wanderer‹ and in Eichendorff. As a Prague Gymnasium student Rilke too identified Goethe's wanderer: “Er heißt nicht umsonst ‘der Wanderer’. Es soll dies unzweifelhaft auch die Unruhe seines Inneren kennzeichnen,

the poem is about the wanderer himself, about his wandering and viewing, about wandering as a metaphor for life and viewing as a metaphor for knowing, and about the risks and temptations to which a wanderer and viewer may be exposed.

Many kinds of journeys occur in Goethe's works – wanderings, pilgrimages, homecomings, colonizing expeditions, and, in the exuberant youthful hymn ›An Schwager Kronos‹, a coach ride downhill, uphill, and downhill again into the underworld, whose princes will be expected to rise and greet the newcomer. The Director's scenario for *Faust* is likewise a journey: "wandelt [...] Vom Himmel durch die Welt zur Hölle" (lines 241f.), while ›Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre‹ portrays the protagonist's journeymanhood and the utopian ambitions of his "Wanderer" friends, and at the same time is a repository of inset novellas and numerous aphorisms illustrating the wanderer's way of thinking – ›Betrachtungen im Sinne der Wanderer‹. As a young man, Goethe was known as "der Wanderer" to his friends (›Dichtung und Wahrheit‹).<sup>2</sup>) His use of the wanderer motif includes self-references in ›Römische Elegien‹, nos. 2 & 7, the poet excusing his intrusion on Olympus in the latter with the words, "es faßte | Hebe den Wanderer und zog mich in die Hallen heran" (no. 7, lines 15f.).

In a letter to Johann Christian Kestner on 15 September 1773 Goethe claims that ›Der Wanderer" is individual and personal – a remembrance of his friendship with Kestner's fiancée, Charlotte Buff during the summer of 1772.<sup>3</sup>) It is an "Allegorie" in which Lotte and he, the *Wanderer*, are easily recognizable. Goethe dares to confess his warm feelings for Lotte, since his posture toward her was one of distant, devout adoration. Whatever its author's feelings toward Lotte, ›Der Wanderer‹ is, however, no simple *poeme a clef*. In fact, its composition in April 1772 preceded Goethe's friendship with Charlotte, who, though an *Ersatz* mother to her siblings, was not married and had no children of her own. The poem was an exercise in a genre that Goethe knew from his studies of Theocritus, Anacreon, and Virgil,<sup>4</sup>) and one made

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die ihn stets weitertreibt, die ihn auch das Anerbieten [of staying to supper] ausschlagen läßt – jene Unruhe, die durch das Streben nach Wissen in die Seele gepflanzt wird, und die sie gewöhnlich zeitlebens nie mehr verläßt", RAINER MARIA RILKE, ›Der Wanderer. Gedankengang und Bedeutung des Goethe'schen Gedichtes, in: Sämtliche Werke, ed. RILKE-ARCHIV in Verbindung mit RUTH SIEBER-RILKE, besorgt von ERNST ZINN, 6 vols. Wiesbaden and Frankfurt/M. 1955–1966: vol. 5 (1965), p. 286; see vol. 6 (1966), pp. 1316ff. for commentary.

<sup>2</sup>) Unless otherwise indicated, references are to the *Frankfurter Ausgabe* of Goethe's works: Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche, 40 vols, eds. DIETER BORCHMEYER et al. Frankfurt/M. 1985–2003, cited parenthetically as FA, with sec., vol. and page – here to FA 1,14: 567.

<sup>3</sup>) Der junge Goethe, ed. HANNA FISCHER-LAMBERG, 6 vols, Berlin 1963–1974: vol. 3 (1966), pp. 44f.; cited as DjG. – Also BREUER, ›Der Wanderer‹, in: Goethe-Handbuch I, Stuttgart 1996, pp. 124–127: p. 124.

<sup>4</sup>) "Mit der antiken Idyllendichtung (Theokrit, Anacreon) hatte sich G. noch im Winter 1771/72 intensiv beschäftigt, und in Vergils *Erster Ekloge* fand er das Strukturmodell für die eigene Aussage: die Begegnung des im Bewußtsein geschichtlichen Niedergangs der Natur entfremdeten Wanderers – bei Vergil der Hirt Meliboeus – mit der in glücklicher Naturgeborgenheit lebenden Bauernfamilie – bei Vergil der Hirt Tityrus – im Dialog, der zugleich eine Abfolge von sehr einfachen, statischen 'Bildchen' evoziert" (BREUER, *ibid.*, p. 126).

popular by the Swiss idyllist Salomon Geßner, whose work Goethe reviewed in the *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen*.<sup>5)</sup> It displays a variety of polarities – art and nature, form and chaos, male and female, past and present, time and eternity, myth and history, experience and innocence, destruction and recreation, hut and temple, hut and homelessness, host and guest, and the contrary female stereotypes – Mary and Venus – all noted by the wanderer who strays onto the scene and whose self and “Vorstellungsart” is the poem’s central subject.<sup>6)</sup>

