

Slut-Shaming Metaphorologies: On Sexual Metaphor in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*

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Sucked-Out Lemons

Few sexual metaphors are so striking as Immanuel Kant's use of a lemon in the *Lectures on Ethics*. In the paragraph "Of Duties to the Body in Regard to the Sexual Impulse," Kant critically opposes the sexual inclination (*Geschlechterneigung*) to the higher love of the human (*Menschenliebe*) and criticizes those who merely have sexual inclination: "In loving from sexual inclination, they make the person into an object of their appetite. As soon as the person is possessed, and the appetite sated, they are thrown away, as one throws away a lemon after sucking the juice from it."¹ When comparing sex to sucking out a lemon, Kant appears to be using the word *Zitrone* as a metalepsis of the English *lemon*, for in Renaissance England *lemons*, *lemans*, or *lemmans* all figure promiscuous lovers, derivative of the Middle English *leofmon* or *leofman*—literally "man-dear" or dear to a man.² Hence, we find

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1. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Peter Heath, ed. Heath and J. B. Schneewind (New York, 2001), p. 156.

2. In George Gascoigne's *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres Bounde Up in One Small Poesie* (1573), the lyrical I finds in his girlfriend's pocket a letter by her old lover ("old leman"); he confronts her in epistolary form that he found "a leman which [he] looked not" and "will (henceforth) take lemans as [he] find[s] them." The indignant lover replies, "A lemon (but

examples, surprisingly close to Kant's, of people being used "like an orange, squeezed of its juice, and thrown away."³ Around the same time, oranges and lemons serve to figure mistresses, prostitutes, as well as more *narrowly* the vagina.

The lemon is the perfect example to ease our way into the discussion of sexual metaphor and slut-shaming metaphorologies in specific. It shows how a metaphor that starts off as neutral and applying to all sexes turns pejorative when it is applied to the female sex alone. Thus, while according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "lemans" (lemons and lemmans) originally refer to men and women alike, as soon as the meaning of *lemon* is "chiefly applied to the female sex" it becomes pejorative: *sexual metaphor* + *woman* = *sluttiness*.⁴ Luckily, the meanings of sexual metaphors have the tendency to multiply and wander towards the limits of signification thus resulting in a certain queerness (as in Roosevelt Sykes's influential blues tune "She Squeezed My Lemon" from 1937: "Now you can squeeze my lemon . . . 'til the juice run down my leg, baby, you know what I'm talking about").⁵ Finally, Kant's example serves as a reflection on the traditional philosophical way of mobilizing metaphor as secondary means, as an illustration of something else. Jacques Derrida calls this approach to metaphors "usage"—in philosophical discourse metaphors resemble sucked-out lemons, discarded or leftover material.⁶ In comparison, literature's rapport to metaphor is imagined to be a bond of love, rather than an instrumental relation. So what counts as a slutty metaphor or a slutty use of metaphor in literature?

no leman) Sir you found, / For lemans bear their name to broad before / But take your lemans henceforth where you lust, / For I will show my letters where I trust" (George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres Bounde Up in One Small Poesie* [London, 1573], p. 1061).

3. Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, 3 vols. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1994), s.v. "cunt," 1:350.

4. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "leman."

5. Roosevelt Sykes and Arthur McKay, "She Squeezed My Lemon," *Roosevelt Sykes Vol. 5 (1937–1939)* (Document DOCD-5120, 1992).

6. Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," trans. F. C. T. Moore, *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1974): 25, 58.

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Goethe the Stud

There is no other author in German literature whose sexual life has been subject to as much obsession as that of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. “The poet’s biography was constructed along a string of ever-fascinating sexual experiences with women,” writes Barbara Becker-Cantarino, thus summarizing the situation.⁷ The phantasma of Goethe’s sexual prowess is an appealing source of identification for certain of his readers, even as it is too sordid or unsavory for others. Gero von Wilpert’s popular introduction to Goethe, for instance, has chapters such as “Woman and Love” with ten subchapters including “What Was Goethe’s Attitude towards Sex?” as well as those tackling questions such as “Did Goethe Have Sexually Transmitted Diseases?” or “Was Goethe Homosexual?”⁸ A whole legion of primarily male historians and literary scholars are busy counting Goethe’s lovers and dividing them into platonic and nonplatonic ones, trying to decide whether his relationship with the lady-in-waiting Charlotte von Stein was consummated or whether it only served as a cover-up for a more sultry affair with the Dower Duchess Anna Amalia; one debates the date of Goethe’s first intercourse and whether it indeed happened with Faustina in Rome. Some argue that this latter plebeian adventure left Goethe with a great taste for great sex, which then made him live in a wild marriage with his lover/housekeeper Christiane Vulpius. The phantasy of Goethe the Stud is still very much alive—so much so that in a recent article entitled “Super Goethe” in the *New York Review of Books*, Ferdinand Mount felt the need to oppose once more those who dare question Goethe’s sexual appetite:

Goethe was a boundless, energetic, uninhibited character who happened to be the most famous author in Germany. In his early twenties he had boasted to his friend Kestner: “Between you and me I know something about girls.” His first letters from Weimar record that “I’m leading a pretty wild life here.” It was common gossip that almost as part of his duties, he was constantly out with the duke sharing the local girls.⁹

In the same spirit, Robert J. Richards quotes in his chapter “Goethe, A Genius for Poetry, Morphology, and Women” from the famous letter, which von Stein received in January 1775 after having inquired about

7. Barbara Becker-Cantarino, “Goethe and Gender,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed. Lesley Sharpe (New York, 2002), p. 179.

8. Gero von Wilpert, *Die 101 wichtigsten Fragen: Goethe* (Munich, 2007), pp. 58, 59, 18, 19.

9. Ferdinand Mount, “Super Goethe,” review of *Goethe: Life as a Work of Art* by Rüdiger Safranski, trans. David Dollenmayer, *New York Review of Books*, 21 Dec. 2017, www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/12/21/super-goethe

the author of *Werther*, who was moving to Weimar; her friend Georg Zimmermann relates that a “woman of the world” told him that Goethe “is the most handsome, liveliest, most original, fieriest, stormiest, softest, most seductive, and for the heart of a woman, the most dangerous *man* that she had ever seen in her life.”¹⁰ In this essay I am going to map out an alternative trajectory that will lead us from this commonplace of Goethe the Stud to the counterintuitive idea of Goethe the Slut—via the trace of a slug.

Philine the Slut

Sexuality is ubiquitous in Goethe’s texts yet hard to locate. This has to do with the economy of metaphor, a compromise formation forced upon Goethe by censoring mechanisms such as editors and superegos. Goethe’s obscene oeuvre was published with great delay, due to attempts to save the German national monument from being soiled by his own dirty words.¹¹ Today we can access many of these texts, the most (in)famous being the Walpurgis Night scene from *Urfaust*, the *Erotica Romana*, which under Friedrich Schiller’s editorial hand was chastened into the *Roman Elegies*, and the *Venetian Epigrams*; one of the more obscure examples is *Hanswurst’s Wedding* featuring a hundred vulgar characters, among them “Ursel with the cold hole,” “Cock Body Servant,” and “Ladykiller Project-Maker.”¹²

So far no word of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795), a bildungsroman that is all about the renunciation of bodily pleasures for the sake of the aesthetic.¹³ Indeed the novel presents a work of sublimation, in the sense that the earlier fragment *Wilhelm Meister’s Theatrical Calling* (1777–85) held more erotic scenes, songs, and puns.¹⁴ The most graphic passage was devoted to Wilhelm’s sexual initiation by the promiscuous older actress Mariane. Friedrich Kittler draws attention to the fact that Wilhelm’s mother from the *Ur-Meister*—a sexually active, unfaithful ur-mother—is killed off in the *Apprenticeship* by being displaced into a minor character

10. Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago, 2002), p. 358, my emphasis.

11. See W. Daniel Wilson, *Goethes Erotica und die Weimarer “Zensoren”* (Hannover, 2015). See also Andreas Ammer, “Nachwort,” in *Goethes erotische Gedichte: Gedichte, Skizzen und Fragmente* (Frankfurt, 1991), pp. 233–244.

12. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Hanswursts Hochzeit in Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Albrecht Schöne (Frankfurt, 1985), 1:579, 583.

13. See Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, trans. and ed. Eric A. Blackall and Victor Lange, vol. 9 of *Collected Works*, ed. Lange, Blackall, and Cyrus Hamlin (Princeton, N.J., 1995); hereafter abbreviated WMA.

14. See Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Theatrical Calling*, trans. John R. Russell (Columbia, S.C., 1995); hereafter abbreviated WMT.

(Aurelie's aunt) in order to give Wilhelm a chaste mother. In comparison to these three slutty older women, the (anti)hero is described with almost sadistic pleasure as sexually unsuccessful.

As the renunciation of erotic appetite cannot be absolute, the frivolous actress Philine attracts all sexual vices like a magnet and emanates, according to Yahya Elsaghe's mythological research, "the aura of the prostitute."¹⁵ Wilhelm initiates the choir of moralizing voices in the *Theatrical Calling*, criticizing Philine as "repugnant," "unclean a creature," and compared to Natalie, "contemptible," her laughter "unbearable" (*WMT*, pp. 213, 327, 222). Johann Gottfried Herder shared this sentiment, grouching "all these Marianes and Philines are detestable to me."¹⁶ It takes considerable reworking on Goethe's part to make Philine in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* appear in a more sympathetic light. Still, Laertes introduces her to Wilhelm as "'represent(ing) in all its true colors the sex that I have such good reason to hate. She is the real Eve, the progenitrix of the whole female race. They're all like her, though they won't admit it'" (*WMA*, p. 55).

These rants would hardly be remarkable were it not for the plenitude of opposing views: "Philine is the most seductive symbol of the lightest sensuality" raves Friedrich Schlegel.¹⁷ "She is the only character of the novel that possesses a spontaneous natural humanity and human harmony," proclaims Georg Lukács, "she never gives herself up, she never cripples or distorts herself in all her promiscuities."¹⁸ Contemporary feminist scholars embrace Philine as an ironization of the ideal female character of Iphigenia,¹⁹ as "the embodiment of female sexuality and promiscuity,"²⁰ and as "the anarchic coquette."²¹ The fact that Philine is a female character—along with her often mentioned liveliness, quick wit, and sexual vitality—seems to provoke an excessively identificatory attitude to the literary character, one who is constantly judged approvingly or disapprovingly. Richard

15. Yahya A. Elsaghe, "Philine Blaütē: Zur Genese und Funktion mythologischer Reminiszenzen in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*" *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts* (1992): 8.

16. Johann Gottfried Herder, letter to Karoline Adelheid Cornelia Gräfin von Baudissin, May 1795, in vol. 7 of *Briefe*, ed. Wilhelm Dobbek and Günter Arnold (Weimar, 1982), pp. 152–53.

17. Friedrich Schlegel, "Charakteristik der Meisterischen Lehrjahre von Goethe (1798)," in vol. 7 of *Sämmtliche Werke* (Vienna, 1846), p. 99.

18. Georg Lukács, "*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1936)," in *Goethe und seine Zeit* (Bern, 1947), p. 35.

19. See Petra Willim, *So frei geboren wie ein Mann? Frauengestalten im Werk Goethes* (Frankfurt, 1997), p. 213.

20. Martha B. Helfer, "Wilhelm Meister's Women," *Goethe Yearbook* 11 (Oct. 2002): 239.

21. Catriona Macleod, "Pedagogy and Androgyny in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*," *MLN* 108, no. 3 (1993): 390

Friedenthal suspects that this phenomenon can be traced to a rivalry between author and character:

The frivolous Philine is (a) character with a life of her own. . . . Goethe is constantly on his guard against this creation of his. He never tires of showering derogatory expressions on her. . . . And yet, in one of the strangest creative manifestations in all literature, this little creature triumphs victoriously over the repugnance of her author. Her slippers tap their way charmingly throughout the whole length of the story. She plays her role far over the poet's head.²²

The Primal Scene

While it is easy to see how Philine is associated with sexuality or literality it is less obvious what she has to do with the metaphorical—and yet, she does function as an allegory of sexual metaphor, masterfully exhibiting obscenities by pretending to hide them. In one of Philine's first appearances, she sings a ballad about the sexual encounter of a shepherd and a young girl during a dance (see *WMT*, p. 155). Though critical of the ballad's vulgarity, the narrator concedes that even Wilhelm could not but admire “the droll whistles, the skillful turns and clever gestures with which Philine made clear the ambiguities while she seemed to be trying to hide them” (*WMT*, p. 155). If metaphor is a form of hiding via substitution, then Philine uses techniques of “semi-concealment . . . in such a way that the whole is fantasized all the more vividly and the desire for the totality of reality is excited all the more consciously and intensively,” which is how Georg Simmel explains a crucial aspect of flirtation.²³ A similar scene occurs when Philine caresses Wilhelm in public, thereby cunningly exploiting his prudishness, which forces him to play along with his molester, pretending Philine were his newlywed wife (see *WMA*, pp. 75–76.) Philine possesses an immediate, almost Foucauldian understanding that censoring and policing, far from eradicating the object of discipline, add a frisson to a situation.

Goethe's novel appears at the end of the eighteenth century, a period when the bourgeois woman was sexualized for the first time and sex simultaneously “became a ‘police’ matter.”²⁴ Fittingly, Goethe depicts the

22. Richard Friedenthal, *Goethe: His Life and Times* (2010; New York, 2017), p. 361.

23. Georg Simmel, “Flirtation,” in *On Women, Sexuality, and Love*, trans. Guy Oakes (New Haven, Conn., 1984), p. 136.

24. Michel Foucault, *An Introduction*, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (1976; New York, 1978), p. 24; hereafter abbreviated *I*. See also Klaus Theweleit, *Women Floods Bodies History*, vol. 1 of *Male Fantasies*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis, 1987), p. 332.

social policing following Philine's erotic adventures. The centerpiece is a scene right after the robbery of Wilhelm's theater group: Philine is the only one who has somehow managed to hold on to her belongings. In what could be described as an early form of *slut-shaming*, the narrator shares the newest gossip with us: Philine is said to have offered sexual favors to the chief robber in exchange for her possessions. The erotics of gossip are contrasted with an image of Philine seen sitting on her suitcase, first giddily click-clacking its buckles, then cracking nuts in her hands.

They vented their scorn on Philine, claiming that the way she had prevented any damage being done to her trunk was absolutely criminal. From various gibes and personal remarks it was clear that, during the looting, she had worked her way into the good graces of the leader of the band of marauders and persuaded him by her craftiness or the bestowal of some favors, to let her have her trunk back. For a while she seemed to have been missing. She did not reply to these allegations, but sat clicking the heavy locks of her trunk to assure her enemies that it was still there and to make them even more furious at her good fortune. [WMA, p. 136]

Shortly later, the narrative voice zooms in again on her: "And Philine sat on her trunk cracking nuts that she had found in her pocket" (WMA, p. 138). The role of the objects is clear: the suitcase seems to have been returned to her in exchange for sexual favors, with the nuts factoring in as a tip for her services. But if one dwells with the particular objects, they become more and more enigmatic: suitcase, buckles, pocket, nuts. The fact that scholars have not yet commented on their oddity suggests that we no longer understand the connotations of these objects: "It is quite possible that there was an expurgation—and a very rigorous one—of the authorized vocabulary," speculates Michel Foucault. "It may indeed be true that a whole rhetoric of allusion and metaphor was codified" (*I*, p. 24).

Sexual Metaphors: On Bags, Buckles, and Nuts

Like Philine, Goethe himself knew a thing or two about the pleasures of being reunited with one's suitcase; several entries of his *Campaign in France* from 1792 (three years before he finished *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*) are devoted to the loss and recovery of his suitcase. How great the joy when Goethe's eyes finally meet again the object of his longing: "But in the midst of these doldrums I should encounter the most longed for—The suitcase was calmly waiting in its old place; what a happy

sight!”²⁵ If we let Sigmund Freud have a turn with the suitcase as a dream symbol, then there is little surprise as to where this leads: travel baggage “figures frequently as an unmistakable symbol of one’s own genitals.”²⁶ How silly! But even sillier perhaps is that Goethe himself likened bags to genitalia. Thus, he called the thirty-two pages of censored material from (*Ur-*)*Faust* the “Walpurgissack” (Walpurgis sack).²⁷ At this point one will want to take Foucault’s advice to heart and consult a historical dictionary about all these bags, pockets, and suitcases. This step is necessary but not sufficient. With Derrida one could object against Foucault’s historical account of sexuality that part of metaphor’s historicity is its being open to the future. Does Goethe’s bag really have a bottom? This, at least, is the promise given by historical dictionaries of metaphors—that metaphor could exhaust itself. With this caveat, let us investigate the metaphorologies of the terms in question.

Bag. It seems that Goethe’s pun about the *Walpurgissack* and Philine’s attachment to her suitcase have to do with the use of words like *bag*, *pocket*, or *sack* for scrotum as well as for vagina. From studying various dictionaries we learn that because *scrotum* “never caught on in the popular language . . . words indicating containers, bags and the like should provide terms for the scrotum”;²⁸ for Middle High German the expression “to play with women in the lower bag”;²⁹ is recorded as well as “bag” as a “vagina-metaphor”;³⁰ furthermore, in Shakespeare “baggage” functions as a derogatory expression for “aspersive term for a woman; whore.”³¹ The German word for Philine’s suitcase is *Koffer*, which links it to the English *coffin*, as both words go back to Latin *cophinus* and ancient Greek *κόφινος* (basket). That is, we are dealing with a crypt structure. Who or what is buried in that crypt? Recall that no less than three slutty women get killed off in the development of the *Wilhelm Meister*

25. Goethe, *Campagne in Frankreich*, vol. 1 of *Sämtliche Werke: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. Klaus-Detlef Müller (Frankfurt, 1994), p. 470.

26. Sigmund Freud, *Studienausgabe*, vol. 2 of *Die Traumdeutung*, ed. Alexander Mitscherlich et al. (Frankfurt, 2000), p. 225.

27. Johann Daniel Falk recalls his conversation with Goethe about the “Walpurgissack” in *Characteristics of Goethe*, trans. Sarah Austin, 3 vols. (London, 1833), 1:113.

28. J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, 1982), s.v. “scrotum,” p. 75.

29. Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, s.v. “tasche” or “tesche.”

30. Johannes Müller, *Schwert und Scheide: Der sexuelle und skatologische Wortschatz im Nürnberger Fastnachtspiel des 15 Jahrhunderts* (Bern, 1988), p. 177.

31. Williams, *Shakespeare’s Sexual Language: A Glossary* (New York, 1997), s.v. “baggage,” p. 57.

cycle (through editorial changes, Wilhelm's promiscuous mother and Mariane as well as, due to marginalization, Aurelie's nymphomaniac aunt). We are talking about undead female sexuality, insofar as the suitcase is a carrying device (*metaphorein*) that both holds and buries the forbidden sluttiness. In this light, Philine sitting on her suitcase playing noisily with its buckles radiates like an image of female sexuality dancing gleefully on the grave of its repression, asking, "how do you like me now?"

Buckles. Before Philine reaches into her pocket for some nuts to snack on, Goethe depicts her sitting on her suitcase playing with its buckles. Whatever one's methodological hesitations, one must again be stunned by the consensus that once existed about reading buckles; allusive of copulation, buckles purportedly combine the initial act of unlocking and locking (or of what Freud calls the "lock and key symbolism," which serves as the leitmotiv of *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*).³² Medieval sexual symbolism translates buckles in insignia as "woman, vulva, whore."³³ At this point, we need to address a pattern structuring our inquiry as we keep stumbling over whores. The formula *buckle* = "woman, vulva, whore" resonates with similar definitions of sexual metaphors such as *lemon* = "an unlawful lover or mistress . . . chiefly applied to the female sex" or *baggage* = "aspersive term for a woman; whore." In all these definitions there is an unremarked metonymic slippage from an allegedly neutral category such as woman to a pejorative term like *whore*. As a rule, dictionary entries follow the structuralist principle that a term has a definition; this relation is metaphorical. But the juxtaposition is metonymic, which creates an implied slippage. If "woman, vulva, whore" or "unlawful lover, mistress, woman" can all be equated with one leading term (*lemon, bag, or buckle*) then does that mean they are all equal to each other? To speak with Roman Jakobson: Does the contiguity of these words as presented in a list effectively insist upon their similarity in terms of content? Is every woman a mistress or whore? Here, Shakespeare comes to our rescue, whose *Hamlet* Wilhelm stages, whose use of androgyny modeled the one in *Wilhelm Meister*, and whose puns and allusions Goethe was able to study in a glossarium that was part of his collection.³⁴ Dictionaries of Shakespeare's sexual language stand out on account of their capacity for queer or hermaphroditic sexuality: rather than

32. Freud, *Die Traumarbeit*, vol. 6 of *Die Traumdeutung*, p. 349.

33. Wolfgang Beutin, "Sexualsymbolik in einem Fundus spätmittelalterlicher Kleinplastiken ('Insignien') und in der Dichtung (Verserzählung, Fastnachtspiel, Märchen)," *Mediaevistik* 18 (2005): 26.

34. See MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity: Androgyny and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Keller* (Detroit, 1998), p. 108.

focusing on the exaggerated gender-distinction of “buckle and thong,”³⁵ Shakespeare has his characters “buckle” in one male-female body.³⁶

Nut. Unfolding metaphorologies is not unlike solving a riddle—a *Knackmandel* or *Knacknuss* in more antiquated German. When talking about things in a nutshell we think of condensation, totality (Wilhelm sees the world in the theater as “in a nutshell” [*WMT*, p. 19]), and riddle (Goethe said in conversation with Friedrich von Müller about the planetary system that it will give us “enough nuts to crack”).³⁷ But to disclose a secret is also erotic: when Wilhelm meets Philine, who is dressed in no more than a *négligé* and her famous slippers, “Laertes shook into her lap some burnt almonds which she immediately began to nibble [*naschen*]” (*WMA*, p. 51). Roasted nuts in a lap—we can easily grasp this pun; plus, the *Dictionary for Middle High German* records that *to nibble* (*naschen*) has the connotation of having illicit intercourse.³⁸ If one starts obsessing over *Knacknüsse* and *Knackmandeln* in German literature, one encounters many salacious passages: in Lenz’s play *The Tutor* (*Der Hofmeister*), the protagonist takes on the pseudonym “Almond” after having impregnated his disciple and then castrated himself. Or, the end of Eichendorff’s *The Life of a Good-for-Nothing* (*Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*): two lovers united at last—and what do they do? “In this mood of pleasure I pulled a handful of almonds out of my pocket which I had brought with me from Italy. She took some too and we sat together happily cracking nuts and gazing out into the silent landscape.”³⁹ In the writings of the German realist Fontane, roasted almonds are consumed in moments of heavy flirtation, which pun on the fact that almonds may grow together as a pair (in German *Vielliebchen* = literally, “much loved”).⁴⁰ Finally, according to one Shakespeare dictionary, “nut

35. Williams, *Shakespeare’s Sexual Language*, s.v. “buckle,” p. 57. Maybe there is even a hermaphroditic buckle transfer from Shakespeare to Goethe to Franz Kafka’s *The Man Who Disappeared*, which has been likened to *Wilhelm Meister* by Gerhard Neumann in “Der Wanderer und der Verschollene: Das Problem der Identität in Goethes *Wilhelm Meister* und in Kafkas *Amerika-Roman*,” in *Paths and Labyrinths*, ed. J. P. Stern and J. J. White (London, 1985), pp. 43–65. In Kafka, the boilerman takes the position of Philine, playing with buckles while flirting with Karl; like Wilhelm, Karl does not give into the seduction and loses his *Koffer*; see Franz Kafka, *The Man Who Disappeared (America)*, trans. Ritchie Robertson (New York, 2012), p. 6.

36. See Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, s.v. “buckle.”

37. Goethe, “Conversation with Friedrich von Müller, 26 Jan. 1825,” *Anhang: Gespräche*, vol. 5 of *Goethes Werke*, ed. Grand Duchess Sophie von Sachsen, 133 vols. (Weimar, 1887–1919), 5:142.

38. Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Naschen.”

39. Joseph von Eichendorff, *The Life of a Good-for-Nothing*, trans. Michael Glenny (London, 1966), p. 110.

40. See Theodor Fontane, *Jenny Treibel: Short Novels and Other Writings*, trans. Ulf Zimmermann, ed. Peter Demetz (New York, 1982), p. 165.

[is] allusively of vulva. [In] Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (c. 1599) . . . quibbles: ‘Sweetest nut hath sourest rind, Such a nut is Rosalind.’ Implications are of being opened up to get at the sexual kernel.”⁴¹ At the same time, *nuts* is equally used for the male genitals. In a nutshell, the metaphor of the nut stands for: vagina, glans, testicles, and aphrodisiac.

The Little Death of Sexual Metaphor

Here is an overview of our sexual metaphorologies: (1) *bag*—“scrotum,” “vagina,” “link between sex and money,” “whore”; (2) *buckle*—“to copulate in one hermaphroditic body”; (3) *nut*—“vagina,” “glans,” “testicles,” “aphrodisiac.” After this more Foucauldian, historical approach, let us proceed to a more Derridian critique of our findings. Most reference works for sexual metaphors are hopelessly phallogocentric, as if sex could be reduced to one organ; this penis reduction makes a dictionary superfluous.⁴² Apparently, sexual metaphorology is not just about metaphor but about hermeneutics as well—and the phallus is what holds the symbolic order together; for the phallic hermeneut, everything is a metaphor for a penis, and the phallus is what assures that metaphors can be converted back into literal meanings without any remainder of metaphoricity. What sets the sexual metaphors implicit in the Philine scene apart from the majority of sexual metaphors is their queerness: each one of the terms figures for the male as well as the female body, some are explicitly defined as hermaphroditic.

Another more general point of critique would be that with every dictionary of metaphor there is a pretense of translating figurative expressions into their literal meanings. What supports the phantasma of translatability is that most of Philine’s erotic insignia—suitcase, pocket, nut—are hollow shells. In Attic comedy, these kinds of cavities were likened to the body; they present perfect transportation devices because they “carry over” (*metaphorein*).⁴³ There is something troubling about approaching bodies, even metaphors in this way.⁴⁴ Philine sitting on her suitcase, playing with buckles would thus translate as: “Philine sitting on a scrotum/vagina engaging in hermaphroditic intercourse.” The next image of Philine sitting on her suitcase and cracking nuts that she found in her pocket would translate into: “Philine

41. Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, s.v. “nut.”

42. Adams’s *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* entails forty pages of sexual metaphors, of which all but one (“household objects”!) are identified with the penis (Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, s.v. “household objects,” p. 22).

43. See Jeffrey Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven, Conn., 1975), pp. 139–142.

44. See Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Body of Pleasure,” in *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality*, trans. Anne O’Byrne (New York, 2013), p. 95.

sitting on a scrotum/vagina playing with a vagina/glans/testicle, which she found in a smaller scrotum/vagina.” Four sexual metaphors in two successive tableaux are just too much; whereas Quintilian warns that metaphors should not be packed too closely together,⁴⁵ in the case of sexual metaphors this hyperbole works as a metaphor for Philine’s sluttiness.

If we try to translate sexual metaphors, things get hairy very quickly but not in a conceptually interesting way. The redundancy of the dictionary translations results from the fact that—according to the restricted logic of dictionaries—there exist only a limited number of genitalia multiplied by a still limited number of sexual practices. This would be the death of metaphor; with Derrida, a metaphor dies when it is translated into a concept that is then used merely as a cognitive instrument.⁴⁶ About ten years earlier, Hans Blumenberg proposed that the goal of a metaphorology cannot be to reduce metaphors to concepts but that we instead have to investigate the “logical ‘embarrassment’” that called for the metaphor in the first place.⁴⁷ There is an evident link between embarrassment and sex, but this does not mean that we can treat sexual metaphors as mere codes, with genitalia being the metaphors’ literality. This pornographic reduction forfeits the sexual metaphor’s latency, its thrill; what is left is nothing more than its peel—a squeezed out lemon. Here we have another explanation for why we use sexual metaphors: “To call the sex act by its own name sounds brazen,” Jakobson explains, “but if in certain circles strong language is the rule, a trope or euphemism is more forceful and effective.”⁴⁸ When vulgarity becomes banal, circumlocution is more forceful. It is metaphor’s movement, its going back and forth between showing and concealing, that is sexual.⁴⁹ What we are left with in the Philine scene is a veritable orgy of sexual metaphors, which we can interpret either as a dead pile of sexually indistinct organs *or* as a last erotic dynamism that survives the death of metaphor.

From Slut Shaming to Slug Shaming

We have counted four sexual metaphors (*suitcase, buckle, pocket, nut*), but there might be a fifth one hiding in Philine’s name. Leonard A. Willoughby demanded to read Philine as a cipher for love: “The author himself gives a

45. See Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, trans. and ed. Donald A. Russell, 5 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 3:433.

46. See Derrida, “White Mythology,” pp. 320–24.

47. Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* (Frankfurt, 1998), p. 10.

48. Roman Jakobson, “On Realism in Art,” trans. Karol Magassy, *Language in Literature*, trans. Magassy et al., ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), p. 22.

49. The sheerly kinetic, rhythmic aspect of this movement is foregrounded at the expense of the semantic: the sounds of cracking (a nut, *knacken*) and clacking (the buckles, *klappern*). Philine’s slippers make the same arousing sound as the buckles of the suitcase—Serlo: “Click! clack! the slippers fall to the ground, and whoosh! we’re no longer alone.” Philine hits Serlo in the face with her hot slippers “Click! Clack!” (*WMA*, p. 181, 182; and see pp. 136, 192).

clue when he lets Friedrich conjugate the Greek verb, *uikéx* (*phileó*), for Wilhelm's benefit: the very stem of Philine's name embodies the instinct of love, undifferentiated and amoral.⁵⁰ In no less compelling interpretations, Philine's name was linked to Venus as well as to the mother of Theokritus.⁵¹ Still, the name could be promiscuously engaged with other meanings at the same time. I would like to trace another line of origin here, not unrelated to the idea of love—a slimy or lubricated line, the line of a slug.

Bright white, almost translucent, milky, that is what the predatory sea slug or sea snail Philine looks like; just like Goethe's ravishing character, the species deserves its surname *Philine elegans*. Could Goethe have had this particular sea snail in mind, too, when he called his female character Philine? After all, the family of Philinidae populated the scientific discourse of the time when Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* originated; discovered by Ascanius in 1772, attributed to the superfamily of Philinoidea in 1850, scientists usually concentrate on *Philine aperta*, which inhabits the North Sea and Baltic Sea. The name Philine is included for the first time in Carl Linnaeus's *Systema naturae* in the twelfth edition from 1767, that is, ten years before Goethe took up his work on the *Theatrical Calling*.⁵² Although there is no record of Goethe having owned the edition in question, it was present at the Herzogin Anna Amalia Library where Goethe was a patron after his move to Weimar in 1775.⁵³ The name Philine also comes up in the writings of Otto Friedrich Müller, who, in 1776, detected another genus. Most significantly, Goethe had a keen interest in snails and sea slugs, as well documented by the books in his library: texts on snails authored by Karl Gustav Carus, with whom Goethe corresponded, the inventory of the collection of "snails, mussels, and corrals" by Johann Peter Meyer, and finally the *Illustration of the Sexual System of Linnaeus* by Johann Sebastian Müller.⁵⁴ Goethe not only read about snails and published

50. Leonard A. Willoughby, "Name ist Schall und Rauch: On the Significance of Names for Goethe," *German Life and Letters* 16 (Apr. 1963): 302.

51. See Hannelore Schlaffer, *Wilhelm Meister: Das Ende der Kunst und die Wiederkehr des Mythos* (Stuttgart, 1989), pp. 3, 139. See also Wolfgang Baumgart, "Philine," in *Lebende Antike: Symposium für Rudolf Sühnel*, ed. Horst Meller and Hans-Joachim Zimmermann (Berlin, 1967), pp. 100–101.

52. See Carl Linnaeus's twelfth edition of *Systema Naturae* (Stockholm, 1766–68).

53. Goethe's private library nowadays consists of 90–95 percent of the books he owned; 5–10 percent remain unknown as there was no librarian before 1817. The Anna Amalia Library only introduced lending records in 1792 and visitor records in 1817; hence, we do not know which books Goethe checked out before this date, not to speak of the ones he just consulted in the library.

54. Johann Peter Meyer, *Verzeichniss der Naturalien u. Kunst-Sammlung des verstorbenen Kaufmanns: Herrn Johann Peter Meyer in Altona* (Hamburg, 1802). See also Johann Sebastian Müller, *Illustratio Systematis Sexualis Linnaei* (London, 1794).

Carus' research on the anatomy of snails in *Hefte zur Morphologie* but also dissected them.⁵⁵

Here comes a less scientific intuition: *Philine aperta* sounds just like the kind of bawdy coital joke of which Goethe was capable. His *Erotica Romana* are no less obsessed than Ovid's rapey *Ars Amatoria* or today's pick-up artists with bringing women to "open up" for penetration (in both German and Latin there is a link between *snail* and *vulva*.)⁵⁶ Hence, *Philine aperta* could be a crude punning about Philine being open to having sex with whomever she fancies—be it with the stableman, Laertes, Serlo, Friedrich, a robber, or maybe Wilhelm. The German translation for *Philine aperta* is "offene Seemandel" (open sea almond) with which we return to the sexual metaphor of nuts. Moreover, it belongs to the species of the *Blasen-schnecken*: in English Paper Bubbles or, closer to the German, Blow Slug. Suffice it to say that *to blow* (*blasen*) has the same sexual connotations in German and if one has a look at the way in which Goethe employs the verb *blasen*, every second usage contains a sexual undertone.⁵⁷ Finally, just as a snail's entire lower body consists of its foot, so the fetishistic gaze upon Philine focuses on her feet and slippers.

Once one opens oneself up to the possibility of sexual metaphor, every word starts to appear suspiciously suggestive. But what if there is no voluptuous double entendre? Never is doubt more embarrassing than when it comes to sexual readings, because nobody wants to fall into the trap that Foucault identifies and make sexuality the key to subjectivity, the secret of all secrets. Queer theory has proven to be best equipped to navigate this slippery slope, which has to do with gay sex having been consigned for the longest time to the realm of connotation. Eve Sedgwick, for instance, writes that "'knowing' how to read, 'knowing' how to interpret sexual meanings, both involve acrobatic leaps of yet unearned identification consolidated by recoils of a more violent repudiation."⁵⁸ As readers we are cathected to the

55. For the correspondence between Carus and Goethe, see Stefan Grosche, "Zarten Seelen ist gar viel gegönnt": *Naturwissenschaft und Kunst im Briefwechsel zwischen C. G. Carus und Goethe* (Göttingen, 2001), pp. 36–38, 82–84. Grosche includes Goethe's diary entries on Carus' snail-research. See also Goethe, "Anatomie der Schnecke: Weimar am 11ten Mai 97," *Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, vol. 24 of *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Dorothea Kuhn (Frankfurt, 1987), pp. 343–45.

56. See Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer and Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, 10 vols. (Berlin, 1936), 7:1269. See also Harry E. Wedeck, *Dictionary of Aphrodisiacs* (New York, 1962), s.v. "snails," p. 225. Müller purports in *Schwert und Scheide* that the Latin word for vulva, *cunnius*, has the connotation "snail" (inspired by snail-shaped pastry) (Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, p. 73).

57. The Grimm's dictionary records three uses of *blasen* by Goethe, all in erotic context; see *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, s.v. "blasen."

58. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Privilege of Unknowing: Diderot's *The Nun*," *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C., 1993), p. 47.

fear of nonknowledge, which is also the source of enjoyment, particularly when reading sexuality; there are risks one has to weigh when undertaking a sexual reading: “It takes one to know one.”⁵⁹ To this fear D. A. Miller adds the risk of deniability: “Connotation enjoys, or suffers from, an abiding deniability. To refuse the evidence for a merely connoted meaning is as simple—and as frequent—as uttering the words ‘But isn’t it just?’”⁶⁰

The Virgin Snail

Foucault recalls that when Goethe was invited by the educational reformer Johann Bernhard Basedow to appear in 1776 for “the first solemn communion of adolescent sex and reasonable discourse” he declined (*I*, p. 29). Apparently he had no interest in doing away with the mystery around sex—on the contrary, he poked fun at his countrymen who were still debating what he could have possibly meant by the “broomsticks” in the Walpurgis-Night.⁶¹ Another time, however, it is Goethe who cautions a curious young woman not to read too much into the metaphoric meaning of a snail. The twenty-four-year-old Louise Seidler, an aspiring painter who later portrays Goethe at his home, reminisces about her visits with him to the *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister* in Dresden. Seidler remembers how she once asked Goethe how to read the presence of a snail in the foreground of Francesco del Cossa’s *The Annunciation* (1470–72):

This snail is an embellishment, my girlfriend, which the painter’s whims added here. (I will pick you up in my car today, we will go for a ride!) he whispered into my ear in all haste. . . . This happened several times; I experienced most delicious hours.⁶²

We do not know whether Goethe dismissed the snail out of ignorance, because he feared that its salaciousness would blow his cover, or whether it was the snail in the first place who brought him in the mood to whisper into the ear of the young woman the idea of a carriage ride (in German, there is a metonymic link between *mail coach/snail-mail*, *Postkutsche/Schneckenpost*). Be that as it may, Daniel Arasse rages that “there is nothing discreet” about the presence of “this slimy thing” in del Cossa’s painting,

59. Sedgwick, “Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet,” *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; Berkeley, 2008), p. 225.

60. D. A. Miller, “Anal Rope,” *Representations* 32 (Autumn 1990): 118.

61. Goethe, *Faust I and II*, trans and ed. Stuart Atkins, in vol. 2 of *Collected Works* (Princeton, N.J., 1994), p. 99. See also Johannes Falk, *Goethe aus näherm persönlichen Umgange dargestellt* (Leipzig, 1832), p. 93.

62. Goethe, letter to Louise Seidler, 18 Sept. 1810, *Goethes Gespräche*, vol. 2 of *Goethes Werke*, ed. Woldemar von Biedermann (Leipzig, 1889), pp. 329–30. Seidler misattributes the painting to Andreas Mantegna.

situated in “the palace of the immaculate Virgin. . . . What the heck is it doing there? And don’t go telling me that it’s merely the painter’s ‘whim.’”⁶³ The snail is “a rare metaphor for the impregnated Virgin,” which crosses itself out due to its peculiar location on the picture’s frame. As Jane Campbell Hutchison writes, Helen Ettliger, too, calls it “the virgin snail” because “the snail became a symbol of perpetual virginity in the early Renaissance. . . . As the snail became pregnant from the dew of heaven, so did the Mother of God become pregnant through the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁴ We see that the question of procreation and sexuality has been linked to the snail for centuries. In 1679, the Dutch biologist Jan Swammerdam discovered that some snails are hermaphroditic and eighteenth-century dissections of snails, like those done by Johann August Ephraim Goetze and Hermann von Ihering, comment on the surprisingly complex sexual apparatus of many snails, including Philinidae.⁶⁵

At this point we have a conflict of interpretation; hermaphroditism comes up in the context of the snail and was already a common denominator of the sexual metaphors surrounding *Wilhelm Meister’s* Philine (in fact, the first study of *Wilhelm Meister* calls Philine herself “a moral hermaphrodite of good and bad qualities, of whim and vagary, of morality and amorality”).⁶⁶ However, in her reading of the orchid in Marcel Proust, Sedgwick notes that “hermaphroditism . . . makes the possible decoding of metaphor all the more dizzyingly impossible” because it simultaneously naturalizes the sexual metaphor and denaturalizes nature resulting in a “definitional flux.”⁶⁷ Sedgwick’s hesitation is to the point—especially when it comes to Goethe. Granted, *Wilhelm Meister* features a plentitude of hermaphroditic and queer elements, including cross-dressing, homosociality, and alternative models of kinship and family.⁶⁸ As a consequence, there is

63. Daniel Arasse, “The Snail’s Gaze,” *Take a Closer Look*, trans. Alyson Waters (2000; Princeton, N.J., 2013), pp. 18, 28.

64. Jane Campbell Hutchison, *Albrecht Dürer: A Guide to Research* (New York, 2000), p. 80 n. 215. See also Helen S. Ettliger, “The Virgin Snail,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978): 316.

65. See Matthew Cobb, *Generation: The Seventeenth-Century Scientists Who Unraveled the Secrets of Sex, Life, and Growth* (New York, 2006), p. 40; Johann August Ephraim Goetze, *Geschichte einiger, den Menschen, Thieren, