

FEMINIST GERMAN STUDIES

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Goethe's Stalker Snails

BARBARA N. NAGEL

"Crab and snail are both rare creatures to me," reads an epigram by Goethe. This article takes the subjective character of the epigram as a point of departure to investigate the curious insistence of snail figures throughout Goethe's oeuvre, with particular attention to their flexibility, reversibility, and ultimate incoherence. This incoherence has to do with the versatility of the snail as an asexual, trans, queer, but for Goethe, above all, *female* figure of victimhood (the persecuted maiden, the debauched lover), which in turn triggers feelings of persecution in the libertine. Yet, when Goethe himself is confronted with the female libertine Mme de Staël, he draws on metaphors of snail seclusion to express his own desire for autonomy as well as protection. The encounter between de Staël and Goethe presents an exemplary attempt of hegemonic masculinity to hijack victimhood and to treat it as the last coveted privilege patriarchy lacks.

If there were such a thing as pop-academic fun facts, then the story of how Jean-Paul Sartre, after a mescaline trip gone awry, felt persecuted for months by imaginary crabs (Sartre 63) would rank in the top five.¹ As a scholar of German one is doomed to emulate the fun the French are having, and indeed Sartre was not the only famous writer to fall victim to animalistic paranoia: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe felt persecuted by snails—with the variation that in the case of Goethe it was masculinity rather than mescalinity that caused paranoia. Goethe felt encroached upon by the ethical messiness of male libertinage. The problem with pop-academic fun facts is that academics tend to spoil the fun by overthinking funny things: On the scale of persecution anxiety, what could be better than being persecuted by a crab or a snail? One walks backwards, the other is slower than a turtle. How scary can it be? Pretty scary, it turns out.

Stalking in Goethe?

Although the paranoid tendencies of certain of Goethe's male characters have been well noted (as in Alexander Mathäs's *Narcissism and Paranoia*

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in the Age of Goethe), the fact that some of those characters themselves stalk female characters finds little or no mention. This is even more surprising given that questions of control, boundaries, and continence are a central issue in the classical period. Admittedly, the quality of many of Goethe's texts arises from the undecidability of questions such as: Did Werther have a right to pursue the married Lotte? Didn't Lotte flirt with Werther? But isn't threatening suicide a bit much? Or, was it wrong of Torquato Tasso to encroach upon the princess on account of her being a woman or on account of her being a princess? Is Thoas a tyrant because he is a barbarian or because he threatens to go on a killing spree if Iphigenia does not marry him? Each of these questions might be difficult to answer on its own, but as a set they prove that Goethe serially features male serial offenders. There are more drastic examples—the most famous being Faust and Mephistopheles's pursuit of Gretchen, which begins with the demonic pair going through her belongings and Faust sniffing her bed and ends with Gretchen's total isolation from her family (by murder, that is).

Goethe's novellas in particular contain events that would be currently considered stalking—*currently* because, given the belatedness with which the legal discourse reacts to sexualized crimes against women, terms such as *stalking* and *sexual harassment* are doomed to sound anachronistic, as the historian Ute Frevert demonstrated; *stalking*, for instance, has only been treated as a criminal offense in the United States since the 1990s. In the novella collection *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* (1795; *Recreations of the German Emigrants*, 1854), a community flees from the French Revolution. Goethe draws on endangered virginity as a classic synecdoche for the endangered community. In the novella "Das Pochen" ("The Knocking"; *CW X*: 36), after a young woman has rejected her suitors because she wants to stay with her adoptive family, a beating sound arises that follows her throughout the house; the sound only subsides when the adoptive father threatens to whip the girl to death. One form of male violence drowns out another.² "Die Sangerin Antonelli" ("The Singer Antonelli"; *CW X*: 29) renders the story of yet another woman falling victim to acoustic persecution after having rejected a suitor. The stalking of the female singer turns even more violent, possibly because the rejection by a female libertine is particularly aggravating to a male subject who believes in "the right to sex," a form of entitlement analyzed by the philosophers Amia Srinivasan and Kate Manne (34–40).

"[T]here is not much critical literature addressing Goethe and his works that can be regarded as even remotely feminist" is Gail K. Hart's

sobering assessment from 2005 (10). In regard to a series of eye-opening publications on queer tendencies in Goethe, authors such as W. Daniel Wilson and Catriona MacLeod caution against totalizing such moments of measured gender-fluidity into a larger principle; after all, Goethe's queerness remains restricted to homoeroticism. As far as androgyny is concerned, MacLeod demonstrates that female androgynes equal "female victims" because they "ultimately only serve male completion" in what comes down to a "heterosexual model of androgyny" (425). Most feminists do not even bother dealing with the author of "the Eternal Feminine" (CW II: 309). What surprises could Goethe's gender essentialism possibly hold for them? No big surprises, I will admit—more surprises of the mundane kind. But what #MeToo as well as the discourse on microaggressions have made evident is that aggression does not have to be spectacular in order to cause injury.

Snails in Goethe?

Goethe was mostly interested in plants and, when it came to animals, concentrated his studies on vertebrates, which makes his documented dissection "Anatomie der Schnecke" (1797; Anatomy of the snail) to a certain degree exceptional (FA I.24: 343–45).³ His library holds an inventory of snails, mussels, and corals (see Meyer, *Verzeichniss der Naturalien u. Kunst-Sammlung des verstorbenen Kaufmanns Herrn Johann Peter Meyer in Altona*, 1802; Catalog of the natural history and art collection of the late merchant Mr. Johann Peter Meyer in Altona) as well as several texts on snails authored by Karl Gustav Carus, whose research on the anatomy of snails Goethe published in *Hefte zur Morphologie* (1817–24; Morphological notebooks). Goethe was also in correspondence with Carus (Grosche 36–38, 82–84); his eventual break-up with Carus was prompted by weirdly snail-like behavior on both sides: as Goethe increasingly loathed Carus's social persistence or indeed his stickiness, he himself retreated into snail-like seclusion (Umbreit 43; Allert 265). In his biographical piece on Goethe, Carus reminisces on this distancing, again in snail-like terms: "Goethe, in the feeling of inner softness, hid under the harder shell of formality and thereby depressed and tempted those who were ready to attach to him."⁴

Still, none of this engagement with snails can be called systematic, which may explain why the otherwise perplexing variety of snails that populates Goethe's oeuvre has so far escaped the attention of Goethe scholars: snail anatomy, snail fossils, an ancient wind instrument of the

same name, snails in architecture whose alleged lack of finish upset him, the steep road from Jena to Weimar called *die Schnecke* for whose demolition he arranged (WA III.6: 48, 60, 72).⁵ Finally, in Goethe's *Briefwechsel mit seiner Frau* (1916; Correspondence with his wife) there is a mention of "the ghastly snails" ("die garstigen Schnecken" [129]) in his garden and their consumption of cabbage and cucumbers, which give instance to a lamenting letter from Goethe's lover/housekeeper Christiane Vulpius: "In a single night the snails have eaten up almost everything; my beautiful cucumbers are almost all gone, and I have to start from anew. [. . .] Supposedly, it's a special kind of snail that consumes everything."⁶ In our age of pesticides, the slowness of the snail is often falsely interpreted as peacefulness or as an allegory of *vanitas*, prompting literary critic Harry Berger to offer the following corrective: "Shortness of life is one thing. Damage is another" (15). We must keep the snail's surprisingly gentle, clandestine manner of wreaking havoc in mind if we want to grasp why female authors of psychological thrillers, such as Patricia Highsmith and Karen Duve, feature snails as omens or even literal causes of the death of male protagonists—or why Goethe imagines snails as something that ought to be tamed, finished, demolished, expelled, or killed off.⁷

"Crab and Snail Are Both Rare Creatures to Me"

Eva Geulen's trenchant recent study on Goethe's rodents (or "gnawers"—*Nager*) takes note of two affects evoked by these small animals: first, she excuses her endeavor with the litotes that she followed "a small passion that could not betray itself"⁸; second, Geulen argues that Goethe's writings on rodents were incited by a sense of disquiet ("Beunruhigung" [38]) due to the versatility of the species. Likewise, it is the versatility of the snail that makes it an inconspicuous but regular guest in Goethe's writings insofar as the snail offers a broad range of connotations: the snail as an allegory of *vanitas* versus a machine of destruction; vulnerability versus incorporated protection. Versatility is a precondition for making something appropriable and tropable, for serving as a rich figurative material (Freud calls it "Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit," "considerations of representability" [487]). We will see, however, that this pliability does not result simply in figurative efficiency or semantic density, but also tends toward reversal and dissolution.

The sense of "disquiet" that Geulen discerns in Goethe's writings on

rodents resonates with Goethe's epigram on snails: "Crab and snail are both rare creatures to me" ("Krebs und schnecke zugleich es sind mir seltne geschöpfe"; WA I.53. Supplement: *Lesarten*: H54). The formulation "crab and snail [. . .] both" or, perhaps better, "at once crab and snail" suggests that there exists a taxonomic overlap between the two animals haunting Sartre and Goethe. The adverb *zugleich* is not solely inserted for metrical reasons, to afford the hexameter with a caesura, but it indicates that the connaturality of crab and snail has to do with the way these creatures imbue time with a strong dose of relativity: the crab walks backwards, the snail is legendary for its slowness as well as for leaving behind a trace that stretches between past and future. If we add to this temporal confusion the calcification process, as well as the ability of crabs and snails to survive as fossils, of which Goethe was a collector, archaeological layers of time open up.

Science Snails

Goethe the scientist became infatuated with the search for the ur-origin and its incessant formation (*FA* I.24: 405), understood as both a phenomenon constructed by thought and an existing ur-form, as John Erpenbeck contends (1080). Like the idea of an ur-type, the primordial character of the snail makes us believe that it would not be subject to time and eludes the continuum of metamorphoses that otherwise characterizes nature for Goethe: a form beyond form. Goethe published an announcement for Carus's "Von den Ur-Theilen des Knochen- und Schalengerüstes" (On the ur-parts of the bone structure as well as shell structure) in *Zur Morphologie* (1817; On morphology) that strengthens this link between the snail and the ur-type (*FA* I.24: 552): Carus argues that hollow shells are the precursors for bones and spine and actually render visible the essential trait of bones—separation ("Abgrenzung") from the outside world as well as from other bodily elements. Carus presents the snail as a model for autonomy, isolation, and separation, and it is in this sense that Goethe cites the snail as metaphor whenever he refers to his own *masculine* mode of being. However, most often Goethe depicts the snail as a stickily *feminine*, persecuting form of life encroaching on this very autonomy.

The accompanying affect is "a kind of timidity verging on anxiety," an affect also adumbrated by the ur-type.⁹ The snail is a frightening, regressive force pulling us back into times that should be forgotten for the

sake of progress. The scientific texts in which Goethe most ostentatiously fights back against the specter of snail regression emerged in the vicinity of his collection of aphorisms “Über die Spiraltendenz in der Vegetation” (1829–31; The spiral tendency in vegetation). According to an idea of the time, growth happens because of the interaction of two principles—a vertical and a spiral system. Goethe illustrates their relation with the image of a “vine slinging around an elm tree [. . .], the feminine and the male, the one that needs and the one that gives, side by side in the vertical and spiral direction of nature.”¹⁰

Goethe regards the spiral, so-called female principle with concern because it may lead to “monstrosities”: “The spiral system is the element that develops, expands, nourishes; as such it is short-lived and different from the vertical. Where its effect predominates, it soon grows weak and begins to decay” (CW XII: 106). There is something obviously nonsensical about Goethe’s depiction of the so-called female spiral principle as both nourishing and appropriating (compare Stockhammer 144); recently, Bryan Klausmeyer alerted us to “a proximity between spirality and epistemic confusion” in Goethe (170). In another version, “Über die Spiraltendenz” (1831; On the spiral tendency), Goethe asserts that what forebodes the female degeneration is the becoming *snail-like* of the spiral principle, showing itself in “creeping and crawling” forms of living (the word *snail* derives from Old English *snaegl*, with *snag-/sneg-* meaning “to crawl”).¹¹ Given that Goethe still maintains a dialectical pretension, he cannot simply dispense with the spiral principle, so he introduces another distinction within this system: that of superior plant parts that grow in “a perfect spiral,” and inferior ones that curve “snail-like” (“schneckenartig,” WA II.7: 62). This is another preposterous distinction, given that the perfect snail’s curvature is an important model both for architecture and mathematics (Williams 129).

Given these blatant misattributions, we must ask what is at stake for Goethe. His epigram on snails already invites this sort of subjective approach: “Crab and snail at once are strange creatures to me.” Preparing for his own survival by inserting himself into the epigram as a Great Author-Fossil is an odd move for an epigram that should rather allude to a hidden, objective truth. Apparently, Goethe is already great enough a celebrity that he can imagine his own likes and dislikes to be of general interest. So, what did he find so “rare” or “strange” (*selten*) about snails?

A Persecuting Snail

The German word that I just rendered as “strange” is actually *selten*. Goethe’s particular use of the word *selten* (rare, seldom) is itself rare, as he uses it here in the sense of exceptional or uncanny. Searching for the uncanniest snail in Goethe’s oeuvre brings us to *Faust I*; the first time Mephistopheles appears, he has the shape of a poodle enclosing Faust and Wagner in a snail-spiral (*Schneckenkreise*) (CW II: 152–53). The association of the diabolical with the snail forms part of folk superstition so that snails also haunt the Walpurgis Night, even terrifying Mephistopheles:

Do you see there the snail that’s crawling toward us?
With eyes that only feel and grope
It has already caught a whiff of me—
Here, there’s no denying my identity. (CW II: 4066–69)

Paradoxically, it is the snail’s blindness that guarantees its clairvoyance and immunity to deception. As mentioned, Goethe was familiar with the anatomy of the snail, including its “fumbling face,” consisting of two sets of tentacles, of which the upper, longer ones have eyes at their tips as well as olfactory neurons for smell and taste. Just like Gretchen, who upon coming home is so aghast at the dank air that she opens her window wide, the snail, too, smells its counterpart. Goethe writes elsewhere that one has to use all of one’s “feelers” (“Fühlhörner” of insects as well as snails) in order to “see, know, divine, believe” the Ur-phenomenon.¹²

The snail from the *Walpurgisnacht* also catches the attention of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in “On the Genesis of Stupidity” from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “The emblem of intelligence is the feeler of the snail, the creature ‘with the fumbling face,’ with which, if we can believe Mephistopheles, it also smells” (213–14). The snail’s way of encountering the world offers an alternative to the *Begriff* or concept. Horkheimer and Adorno regard the snail’s vulnerability, embodied in its stretching or reaching feelers, as a condition of possibility for a heightened form of encounter; but these feelers are also the cause of its own loss of this capacity, as Erik Porath warns (91)—a capacity that is by definition unsustainable so that the snail has to withdraw to preserve its most exceptional feature.

This super-snail is followed by a snail-like “dead-pale, lovely child” (CW II: 4184) whose sight is equally arresting, this time however for Faust:

She only slides slowly from her place,
She seems to move with closed feet.
I have to say I can't help thinking
That she looks like good Gretchen. (CW II: 4185–88)¹³

Gretchen “slides slowly [. . .] with closed feet”—a potential prolepsis of the chained Gretchen in the play’s final scene but also a way of depicting the mute Gretchen as snail. With the excursion to the Walpurgis Night, Mephistopheles intended to distract Faust from his creeping bad conscience after having impregnated Gretchen, poisoned her mother, and murdered her brother. Thus, the Gretchen-snail—just like the appearance of an ex at a party—is a bummer; the young, alluring witches are forgotten. Just as the snail and its trace imply connectedness to the past, so Gretchen carries something repressed into the present. If it is her victimhood that is so haunting, then allegorizing her as a snail is pointed—after all, snails are often our first victims; as children we may perform sadistic experiments upon them because they cannot run away or cry. In his essay on *Faust* in *Notes to Literature*, Adorno stresses that Goethe’s tragedy could only continue after *Part I* because at the beginning of *Part II* Faust drinks from the waters of Lethe:

The power of life, as a power of continued life, is equated with forgetting. It is only by passing through forgetting [*durchs Vergessen hindurch*] and thereby being transformed that anything survives at all. This is why *Faust Part Two* has as its prelude the restless sleep of forgetting. (“Final Scene” 120)

Following Paul Fleming’s interpretation, Adorno declares—after the Shoah—that forgetting does not mark an end but that one must go “through oblivion and back [. . .]. Forgetting may prepare salvation, but only the final step of memory after an interval of oblivion produces the ‘boundless joy’ found in redemption” (140). Compared with Goethe’s anti-melancholic attitude, the slowness of the Gretchen snail is a figure of *insistence*: of not being able to move on. The temporality of the Gretchen snail and the set of feelings that informs it perform what Elizabeth Freeman terms *temporal drag* by way of “retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present” (62). Though we are used to calling this kind of formation a “guilty conscience,” this Protestant concept, with its implications of internalization and abstraction, falls short of the scary materiality of the haunting snail, which even throws a wrench into the Romantic topos of the persecuted maiden, whose “most celebrated”

exemplum, in the eyes of Mario Praz, is none other than Gretchen (98). As a stalker snail, Gretchen cannot be reduced to the “victim-character” of the persecuted maiden (113), but rather is a peculiar kind of persecutor and thereby regains a certain agency.

A Persecuted Maiden Snail

There are other reasons, besides the temporal one, for depicting Gretchen as a snail. Goethe’s early dramatic piece *Das Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilern* (1773–78; The fair at Plundersweilern) likens a persecuted maiden to a snail. The farce contains a scene involving a female Tyrolean vendor and a doctor, in whom Goethe’s early editor Karl Julius Schröder means to recognize the poet, as stated in a footnote (244). The stage directions envisage the doctor initially behaving courteously toward the woman; the German formulation is “*er tut artig*.” The Brothers Grimm offer the example phrase “the gentlemen were *not sexually pressuring* [*ganz artig*].”¹⁴ However, courteousness in Goethe’s play may be mere simulation: “The doctor acts courteously [*tut artig*] with the Tyrolean woman while looking at her goods; at last becomes more pressing.”¹⁵ The woman reacts as benevolently as only a female character crafted by a male author could, being understanding with her horny “good friend”:

A gallant girl
Cannot always right away
be yours, my sirs;
If the good friend takes too many liberties.
The snail goes right back in its house.¹⁶

The snail house perfectly images the way in which flirtation, following Georg Simmel, oscillates between advance and retreat, forcing us to temporize (137). At the same time, it allegorizes the persecuted maiden’s point of retreat and the associated affects of shame and guilt.

There exists a well-established relation between the snail and the feminine. “Metaphors of woman as a house or like the snail, which carried its house around on its back, were widespread,” records the medieval historian Susan Karant-Nunn (173). The image of the feminized snail combines homeboundness and martyrdom so that the snail becomes the real sacrificial lamb carrying its cross on its back. But the identification of the snail with women also has to do with fantasies of female sexuality and female genitals, as Michael Camille asserts: “its shape and size linked it to the

genitals of women and hermaphrodites” (35). Thus, in German, French, and Latin slang, “snail” carries the connotation of vulva.

Four Obtuse Snails and a Libertine

The fact that Goethe inserted himself into his epigram on snails offers an entryway to move from Faust to the Gretchen figure in Goethe’s own life: Friederike Brion, a debauched pastor’s daughter who, following Barbara Becker-Cantarino, became one of “many more relationships of ‘welcome and farewell’” (180). Goethe famously ended his relationship with Brion in 1771 via mail, which left Brion—at least according to Goethe folklore—heartbroken and living for the rest of her life bound to her father’s house, and later her brother’s house, like a little snail.

And yet there are moments when even Goethe trips—four snails crossing his path will do. In his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811–33; *The Autobiography of Goethe: Truth and Poetry; From My Own Life*, 1848–49), Goethe reminisces on his feelings prior to his breakup: he experiences acute feelings of anxiety—“the passionate attachment to Friederike was beginning to frighten [ängstigen] me” and “I was scared [ängstigte mich] in Friederike’s presence” (CW IV: 369). I have modified the translation of *ängstigen* here because the translator of *Truth and Poetry*, Robert R. Heitner, renders Friederike’s effect on Goethe as merely making him “uneasy” (CW IV: 369). Goethe’s word choice is more extreme, although that in itself does not explain such a (as we will see) systematic intervention by the translator. Rather, it seems that Heitner is trying to straighten out Goethe’s self-feminizing tone by making his word choice more masculine or masterful. What Heitner misses is that where Goethe describes Friederike’s powerlessness as intimidating and recasts himself as her soon-to-be victim, it might not be just poor word choice but strategy—one would nowadays speak of “blaming the victim.” The most famous Goethean lyrical incident of this kind is a poem dedicated to Friederike titled “Heidenröslein” (“Rosebud in the Heather”; CW 1: 16), in which the lyrical I likens the violence of a young man raping a girl to the violence that she allegedly commits by making him remember his deed. Reflecting on Goethe’s female “scapegoats,” Marc Redfield comes to the conclusion that “the economy of victimage is incapable of true closure” (20); the stalking of maidens will lead to feeling stalked by them, the production of a victim will recoil into the desire to be a victim oneself.

Goethe reports that he found some relief from the torturing thoughts

of Friederike during an outing to the country. What lifts his mood is his overpowering of four snails on a church tower (*Münster*). Goethe proudly reports on a moment when he intuitively recognized that a church tower was unfinished because he thought it was impossible that the “snails” in the architecture—that is, the Ionic volutes—should have had the last word in the tower’s architecture: “I loathe [*es ist mir [. . .] leid*] to see that this tower has not been fully executed. The four snails stood out as way too obtuse [*stumpf*], and four slender spires should have been added on top of them” (CW IV: 370).¹⁷ The parish clerk provides Goethe with the architectonic plan; the latter happily records how he “quickly traced the unexecuted spires” (370). But why did these snails need spires in the first place? Why were they “way too obtuse”? Are they as *stumpf* as the scar commemorated by Horkheimer and Adorno in the line “[B]ut at the point where its impulse has been blocked a subtle scar is left behind, a slight callous where the surface is numb/obtuse (*stumpf*)” (296)? According to Horkheimer and Adorno, what appears *stumpf* to us is caused by traumatic experience: a violent encounter that prompts the snail to withdraw its feelers, to lose curiosity in the world. Can Goethe perhaps not bear the responsibility for the scar that he is going to inflict on Friederike—a trauma that the critical theorists liken to the crippling of the snail’s feelers? Is this why Goethe puts the feelers back on the snail, in the form of four phallic spires?

Snail Envy

“In spite of all the stress and confusion, I still could not forswear to see Friederike once more. Those were distressing [*peinliche*] days, the memory of which I do not retain” (CW IV: 370).¹⁸ The transition in the autobiography from the four snails on the spire to Friederike would have to be called abrupt if it were not for the slimy trace of *female victimhood* that allows Goethe to slither from the four overpowered snails to his soon-to-be ex. Goethe vindicates female weakness by claiming it for himself: he presents himself as having been made obtuse (“I do not retain”) with his feelers crippled by the trauma Friederike inflicted upon *him*, rather than having dumped a pastor’s daughter.¹⁹

Goethe’s texts show how patriarchal ideology first projects weakness on feminized beings, then ridicules them for this inferiority, and eventually grows terrified of this feminine weakness. Consequently, the snails in Goethe figure as both victim and aggressor, or figure victimhood *as* ag-

gression. “A girl’s reasons for withdrawing back [*zurückzieht*] always seem valid; a man’s never” (CW IV: 369). Goethe superimposes his own discontent onto Friederike’s misery, climaxing in the narcissistic line, “the worst of it was, I couldn’t forgive myself for my own misfortune” (385).²⁰

Barbara Johnson’s classic essay “Muteness Envy” traces the *vying* for victimhood throughout literary history: “Why are so many white men so eager to claim a share in the victimhood sweepstakes? Why did Petrarch, the father of the love sonnet, insist that it was he, not Laura, who was wounded, burned, enslaved, and penetrated by love?” (152). Following Johnson, the fact that men have historically forced women into silence had the unexpected effect of transforming female silence into an aesthetic achievement. This reappraisal of victimhood in turn led to attempts by male authors to reclaim the now coveted muteness or victimhood for themselves. Of late, Manne writes of a similar maneuver as “the often overlooked mirror image of misogyny: *himpathy*” (197), which she defines as “the flow of sympathy away from female victims toward their male victimizers” (23). The two absolute temporal adverbs “always” and “never” in Goethe’s androcentric sententia “The reasons of a girl who retreats always seem valid, those of a man never” lend it an authoritative and at the same time childlike tone: *You are always allowed to do X, I am never!* From the moment Goethe takes the position of an early men’s rights activist, a regression sets off that lets him morph into a snail, with the semantic field mimicking movements of withdrawal and retreat. Goethe made use of the metaphor of snail retreat already in letters to his friend Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi where he likens his state of living to snail seclusion: “I live now like a snail, withdrawn into the house” or also “like a snail I will cover my door with a crust” as well as in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795–96; *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, 1824).²¹ When Goethe turns his lodging into a snail’s house, it always generates a certain queering; this is because Goethe is squatting in a zone that is mostly coded feminine but actually is also trans, asexual, and queer: *trans* because some snails switch sexes but also because the etymology of the word *Schnecke* is in flux (whereas in Middle High German the word is masculine, in Modern High German it becomes feminine); *asexual* insofar as the pregnancy of the “Virgin Snail” (to borrow Helen Ettliger’s denomination [316]) posed a riddle for centuries; and *queer*, because many snails are hermaphroditic, as the Dutch biologist Jan Swammerdam discovered in the seventeenth century, thereby finally solving the riddle of snail procreation (Cobb 40). The snail upsets the binary system of sexuality and thereby succeeds in something to

which Goethe aspires, namely, destabilizing the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator. Incorporating snails redeems the androcentric self by appropriating the sexual Other.

And yet whoever thinks that snails would silently endure being instrumentalized by patriarchy is wrong: snails carry on their backs excess semiotic baggage, which undermines the symbolic order. The snail's fluidity shakes up the principle of taxonomy—so much so that Hegel warns that snails and other invertebrates pose a taxonomical confusion between vegetative and animal life because, while moving around like animals, snails reproduce their body parts like plants. This capacity of the snail to repair, regrow, and hibernate adds to its image as a revenant. The snail's upsetting of both linear temporality and taxonomic order prompts Hegel to treat garden slugs as a paradigmatic case of "the impotence of nature."²²

Goethe's own disquiet about snails arises first and foremost from the realm of the erotic. His fantasies of snail seclusion mirror the contradiction inherent in libertinage: the libertine pursues, but the relationship is asymmetrical because he will perceive any counter-pursuit as curtailing his freedom—which means he can at the same time be on the hunt for the snail and feel persecuted by the snail. In his annals, Goethe justifies this feeling of persecution by the feminine: "[I]f, as it happens in love, a man has opened his innermost, and has given himself up, then this is a present that he cannot possibly take back, and it would be impossible to damage a once beloved being and to leave it unprotected."²³ Thinking of the fates bestowed upon Gretchen or Friederike, Goethe's statement seems preposterous—except from the perspective of a male libertine who tries to pass as a woman by surrounding himself with clichés of female vulnerability and powerlessness.

Mme de Snail

It is Goethe's good luck that his statement in praise of men comes from *another* woman: the Swiss writer Anne Louise Germaine de Staël-Holstein, aka Mme de Staël. Ostracized from Paris by Napoleon, de Staël embarked in 1803 on a trip to Germany, including two months in Weimar, where she researched her book *De l'Allemagne* (1813; *Germany*, 1813). A sentence by de Staël allegedly prompted Goethe's own: "[De Staël] also once said: 'I don't trust a man who hasn't loved me.'" Although a statement like this hardly requires a response, Goethe puts a spire on the snail, so to speak: "This remark is correct."²⁴ Mansplaining de Staël, Goethe slyly contrasts

male loyalty with de Staël's supposed promiscuity—after all, she had arrived in Weimar in the company of her children as well as the younger Benjamin Constant. De Staël is yet another woman who elicits terror in Goethe—however, not because he feels smothered by female victimhood but rather because he is face-to-face with his equal: a female libertine and powerful intellectual.

Goethe likens the arrival of de Staël to an illness-bringing winter storm: “Winter had arrived in all its violence; roads were snowed in, no getting through on the Snail. Frau von Staël announced herself ever more urgently.”²⁵ The road to Weimar, called “the Snail,” is closed off, and Goethe himself is housebound in Jena, presumably with a nasty cold. He pontificates that the bad weather as well as his sickness were the reasons why “a part of the stay of this strange woman [*dieser seltenen Frau*] became historical to me”—a brilliantly bitchy line, not least because of the adjective *selten*.²⁶ The formulation “this strange woman” reappears in a letter from the end of February 1804 (*FA* II.5: 470). In an earlier version, the adjective is “extraordinary” (“*dieser außerordentlichen Frau*”; *WA* I.35: 311), but then Goethe decided on the more ambiguous *selten*. We have come across this adjective before: “Crab and snail at the same time are rare creatures to me.” So rare or strange is Goethe's use of the adjective that the Brothers Grimm cite his depiction of de Staël, adding: “The emphasis on the concept of queerness” makes sense, given that the latter “is naturally connected with that of infrequency, unusualness.”²⁷

De Staël's perceived queerness becomes a point of attack so that Goethe's friend, the critic and annalist of Weimar, Karl August Böttiger, slanders her: “people said she is a mannish woman [*Mannweib*] [. . .]; too ugly to conquer through the belt of Venus.”²⁸ One is reminded of the poignant observation by the French collective Tiqqun: “The woman in power exercises a phallogocentric authority, minus the nuts [. . .]: she occupies an unconsciously comical position and she doesn't get the joke” (75). Thus, through the queer word *selten*, Mme de Staël metamorphoses into Mme de Snail: a dangerous, ugly man-woman armored with feelers to spy on Germany's great minds—or at least so fears Goethe, who starts to resemble Mephistopheles confronted with the super-reader snail. Goethe goes into hiding when de Staël arrives in Weimar: “For some time Goethe was or thought he was sick,” Böttiger reports snappishly; someone else jokes: “You know that Goethe is indisposed; I don't want to say sick.”²⁹ The accounts of Goethe fleeing Mme de Snail are reminiscent of medieval margin images that depict how “a knight drops his armour and flees from

the gigantic gastropod”—an image suggestive of “the vice of cowardice” (Camille 35).

Writing to Schiller, Goethe refers to de Staël as “the intrusive neighbor” (“die zudringliche Nachbarin”; *FA* II.5: 442), with *zudringlich* having connotations of sexual harassment. In the *Paralipomena* to the year 1804, Goethe complains that “she takes a momentary withdrawnness to the outside as the highest crime,” and undergirds his evaluation with “a little story” (“ein Geschichtchen”).³⁰ One day, de Staël stormed in with the news of the imprisonment of Jean Victor Moreau; apparently, neither Goethe nor Schiller was prepared to discuss the news, because it was indeed news to them. On Christmas Eve 1803, de Staël wrote to her father that Goethe, Schiller, and Wieland do not read the newspaper (*FA* II.5: 433). As if defending himself against this criticism, Goethe first blames de Staël for his silence (“her story closed me up immediately”) and then presents his muteness as deliberate because only by foreclosing himself to the “continuous observation of world-events” was he able to protect his capacity to “intuit the world-historical value of a piece of news, to make the past present to myself and to stretch out my feelers [*Fühlhörner*] towards the future.”³¹ Goethe knew the news by not knowing the news, because his way of knowing is higher than the empirical. Simultaneously, through words like “withdrawnness,” “closing oneself up,” and “feelers,” the semantic field lets Goethe morph into a snail again. Now we are dealing with two snails: a mute Goethe-snail forced back into its snail house by another, aggressively talkative French Snail. The men of Weimar cannot stop talking about de Staël’s refusal to hold back in conversation: Böttiger notices that her mouth is split far too widely (347), and Goethe quotes Schiller saying that the only annoying thing about de Staël is “the totally egregious skill of her tongue, which means one must become all ear.”³² Goethe sharpens this verdict—“as a woman and a French woman” (“als Frau und Französin”; *FA* I.17: 128), de Staël is incapable of listening: “As she had no concept of what we call duty and of the kind of quiet, unfazed demeanor that someone, who resolves himself to duty, must embrace, so she wanted people to continuously intervene, immediately to produce effects, always to talk and discuss.”³³ The dutiful person is naturally Goethe himself: a paragon of male muteness, who describes himself at events with de Staël as “in quiet reflection,” “ruminating in thought,” or “again, quiet and more contemplative.”³⁴ He cannot contain his satisfaction when “Mme de Stael finally perceived the accusation of my silence [*die Anklage meines Schweigens*]” (*FA* I.17: 129). Apparently, Goethe’s muteness is not

so mute after all but is meant to intimidate; Goethe and his “silent-smart” (*stillkluge*; *FA* I.17: 127) friends are actually giving the loquacious lady the silent treatment. In “Muteness Envy,” Johnson holds that male muteness is just another way of exercising power:

Far from being the opposite of authority, victimhood would seem to be the most effective *model* for authority, particularly literary and cultural authority. It is not that the victim always gets to speak—far from it—but that the most highly valued speaker gets to claim victimhood. [. . .] If feminism is so hotly resisted, it is perhaps less because it substitutes women’s speech for women’s silence than because, in doing so, it interferes with the official structures of self-pity that keep patriarchal power in place, and, in the process, tells the truth behind the beauty of muteness envy. (153)

There is nothing transient about male victimhood: patriarchy is men getting to decide to make their suffering dominant and powerful. Feminism, just like the snails destroying Goethe’s garden or like de Staël chasing Goethe back into his snail house, breaks with the logic of victimhood as authority. Whereas all other snails that we encountered (the harassed girl from *Das Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilern*, the super-reader snail, the Gretchen snail from *Faust*, the four church-tower snails) were mute, Mme de Staël is the snail that talks back. With this, the snail in Goethe oscillates between talkative and mute, or “between the poles of phallic woman and sentimental victim” (20), to borrow Redfield’s characterization. In the end, Goethe did not succeed in silencing her as one of his most explicit critics, as Torsten Unger documents (136–44). *De l’Allemagne* makes reference to Goethe and his works, sometimes praising, sometimes dispraising, including his (mis)treatment of female characters:

The story of Margaret is oppressively painful to the heart. Her low condition, her confined intellect, all that renders her subject to misfortune, without giving her the power of resisting it, all this inspires us with the greater compassion for her. Goethe, in his novels and in his plays, has scarcely ever bestowed any superior excellence upon his female personages, but he describes with wonderful exactness that character of weakness which renders protection so necessary to them. (de Staël 376)

De Staël’s irony could not be drier: she praises Goethe’s exactitude in portraying women as weak as an *effet de réel*, as something invented—

the most literary reproduction of a very refined ideology. Gretchen or Margarete is the product of a narcissistic structure that allows Goethe and his readers to identify with the megalomaniac male position, which is paradoxically *dependent* on the fantasy of having the power to either protect or destroy a woman. De Staël's laying bare of the structure itself is subversive, because it shows how men need to produce female weakness in order to feel strong.

What do we commonly do with an unruly woman who will not shut up? We try to find ways to discredit her, today most commonly with the terms *bitch* or *slut*. In the case of de Staël, Goethe employs both strategies. In his early notes on the year 1804, Goethe admits that “the nature and way of this extraordinary [*außerordentlichen*; later changed to *seltnen*] woman was opposed to my own and off-putting to me.”³⁵ Later he alters and eventually cuts the passage. Why this elision? Maybe because opposition structurally presupposes equality. When Goethe mocks de Staël's “passionate formlessness” in a letter, this resonates with his view of the snail's anatomy as a zone of indistinction (*FA* I.24: 343), which Goethe was anxious to clarify, as Manfred Wenzel explains (632–33).³⁶ But by calling de Staël formless, Goethe also implicitly presents her once more as his opposite, because *Goethe* stands in for *form*. Likewise, Böttiger reports that a “lovely and keenly observing woman” described Goethe as “far more form and formal intuition [*Anschauung*] [than de Staël]. Now just imagine two psyches organized against each other in this way, touching and attracting one another in perpetual alternation, and then fleeing and repelling one another.”³⁷ The people of Weimar perceive de Staël and Goethe as antagonists but are eager to defuse this tension as erotic. The one who profits from this sexual reduction is naturally the male. In later editions, Goethe isolates the most insinuating passage from his annals and publishes it under a separate heading as “Relation to Madame de Staël”:

[H]er presence was intellectually as well as physically provocative [*etwas reizendes*] and she did not seem to mind if one was not un-receptive in this latter regard, too. How often may she have melted together sociability, favor, affinity, and passion.³⁸

Goethe takes recourse to the subjunctive (“How often may she have . . .”) in order to plant a sexist rumor against the female intellectual. Then, to make sure his bawdy remark is not interpreted as a sign of true affection, he ridicules her appearance in a sentence bordering on a death-threat in a

remark to Charlotte von Stein: “Goethe said of [de Staël] that if she were pretty one would have to kill her.”³⁹ The power of the libertine is predicated on not being overpowered by one single person; his self-identity, based upon sexual dominance or mastery, is also self-mastery. If there is an object that threatens the sexual mastery of the libertine then self-identity is also undone; as a consequence, the threatening object must be undone. So, if we *must* nonetheless talk about sex in regard to Goethe and de Staël, let it be snail sex—famously strange, prolonged, aggressive: a foreplay of biting for an hour or more until a dart “equipped with four blades is forcibly ejected from one snail into the body of the other” (Williams 92–3). In his monograph *Snails*, the British natural historian Peter Williams concludes: “there is no hiding place from conflict and competition” (100).

Snails Stalking Snails Stalking . . .

What just happened is something one generally wants to avoid in an analysis: the concept guiding my investigation has proliferated to the extent that everything has become snail—the persecuted and persecuting maiden, the persecuting and persecuted male libertine, the bitch snail chasing the libertine, who is then slut-shamed by the libertine. We are dealing with two models that are reversible: the first, in which Goethe imagines the woman as victim retreating as a snail, and the second, in which he hijacks the victimhood model and presents *himself* retreating like a snail. But then there appears a third model that does not seem to be part of this reversibility—this is the case when the empowered woman is likened to a snail. The effect of this multiplication is that the stigmatization is no longer coherent. This is also the point of my investigation: the figure of the snail in Goethe insists beyond its logical application—it becomes overtly symptomatic, a sticky symptom.

The symptom-character of the snail carries structural implications; as a symptom, the snail surfaces in Goethe only in the form of a detail. Because art historians are trained to look out for details, it has been Daniel Arasse, Michael Camille, and Helen Ettlinger (not to mention moonlighting literary critic Harry Berger) who have warned against, as Camille puts it, “over-zealous symbol-seeking” when reading snails and have alerted us to their iconographic instability in religious paintings, still lifes, and book margins. When the sixty-one-year-old Goethe, at the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, is confronted with such a marginal snail in the

foreground of Francesco del Cossa's *The Annunciation* (1470–72), he is quick to dismiss this snail to the curious young painter Louise Seidler:

“This snail is an embellishment, my girlfriend, which the painter’s whim added here (I will pick you up in my car today, we will go for a ride!)” he quickly whispered into my ear in passing; then he continued in his earlier tone: “Painters often have such phantasies and intuitions, not always based in a deeper relation.” He now concluded his lesson, as if he had not made that interpolation. Around evening, the carriage really arrived [. . .]. This happened several times; I experienced most delicious hours [. . .].⁴⁰

A metonymic slime allows Goethe’s thoughts to glide from snail to snail-mail to mail coach until the young woman finally slips into his coach. Goethe takes advantage of the poetic potency of del Cossa’s snail in the same moment in which he trashes it as a negligible embellishment. Is Goethe pretending to be obtuse when treating the (actually hotly contested) virgin snail as a signifier without a signified, à la Barthes’s sense of *lobtus*? “The snail must obviously have some purpose other than decorative,” Ettliger states matter-of-factly (316), whereas Arasse loses patience with spectators of the Goethean kind: “and don’t go telling me that it’s merely the painter’s ‘whim’” (18). Is Goethe phobically fleeing snails from the past? The snail in Goethe appears as a parapraxis, a Freudian slip, which has the potential to disclose the author’s true intentions—namely, to enjoy libertinage as a male privilege without having to worry about being haunted by the specter of female victimhood.

However, reducing the snail to the status of a detail does not make it go away—because like “the feminine with which it has so long been linked,” the detail might triumph in the end, as Naomi Schor gives to consideration (6). Howard Bloch explains that the misogynist representation of women as ornamentation is informed by a “deep mistrust of the body and of the materiality of signs” (14). And indeed, Adolf Loos’s gendered modernist theory of the ornament finds the most repugnant materialization of the outdated ornament in a “woman’s ball outfit” (172)—for Loos, the future belongs to the male spirit, embodied by none other than Goethe (168).

Here, the snail crawls into view again: though only a detail, it is impossible to avert one’s gaze from its slimy, vulnerable physicality, which poses an offense against male paradigms of abstraction, idealization, and

Goethe's classical facade. Berger marvels that the violence of the snail in Baroque still lifes shows "how one touch of counter-violence can upset—or at least diminish—allegory's assault" (84). However, the materiality of the snail also gives rise to its versatility and ultimately its reversibility, which allows Goethe to hijack the snail, putting on a spectacle of masculine self-victimization. Ironically, what ruins the snail-impostor-show is a male habituation to power: Goethe cannot hold the snail pose; presenting himself as the victim of a bitch snail, he breaks character and demands from de Staël to hear "the accusation of my silence." Likewise, after just having lauded male chivalry, he murderously hisses about de Staël: "If she were pretty one would have to kill her." The impostor snail aims to gain the status of the victim while enjoying the snail's sense of protection. But what a snail researcher like Williams knows is that all this can only be had at the cost of a real vulnerability: "A snail's apparent vulnerability is coupled with an ability to accept the hostility of its environment" (64)—a credo for any kind of activism that stays truthful to the suffering that gave rise to it.

All this is not to say that snails would not be violent. The snail destroys patriarchy one cucumber at a time, thereby turning the feminine virtue of household-management against itself. It is a violence *sui generis*, inimitable, and in this quality it perhaps prefigures a new feminism. If the dominant male discourse is unable or unwilling to see in victimhood anything but a coveted status that it tries to absorb and appropriate by mimicry, then feminism in turn must stay truthful to the experience of violence while translating it into new forms of coexistence.

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Notes

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2. Based on the translation from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Collected Works*; further references to this edition [CW] will be cited by volume and page numbers.

3. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke (Frankfurter Ausgabe)*; further references to this edition [FA] will be cited by volume and page numbers.

4. "Goethe, im Gefühl der inneren Weichheit, verbarg sich unter der härtern Schale der Förmlichkeit und drückte und reizte dadurch die, welche an ihn sich anzuschließen bereit waren" (113–14). All English translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

5. *Goethes Werke (Weimarer Ausgabe)*; further references to this edition [WA] will be cited by volume and page numbers.

6. "In Einer Nacht haben mir die Schnecken beinahe alles aufgefressen, meine schöne Gurken sind fast alle weg, und ich muß wieder von vorne anfangen. [. . .] Es soll eine besondere Art Schnecken sein, die alles aufzehren" (127–29).

7. See Highsmith's "The Snail-Watcher" and "The Quest for *Blank Claveringi*" in *Eleven* and Duve's *Regenroman*.

8. "[E]iner kleinen Leidenschaft, die sich nicht untreu werden konnte" (7).

9. "[E]ine Art von Scheu bis zur Angst" (FA I.13: 354, see also 19).

10. "[D]ie Rebe, die sich um den Ulmbaum schlingt [. . .], das Weibliche und Männliche, das Bedürftige, das Gewährende neben einander in verticaler und spiraler Richtung von der Natur" (WA II.7: 67).

11. "[R]ankenden und kriechenden" (WA II.7: 345).

12. "[S]chauen, wissen, ahnen, glauben" (FA II.10: 473).

13. I have modified Stuart Atkins's translation here first for the sake of retaining the strange, snail-like language ("schiebt sich [. . .] mit geschloss'nen Füßen"; FA I.7: 4186); Atkins speaks of Gretchen's feet being "in fetters" (FA 1.7/1: 4186), which preempts the ending. Second, Atkins's emotional "my own dear Gretchen" in place of Faust's distanced reference to "dem guten Gretchen" (FA 1.7/1: 4188) gives the impression that the translator were telling Faust: "Once more with feeling!"

14. "Die Herren waren ganz artig (*nicht zudringlich*)" (vol. I, cols. 1–5).

15. "Der Doktor tut artig mit der Tirolerin während des Beschauens der Waren; wird zuletzt dringender" (act 2, lines 126–27).

16. "Nicht immer, immer gleich / Ist ein galantes Mädchen, / Ihr Herren, für euch; / Nimmt sich der gute Freund zuviel heraus / gleich ist die Schneck' in ihrem Haus" (act 2, lines 116–19).

17. Again, Heitner dampens Goethe's word choice by mistranslating "es ist mir [. . .] leid" as "I am sorry to see"; "etwas leid sein" is different from "etwas tut einem leid" insofar as the former phrase indicates vexation (*Verdruß*; see *Grimmsches Wörterbuch*, vol. XII, cols. 651–68). In effect, Goethe is not expressing regret so much as real annoyance about the snails on the church.

18. Where Goethe speaks of "peinlich," which in his time still meant "painful," Heitner translates the phrase to "difficult," imagining a more stoic Goethe.

19. Barbara Hahn gathers three formulations from Goethe and Charlotte von Stein's romantic correspondence (66), in which Goethe likens himself to "obtuse" mussels and hollow shells: "Please pardon my being a bit obtuse [*stumpf*]. Sometimes I feel like a magical oyster over which strange waves pass" ("Manchmal komm ich mir vor wie eine magische Auster über die seltsame Wellen weggehen"; *WA* IV.20: 30).

20. I slightly alter Heitner's translation here ("the worst of it was, I was responsible for my own unhappiness"), because the vocabulary of responsibility is absent from Goethe's account.

21. "Ich lebe jetzt wie eine Schnecke, eingezogen ins Haus" (*WA* IV.9: 38); "[U]nd werde wie die Schnecke eine Kruste über meine Thüre ziehen" (*WA* IV.6: 369).

22. "[D]ie Ohnmacht der Natur" (510, §368).

23. "[W]enn wie in der Liebe geschieht ein Mann sein Inneres aufgeschlossen und sich hingeeben hat so ist das ein Geschenk das er nicht zurücknehmen kann und es würde unmöglich seyn ein sonst geliebtes Wesen zu beschädigen oder ungeschützt zu lassen" (*FA* I.17: 388).

24. "[A]uch sagte sie einmal: 'ich habe niemals einem Manne vertraut der nicht einmal in mich verliebt gewesen wäre.' Die Bemerkung ist richtig" (*FA* I.17: 388).

25. "Der Winter hatte sich mit aller Gewalt eingefunden, die Wege waren verschneit, auf der Schnecke kein Fortkommen. Frau von Stael kündigte sich immer dringender an" (*FA* I.17: 125).

26. "[W]ard mir nun ein Theil des Aufenthaltes dieser seltenen Frau historisch" (*FA* I.17: 126).

27. "[M]it hervorhebung des begriffs der eigenartigkeit, der sich naturgemäsz mit dem der unhäufigkeit, ungewöhnlichkeit verknüpft" (vol. XVI, col. 544).

28. "[S]ie sei ein Mannweib [. . .], zu hässlich [..], um durch den Gürtel der Venus zu erobern" (347).

29. "Goethe war oder hielt sich wenigstens eine Zeitlang für krank"; "Sie wissen doch daß Göthe unpaß ist, krank mag ich nicht sagen" (*FA* II.5: 436, 439).

30. "[E]ine momentane Verschlossenheit nach außen [war] höchstes Verbrechen" (*WA* I.35: 311).

31. "Da ich nun überhaupt mich im fortdauernden Anschauen von Weltereignissen zu erhalten suche, wodurch ich in der Stimmung bleibe, den welthistorischen Werth einer Neuigkeit zu ahnen, mir das Vorhergehende zu vergegenwärtigen und in die Zukunft meine Fühlhörner auszustrecken, so verschloß mich ihre Erzählung freylich sogleich" (*WA* I.35: 311).

32. "Das einzige Lästige ist die ganz ungewöhnliche Fertigkeit ihrer Zunge, man muß sich ganz in ein Gehörorgan verwandeln um ihr folgen zu können" (*FA* I.17: 122).

33. "Da sie keinen Begriff hatte von dem was Pflicht heißt und zu welcher stillen gefaßten Lage sich derjenige der sie übernimmt entschließen muß, so sollte immerfort eingegriffen, augenblicklich gewirkt, so wie in der Gesellschaft immer gesprochen und verhandelt werden" (*FA* I.17: 127).

34. "[S]tilles Nachdenken," "in meinem Grübeln verharrend," "auch für diesmal still und mehr nachdenklich" (*FA* I.17: 128–29).

35. “[S]o war die Natur und Weise dieser außerordentlichen Frau der meinigen entgegengesetzt und unbequem” (WA I.35: 311).
36. “[P]assionierte Formlosigkeit” (FA II.5: 547).
37. “[S]agte eine liebenswürdige und scharf beobachtende Frau [. . . :] Er ist in allem weit mehr Form und formelle Anschauung.—Man denke sich nun diese zwei so organisirten Psychen gegeneinander, im ewigen Wechsel sich berührend und anziehend, und dann wieder sich fliehend und abstoßend” (FA II.5: 472).
38. “Verhältnis zu Frau von Staël [. . .] Ihre Gegenwart hatte etwas reizendes in geistigem und körperlichem Sinne und sie schien es nicht übel zu nehmen wenn man von dieser Seite gerührt war, wie oft mochte sie Geselligkeit Wohlwollen Neigung und Leidenschaft zusammengeschmolzen haben” (FA I.17: 388).
39. “Goethe hat von ihr [Mme de Staël] gesagt wen [sic] sie hübsch wäre müste man sie umbringen” (FA II.5: 473).
40. “Diese Schnecke ist ein Zierrath, meine Freundin, welchen die Laune des Malers hier angebracht hat. (Ich hole Sie heute mit dem Wagen ab, wir fahren zusammen spazieren!)’ flüsterte er mir dazwischen in aller Schnelligkeit zu; dann fuhr er in seinem vorigen Tone fort: ‘Die Maler haben oft solche Phantasien und Einfälle, denen nicht immer eine tiefere Beziehung zum Grunde liegt.’ Er beendete nun seine Belehrung, als sei jene Einschaltung gar nicht gemacht worden. Gegen Abend kam wirklich der Wagen [. . .]. So geschah es mehrmals; ich erlebte köstlichste Stunden” (WA, *Supplement: Conversations II*: 329–30). I briefly take up this scene in my article “Slut-Shaming Metaphorologies.”

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