In ›Der Wanderer‹, a sojourner underway toward Cumae, the oldest Greek colony in Italy and famous in the 18th century for its ruins (MA 1,1: 853), happens upon a young mother and her baby living in a hut made of the stones of an ancient temple, and asks to be allowed to sit down beside her in the shade of an elm tree. He requests a drink from the woman’s well, and she obligingly guides him upward along a rocky path, on one of whose stones he notices a faint inscription to Venus. Only a short distance further on there is the hut in which she and her family live, built by her father from the rubble of an ancient temple, a pair of its ivy-encircled columns standing upright together, a third standing some distance away. It was in hope of seeing such ruins that the wanderer had set out toward Cumae in the first place, although a wanderer may have no invariable destination and must be open to whatever his journey and wayward gaze may disclose. Holding the baby, while its mother goes to fill a pitcher with water, the wanderer ponders the temple’s remains and Nature’s seeming disregard for the creations of her own most sublime creature and masterpiece, the creative artist. Elm and vine are a traditional marriage topos, the sturdy elm supporting the vine which sucks out its life juices,<sup>7)</sup> but there is an interesting displacement here. The vine is entwined not around the elm but around a still-standing column of the temple, yielding a paradoxical symbol of nature supported by art, albeit art in decay, giving testimony of the ravages of time.

The constellation of wanderer and woman and child is paradigmatic and portrays not only a particular woman’s ministrations to a man afoot on a hot southern peninsula, but a mythical relationship between the sexes – man as insufficiency and woman as fulfillment. This wanderer gains a vision of a home to which he himself

<sup>5)</sup> 25 August 1772, DjG 2 (1963), pp. 271f. ›Der Wanderer‹ is thought to be indebted to Geßner’s *Idyllen* as well as to Goldsmith’s ›The Traveller‹. See BREUER, Goethes Gedicht ›Der Wanderer‹ (cit. fn. 1), pp. 306ff., and KAISER, Wanderer und Idylle (cit. fn. 1), pp. 37–42. – ELIZABETH POWERS discusses the poem as an idyll in ›From Genre to Gender. On Goethe’s ›Der Wanderer‹, in: Goethe Yearbook 10 (2001), pp. 31–49.

<sup>6)</sup> In his 1793 essay ›Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt‹ Goethe defines a “Vorstellungsart” as “ein Versuch, viele Gegenstände in ein gewisses faßliches Verhältnis zu bringen, das sie, streng genommen, untereinander nicht haben; daher die Neigung zu Hypothesen, zu Theorien, Terminologien und Systemen, die wir nicht mißbilligen können, weil sie aus der Organisation unsers Wesens notwendig entspringen” (FA 1,25: 31; cf. 1,10: 581).

<sup>7)</sup> See PETER DEMETZ, The Elm and the Vine. Notes Toward the History of a Marriage Topos, in: PMLA 73 (1958), pp. 521–532: p. 529. – See also MANDY GREEN, “The Vine and her Elm”. Milton’s Eve and the Transformation of an Ovidian Motif, in: The Modern Language Review 91, Part 2 (April 1996), pp. 301–316. In Goethe’s Amytas it is an apple tree and vine.

might eventually return. The poem's plot is both sexual and sexist – sexual because man's longing to re-enter the primal, maternal context and matrix is the basic paradigm; sexist because this sexual paradigm almost always portrays the seeker as a man and provides a woman as the means of his fulfillment.<sup>8)</sup>

›Der Wanderer‹ is a dialogue, but contains extensive soliloquies. It might as well be a monologue, so little philosophy does the traveler receive from his interlocutor's conversation, as opposed to what she means to him as an object of contemplation, a *Nicht-Ich* against which the man's self-centered consciousness may define itself. Only the man truly possesses subjectivity. And it is the quest of a man, as a *homo viator*, and his encounter with feminine domesticity that the poem celebrates.

Eventually the wanderer asks for directions and takes his leave, entrusting himself to Nature's guidance for the remainder of his journey. He *needs* a guide as he wanders, like Werther, "in der Irre herum" (11 Juni 1772),<sup>9)</sup> but upon resuming his journey, he realizes that he has been given more than just directions, he has also gained a goal and a hope – the prospect of someday returning home to a wife of his own, with babe in arms – which transforms the rover into a Ulysses and *Heimkehrer*, however erratic or lengthy the journey. But fulfillment can wait. The promise is a state of at-homeness – submergence and reintegration (*Einschränkung*, as in Werther's honorific use of the word) – but its price would be a loss of the vision and understanding that only alienation can afford, and it is vision in which this wanderer currently delights, preferring opposition and seeing to assimilation and blindness. The fundamental tension of this poem is that between the titular figure's simultaneous desire for reassimilation, reabsorption, engulfment, and for meaning through opposition and representation. Seeing transgresses a limen or boundary, the threshold between perceiver and object of perception. Committed for the present to preserving the line between himself and the objects he observes, he continues on his way. It is not innocence, finally, that the Romantic imagination most cherishes, but its own ability to appreciate innocence and the alienation presupposed by this ability. And this self-consciousness – the dramatized consciousness of a self, objectified as a *Rückenfigur* with whom we look into the landscape – is what is new and peculiarly Romantic

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<sup>8)</sup> To be sure, Goethe's *Iphigenie* and ›Die pilgernde Törrin‹ are *women* underway – exceptions confirming the rule. The "Bride of Corinth," a vampire, is driven to seek sexual fulfillment in the black widow-like destruction of young men.

<sup>9)</sup> Cf. MEREDITH LEE, *Goethe, Klopstock and the Problem of Literary Influence*, in: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. One Hundred and Fifty Years of Continuing Vitality, Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Press 1984, pp. 95–113: pp. 102f. – Goethe's conception of wandering was exploration, without a fixed goal (ZIMMERMANN, *Das Weltbild des jungen Goethe* [cit. fn. 1], p. 229–233). – See also POWERS, *From Genre to Gender* (cit. fn. 5), p. 42f. – Rosen discusses Heidegger's view of human error as being "fundamentally the 'wandering' of Being." STANLEY ROSEN, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger*, New Haven and London: Yale UP 1993, p. 182.

in the writing of the young Goethe.<sup>10</sup>) A pause for refreshment, due appreciation and a promise will do. That was probably his attitude toward Friederike Brion, for it is likely that Goethe regarded his time with Friederike as a dalliance and a pastoral interlude from the outset, and, as he himself admits, that he experienced the events at Sesenheim in terms of the characters, categories and topoi of ›The Vicar of Wakefield‹ while he was experiencing them and not only in recalling them forty years later (FA 1,14: 472). ›Der Wanderer‹, in any case, creates a double perspective, casting the reader as the wanderer's double, on the one hand, and as a witness to his longing, on the other.

In the inset novella ›Sankt Joseph der Zweite‹<sup>11</sup>), at the beginning of ›Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre‹, Wilhelm is repeatedly referred to as “der Wanderer,” “unser Wanderer,” and “der beschauende Wanderer” (FA 1,10: 26). In this episode Wilhelm encounters a reincarnation of the holy family en route to their home in the ruins of an ancient cloister, its chapel decorated with scenes from the life of Joseph of Nazareth. Wilhelm is an itinerant spectator, and adopts the same contemplative posture toward the “new” Holy Family<sup>12</sup>) as does the wanderer of our poem toward the mother and baby into whose domain he strays. In both cases a spectator and outsider becomes a guest in a circle of warmth and domesticity, his posture toward the holy family that of a voyeur and interpreter. The reader of the poem or the story is, in turn, invited to contemplate and interpret the depicted wanderer's mode of contemplation.

It is a commonplace of feminist film theory that “the cinematic gaze is gendered male and characterized by the taking of the female body as the quintessential [...] object of sight.”<sup>13</sup>) It is the man who is the spectator, and the woman the picture ready to receive his gaze. This, of course, applies to poetry as well as to film. Man is the “perfect Cartesian knower” and representative “epistemic hero” of modernity,<sup>14</sup>)

<sup>10</sup>) The specular situation is the same as in Morgenstern's ›Vice versa‹, where the hunter watches the rabbit with his Zeiss binoculars while God watches the hunter, or in Velazquez' ›Las meninas‹, except that through his monologues and conversation Goethe's wanderer makes us privy to his seeing, affording vicarious aesthetic appreciation of Nature's sovereign indifference to the fortunes of its creatures.

<sup>11</sup>) First published in Cotta's ›Damenkalender‹ with the subtitle ›Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre. Erstes Buch. Erstes bis viertes Kapitel‹ (1810).

<sup>12</sup>) “New” versions (i. e., imaginative adaptations) were in fashion, thus Rousseau's ›La nouvelle Héloïse‹ and Goethe's ›Der neue Paris‹ and ›Die neue Melusine‹. Also, continuing the tradition, Goethe's ›Der neue Amor‹, ›Der neue Amadis‹, and ›La nouvelle Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu‹ by Donatien Alphonse François Marquis de Sade.

<sup>13</sup>) NAOMI SCHEMAN, Missing Mothers/Desiring Daughters. Framing the sight of Women, in: *Critical Inquiry* 15,1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 62–89: p. 63.

<sup>14</sup>) The wanderer's “separation [and] dissociation from [the] maternal” account for his ability to interpret the woman (SCHEMAN, *ibid.*, pp. 84f.). – Cf. CHRISTIAN METZ, The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema, tr. CELIA BRITTON et al., Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP 1982, p. 97, – and SUSAN BORDO, The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought, in: *Signs* 11 (1986), pp. 439–56; expanded in: The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought and the Seventeenth-Century Flight from the Feminine, in: S. BORDO, *The Flight to Objectivity Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*, Albany: SUNY Press 1987, pp. 97–118.

authorized by his maleness to interpret and valorize the picture before him, while – an unmoved mover – every woman and every picture, inherently spatial, stands for eternity, inviting a closer look and eventual penetration, just as the “wilder Knabe” of ›Heidenröslein‹ feels invited to investigate and then to violate. The picture of Lotte cutting bread and the mirror portrait in the Witch’s Kitchen move Werther and Faust in the same way. The visual situation ignites a man’s desire to escape from his position of opposition to the love object, always *vorhanden* and always just out of reach: “Weiß der große Gott, wie einem das thut, so viel Liebenswürdigkeit vor einem herumkreuzen zu sehen und nicht zugreifen zu dürfen” (›Werther‹, 30 Okt. 1772). To see the promised land is to want to enter it, as Werther longs to enter and become lost in the beckoning greenness of the forest (21 Juni 1771), or in the flood waters raging through the valley in which Werther has enjoyed moments of intimate conversation with Lotte (12 Dez. 1772), or in Lotte’s enveloping self. The wanderer comes upon a scene of domestic stability and exploits it to articulate his own identity as a transient “Fremdling” and connoisseur of idyllic scenes but also as a stranger whose future, nevertheless, may hold a return and loving embrace. Both the prospect before him and his own identity are products of his creativity – artifacts. To see is to create, to be a *homo faber* and an artist. In this sense the wanderer is a descendent of the architect who built the temple and whose masterpiece lies in ruins as a foil to the timeless naturalness of woman.

Because seeing requires detachment from the objects of inspection, only strangers see.<sup>15)</sup> Only aliens can detect the peculiarities of a kind of behavior or language or a culture. And this is also why the ocularcentric metaphor of knowing as seeing generates the subject-object dichotomy, on which so much Western thought depends. Thinkers are wanderers, and it is in the nature of a wanderer, as of a thinker, to be non-committal, making wandering a useful metaphor not only for waywardness but for nonfinality, for separation and the avoidance or postponement of closure. The presence of such a metaphor in so early a poem is revealing with regard to Goethe’s life-long aversion to finality and his need of an unreachable goal.<sup>16)</sup> Like the “fragments” of the younger Romantics, the “unfinished” ›Faust II‹ is a monument to its author’s wariness of perfection. Yet every wanderer, seemingly at loose ends and adrift, is invisibly tethered to the permanence which defines his transience by contrast and points the way home. The poisoned rat’s frenetic racing

<sup>15)</sup> Cf. Werther: “Ja wohl bin ich nur ein Wanderer, ein Waller auf der Erde! Seyd ihr denn mehr? (16 Junius 1772). Possibly the “bibelfest” Goethe had Hebräer 11.13 in mind: “Diese alle [...] haben [die Verheißungen] von ferne gesehen [...] und bekannt, daß sie Gäste und Fremdlinge auf Erden wären.”

<sup>16)</sup> Goethe “needed the impossible union, for fear of the possible” and therefore courted women who were already committed to someone else. NICHOLAS BOYLE, Goethe. The Poet and the Age, vol.1: The Poetry of Desire, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991, pp. 261, 471. – Erring is the paradigm both in Goethe’s biography and in his epistemology, which must have been a formative element in Heidegger’s thought. Cf. GERALD L. BRUNS, Heidegger’s Estrangements: Language, Truth, and Poetry in the Later Writings, New Haven: Yale UP 1989, pp. xxix & 183.

about, in Brander's song ›Es war eine Ratt' im Kellernest‹ (›Faust‹, Auerbachs Keller), seems aimless, but its goal is death.

Although seeing requires detachment, the object of sight may be a project, or, better, a projection, of the seeing subject. What the wanderer of Goethe's idyll sees is an image he brings with him and casts before him where it is visible to his own eyes – a chaste, natural madonna. He sees no marital conflict – imaginable, given the primitive housing and the lack of modern medicine (what if the child gets small pox or the measles?). He does not see menstrual blood and the travail of child-bearing, or an overworked and perhaps disgruntled husband sweating as an *Ackermann* in the heat of the sun-baked fields. Such discordant images are not part of the idyllic picture which this visitor projects onto the scene before him. Rather, in his idyllic vision, the woman's naivete and easy fit into her surroundings encode the natural life, while his own reflectiveness defines him as a stranger and admirer of the natural. The wanderer's self-conscious linguistic playfulness reflects his thoughtfulness and alienation. The inscriptions on the stones on the path leading to the temple, for example, are "verloschen" – "weggewandelt," in a clever transitive locution for *vergangen*. Worn away by wayward feet, they are now past and 'gone (that is, *trod*) away' – but present in their pastness for him who can see what is no longer there and who does not say with Faust, "Vergangenheit sei hinter uns getan!" (line 9563).<sup>17</sup> Their traces engender an exquisite nostalgia in the traveler who happens by, stops to contemplate, and then proceeds along his way.<sup>18</sup> Nature – "reich hinstreuende Natur" – is wasteful, but her ambulant and transitory creature struggles to retrieve and conserve, celebrating the *Genius* of the temple still "weaving" a monument to Venus, and buried beneath the collapse of his masterpiece. The wanderer stands apart, addressing a participant in the common life with affectionate condescension: "Und du flickst zwischen der Vergangenheit | Erhabne Trümmer | Für dein Bedürfnis | Eine Hütt', o Mensch, | Genießest über Gräbern" (lines 138–142).

Nature, like woman, is both a sublime mystery and a familiar curiosity, but inestimably the opposite of every maker, including the reader, if he or she can be made a party to the wanderer's constructive viewing. Part of this viewing is the assignment of women to binary categories. Venus, the paradigmatic *femme fatale*, in the rubble of whose temple this holy family has ironically erected its dwelling, is a foil to this young mother's innocence and purity – as Adelheid von Waldorff is the antipode of Maria in Goethe's ›Götz von Berlichingen‹. The opposed female types – mother with child (woman as life- and care-giver) and Venus (woman as enveloping, consuming love) – may suggest the possibility of their synthesis and confer an erotic attractiveness on the madonna's innocence, like that of Werther's

<sup>17</sup>) "Wir alle leben vom Vergangenen und gehen am Vergangenen zugrunde" (FA 1,13: 20).

<sup>18</sup>) Of the Doric temple ruins of the Greek settlement of Posidonia, Goethe observed, "nur wenn man sich um sie her, durch sie durch bewegt, teilt man ihnen das eigentliche Leben mit, man fühlt es wieder aus ihnen heraus, welches der Baumeister beabsichtigte, ja hineinschuf" (›Italienische Reise‹, FA 1,15,1: 237; see BOYLE, Goethe [cit. fn. 16], p. 480).

Lotte. We know from Freud that *every mother* is a potential agent of engulfment, therefore a threat. Would it, then, not be necessary to escape this poem's ideology in order to realize that she is also a feeling and thinking subject in her own right? Perhaps not, given the visitor's, and certainly the author's, reflectiveness, but there are no explicit thoughts on intersubjectivity in the poem. Only its title and the situation depicted prompt us to critique the wanderer's orientation.

That maternity was laden with erotic and minatory connotations for Goethe is evident. It is precisely Lotte's maternity that makes her so fatally seductive. Albert honors her as "eine wahre Mutter" (10 August 1771) and she is first admired by Werther in the midst of "her" children. Similarly, Gretchen's appeal for Faust is enhanced when, a surrogate mother, she tells of her toilsome care for her baby sister. In ›Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre‹, Lothario, after seeing his beloved of twenty years hence now surrounded by her children, says: "Es ist nichts reizender, als eine Mutter zu sehen mit einem Kinde auf dem Arme, und nichts ehrwürdiger, als eine Mutter unter vielen Kindern" (FA 1,9: 848). And it is a "scheinbare Mutter" that Otilie in ›Die Wahlverwandtschaften‹ is so adorable to the young architect that he transforms her, in his mind and in the creche tableau in which he situates her, into the mother of God (FA 1,8: 438). Similar feelings inspire the young Goethe's self-anointing invocation to the "Genius unsers Vaterlands" to let a German youth go forth and find a maiden, "die zweyte Mutter ihres Hauses", who will give truth and living beauty to his songs (DjG 2: 274).<sup>19</sup> Venus is most seductive with Amor sucking at her breast, and it is as a mother that the woman of ›Der Wanderer‹ is first perceived and saluted: "Gott segne dich, junge Frau, | Und den säugenden Knaben | An deiner Brust!"

In ›Der Wanderer‹, Goethe shows himself to be what he described Geßner as being – a "mahlender Dichter" (DjG 2: 271). The wanderer's mental pictures are translated into dialogue and action, as Lessing's *Laocoon* required, but they are pictures nevertheless. Like this wanderer, attracted to a picture of domestic familiarity, the traveler in ›An Schwager Kronos‹ is attracted to the maiden in "des Überdachs Schatten". Any picture may invite the viewer to enter and partake of its permanence, not merely to witness but to become part of the picture, which is what Werther attempts to do in crossing the threshold into Lotte's house as she cuts bread for her siblings and subsequently entering into the life of her family (16 Juni 1771).

What, to my knowledge, has been overlooked is that in the picture presented by this poem the wanderer himself is the central figure. It is such a widespread assumption that a "Rückenfigur" stands for the viewer of a painting and invites him or her to share the figure's point of view that we fail to see this figure as part of the painting. Identifying with the poem's protagonist, interpreters of

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<sup>19</sup>) No doubt someone has written a book on female artifacts. Even the alembic in Wagner's laboratory is a surrogate mother. The chocolaterie in the movie ›Chocolat‹ features a confection called "Venus's nipples."



›Der Wanderer‹ have viewed the mother and baby amidst ruins through his eyes, while he, who should be in sharp focus, remains invisible.<sup>20</sup>) Readings based on such an orientation may accurately describe what the wanderer sees, but overlook that any viewer bears the structures of his vision with him, seeing not “objective” reality but a preconfigured “Nature” which is itself an artefact, as Goethe says, an arrangement of “viele Gegenstände in ein gewisses faßliches Verhältnis [...], das sie, streng genommen, untereinander nicht haben” (see n6 above). We can see this if we see the wanderer as an artificer on display within the universe of the poem, like the architect in his own tableau in ›Die Wahlverwandschaften‹, who, rejoicing in his view of Otilie as the virgin Mary over the heads of the kneeling wise men in the *tableau* in which he himself is a shepherd, both witness and object – what Goethe in ›Über Laocoon‹ calls “ein Beobachter, Zeuge *und* Teilnehmer bei der Tat” (FA 1,18: 496). Wallace Stevens’s line for this idea is “Oh, Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon” (›The Idea of Order at Key West‹).

What the wanderer beholds and reveres through many verses as a complement to his agonistic, modern self is life in the lap of Nature, who “mütterlich” has provided her children with a home but indifferently allows the creations of her creatures to sink into rubble and oblivion. “Unempfindlich zertrümmerst | Du dein Heiligtum, | Säst Disteln drein.” For “unfühlend ist die Natur” (›Das Göttliche‹), and “unfühlend” the swallow that builds its nest in the temple’s architrave and gums up its ornaments with mud. “Schätzezt du so, Natur, | Deines Meisterstücks Meisterstück?” he bemusedly asks (lines 79f.).<sup>21</sup> “Unfühlend” too is the woman, who makes a nest in ruins and has her place in the chain of Nature’s creatures, her instinctive practicality a happy contrast to the viewer’s ponderous seeing. That she is conscious of no irreverence in the recycling of ancient stones bespeaks the naturalness that so appeals to a self-styled stranger to the natural.<sup>22</sup>) Woman, like Nature, is ambiguous and metonymically linked with the chaos made concrete in the rubble of the temple – chaos as “the Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave” (›Paradise Lost‹ 2.911) – and with the source from which she draws water for her guest. And this the wanderer understands, “trüber Gast” and thinking viewer that he is. It is he who situates her in her context and creates her iconographical tie to her child and to the ruins of the backdrop.<sup>23</sup>) Tischbein’s famous portrait situates Goethe himself in a landscape with ruins – an aqueduct and the tomb of Caecilia Metella in the background, the remains of an ivy-covered capital on his left. Half

<sup>20</sup>) Breuer, for example, speaks of “die Einfachheit der Frauengestalt und ihres glücklichen Naturdaseins” (BREUER, Goethes Gedicht ›Der Wanderer‹ [cit. fn. 1], p. 308).

<sup>21</sup>) Goethe’s drawings in Agrigento, Sicily “give prominence to the landscape rather than the remains. The fact was that he disliked decay, and more important to him than any differences between the architecture of Greek Agrigento and that of Imperial Rome was the ruinous condition of both” (BOYLE, Goethe [cit. fn. 16], p. 474).

<sup>22</sup>) Cf. Werther on Lotte’s easy acceptance of sickness and death (26 Oct. 1772).

<sup>23</sup>) The child will grow in “Götterselbstgefühl,” blossoming and ripening toward the sun – whether as the “stämmiger Vigneron” that Felix Mendelssohn claimed to have come across in Cumae or as the “great artist” foreseen by SILZ, Goethe: ›Der Wanderer‹ (cit. fn. 1), pp. 139, 145.

sitting, half lying on another stone, he reflects “‘on the fate of the works of men,’ as Tischbein expressed it”<sup>24</sup>).

The picture before the wanderer of the poem also contains symbols of past, present, and future: innocence manifest as practicality;<sup>25</sup>) nature recast as art, which is always fragile, transitory, and at the mercy of nature. Nature creates, destroys, and recreates, establishing a presence bracketed by loss and promise – both summoned into the picture by the stranger’s hope for a wife and child like these and by his appreciation of “der Vergangenheit erhabene Trümmer.”<sup>26</sup>) As an archetypal group, mother and child, with the husband and father in the background, are beyond temporality. They are an instance of what Coleridge termed “the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal”<sup>27</sup>) and of “[das] Vergängliche” which is only “ein Gleichnis” of things eternal (›Faust‹, lines 12104f.). They have *always* been present and will reappear in “repeated mirrorings” for as long as humankind endures and specifically at the end of this stranger’s wandering, when he himself will be the father and find his beloved waiting for him as a “Madonna [...] [with] ein Erstlingskind, | Ein heilig’s, an der Brust” (›Künstlers Morgenlied‹).

›Der Wanderer‹, then, is pictorial – an example of *ut pictura poesis* – and essentially a landscape, as Caroline Flachslund recognized when, writing to Herder in April 1772, she described the poem as about a “Hütte [...] in Ruinen alter Tempel gebaut.”<sup>28</sup>) It might bear a longer caption than the simple ›Der Wanderer‹ – for example: “Wanderer in the Roman Campagna,” or, borrowing the caption of Tischbein’s Goethe portrait, ›Goethe in the Roman Campagna,“ since the Campagna is the place of the poem’s action and essential to its meaning.<sup>29</sup>) One thinks also of Caspar David Friedrich’s ›Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer‹, for this poem has a point of view in common with all of those Friedrich landscapes in which a *Rückenfigur* invites us to adopt his or her point of view and gaze into the landscape beyond. The figure in ›Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer‹, incidentally, has been read as a portrait of Goethe.<sup>30</sup>) Certainly Goethe’s poem exhibits a characteristic

<sup>24</sup>) BOYLE, Goethe (cit. fn. 16), p. 445.

<sup>25</sup>) Cf. the village women observed washing their clothes in an ancient marble sarcophagus in Gerhart Hauptmann’s ›Der Ketzer von Soana‹. Francesco, the heretic priest, is a wanderer and a contemplative intellectual. Later Francesco comes upon a madonna statue under which a spring pours forth into a marble sarcophagus.

<sup>26</sup>) Contrast the young Goethe’s reproach to the French and Italians: “Welscher! [...] flicktest aus den heiligen Trümmern dir Lusthäuser zusammen” (›Von deutscher Baukunst‹, FA 1,18: 111).

<sup>27</sup>) Cited in PAUL de MAN, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1983), p. 192. See also p. 207, where de Man argues that repetition implies temporality.

<sup>28</sup>) Cited in SILZ, Goethe: ›Der Wanderer‹ (cit. fn. 1), p. 140, who notes that “its pictorial quality drew the admiration of the painter Angelika Kaufmann” (p. 141).

<sup>29</sup>) WILHELM VON KAULBACH’S fresco of the wanderer taking leave of the young mother in the Munich *Residenz* was destroyed in WW II. – Cf. O. WISNIESKI’S attempt to capture the woman bringing water to the thirsty, baby-sitting traveler. ›Goethes Werke. Illustriert von ersten deutschen Künstlern‹, ed. H. DÜNTZER, Stuttgart 1882, p. 234.

<sup>30</sup>) THEODORE ZIOLKOWSKI, *Bild als Entgegnung. Goethe, C. D. Friedrich und der Streit um die romantische Malerei*, in: *Kontroversen, alte und neue. Akten des VII. Internationalen*

Romantic longing to escape from temporality and individuation and become lost in the mists (or the thickets) of the distant and beckoning landscape – or in domesticity, or in the womb, or in his own vague inwardness: “[Er] wendet[...] | Den ernsten Blick, wo Nebel ihn umtrüben, | Ins eigne Herz und in das Herz der Lieben” (›Wandersegen‹, FA 1:2: 537). The fact that the prospect before Friedrich’s wanderer is a sea of mist brings out the fundamental likeness. It is the man *as longing* who is in focus, not the vague landscape before him. This – in addition to the fact that Nietzsche is also fond of the wanderer paradigm – makes the choice of the Friedrich painting as the cover picture for the Penguin edition of Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* a happy choice. It reminds us to look *at* (and not just *with*) the wanderer. The same imperative – “*Ecce homo!*” – is implied in the title of Goethe’s poem.

›Der Wanderer‹ is commonly supposed to reconcile nature and art by revealing the latter as a sub-category of the former. “Wie das Schwalbennest am Architrav oder das Raupengespinnst am Zweig, so ist auch die Hütte in der Tempelruine eine notwendige Hervorbringung der göttlichen Natur,” says Breuer<sup>31</sup>). According to Silz, “the relation of Nature and art is [...] the central concern of this poem, and their reconciliation its chief intellectual result” (143).<sup>32</sup>) Art is nature he says. The naturalness of artifice is a point also made elsewhere, in the poem “An Belinden,” for example, and in Wilhelm Meister’s realization that the artful ringlets and ornaments adorning his beautiful countess are ultimately natural (FA 1,9: 560), indeed that it is natural for human beings to dress themselves up. But what Goethe shows in ›Der Wanderer‹ is not only that art is nature but that “nature” is art and that polar oppositions and conceptualizations of whatever kind are productions involving an observer on whom a culture has always already placed its stamp. They are not to be taken as final, unambiguous truth, but as indices to inarticulable mysteries: “Die Geheimnisse der Lebenspfade darf und kann man nicht offenbaren; es gibt Steine des Anstoßes, über die ein jeder Wanderer stolpern muß. Der Poet aber deutet auf die Stelle hin” (›Aus Makariens Archiv‹, FA 1,10: 746). That is all that a poet can do. It is a modest, but estimable service. Goethe did not regard the world’s polarities as fundamental: “what is primary is the activity that precedes the distinction [...], and calls [the contrary terms] into being” – as well as into question.<sup>33</sup>) This activity takes place in the viewer and within a particular “Vorstellungsart.”

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Germanisten-Kongresses, ed. ALBRECHT SCHÖNE, Göttingen 1985, p. 202; – cf. ROLF DENECKE, Malte Caspar David Friedrich Goethe auf der Teufelskanzel, einem Felsen auf dem Brocken im Harz?, in: Goethe Jahrbuch 106 (1989), p. 337–347.

<sup>31</sup>) BREUER, Goethes Gedicht ›Der Wanderer‹ (cit. fn. 1), p. 311.

<sup>32</sup>) See ›Diderot’s Versuch über die Malerei‹, FA 1,18: 559–608. – Cf. “Die Kunst vollendet die Natur” (STAIGER, Goethe [cit. fn. 1], vol. 2, p. 294). Appreciation of the woman’s naturalness enables the wanderer to resolve the conflict between “Natur und Kultur, organische Lebenszeit und geschichtliche Weltzeit” and to embrace the “Ursprünglichkeit, Unmittelbarkeit und Bewußtlosigkeit des natürlichen Lebens” (SCHRIMPF, Gestaltung und Deutung des Wandermotivs bei Goethe [cit. fn. 1], p. 14). Art is a distinct, subordinate manifestation of the formative forces of nature, giving meaning to what otherwise would be unintelligible.

<sup>33</sup>) FREDERICK AMRINE, The Metamorphosis of the Scientist, in: Goethe Yearbook 5 (1990), pp. 187–212: p. 204.

In ›Der Wanderer‹, then, the desiring and aimless wanderer as viewer and his *Vorstellungsart* are brought into view and invested with meaning as he in turn invests meaning in the scene before him. “Indem der Künstler irgendeinen Gegenstand der Natur ergreift, so gehört dieser schon nicht mehr der Natur an, ja man kann sagen: daß der Künstler ihn in diesem Augenblicke erschaffe, indem er ihm das Bedeutende, Charakteristische, Interessante abgewinnt, oder vielmehr erst den höhern Wert hineinlegt” (FA 1,18: 465).<sup>34</sup>) And this should prompt us to bring ourselves and the constructs we use into view, or at least to know that they are at work within our viewing.<sup>35</sup>) Our beholding has discernible laws and limits. Goethe advises the scientist, the student of nature, to keep this in mind. “Es gibt keine Erfahrung, die nicht produziert, hervorgebracht, erschaffen wird.”<sup>36</sup>) The nature construed by science is itself already an artifact, as are the successive models of scientific and philosophical construction. Artifacts of every kind must yield to the rearrangements of time. This is the meaning of the ruins in the poem, which proclaim “die Vergänglichkeit der menschlichen Dinge,” in the words of the mason laying the cornerstone of the pavilion on Eduard’s estate in ›Die Wahlverwandtschaften‹ (FA 1,8: 333). Nor is Nature or the self outside of time. Each is newly reconfigured with each social development, each scientific revolution and each step aside or to the rear in philosophical contemplation. “In dem ewigen Strom der Veränderung ist kein Stillstand.”<sup>37</sup>)

Karl Philipp Moritz, whose “farewell to Rome, some months after Goethe’s, took place on the Capitol,” learned from Goethe to appreciate moments of happiness, however fleeting. Moritz “stood with Herder watching the sun set”, resolved “to enjoy every beautiful scene in life to its ultimate moment, with no complaint or grumbling that it must end”<sup>38</sup>). This is the wanderer’s stance toward the young mother and her child amid the ruins. He knows that all visions end and become past. “Leb wohl, du glücklich Weib!” We may watch him enjoy the sight for a moment – and join him in saying goodbye to beauty by-passed along the way.

<sup>34</sup>) “Die Natur organisiert ein lebendiges gleichgültiges Wesen, der Künstler ein totes, aber ein bedeutendes” (FA 1,18: 563).

<sup>35</sup>) “Bei allem nun hat der treue Forscher sich selbst zu beobachten und zu sorgen, daß, wie er die Organe bildsam sieht, er sich auch die Art zu sehen bildsam erhalte, damit er nicht überall schroff bei einerlei Erklärungsweise verharre, sondern in jedem Falle die bequemste, der Ansicht, dem Anschauen analogste zu wählen verstehe” Pflanzen, GOETHE, Werke. Weimarer Ausgabe, eds. GUSTAV VON LOEPER, ERICH SCHMIDT, et. al, im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen. Four parts, 133 vols. in 143. Weimar 1887–1919: ›Aphoristisches‹, 2,6: 349.

<sup>36</sup>) ›Der Sammler und die Seinigen‹, FA 1,18: 712.

<sup>37</sup>) Goethe to Sophie von Schardt, Dec. 1805–to June 11, 1806.

<sup>38</sup>) BOYLE, Goethe (cit. fn. 16), p. 503.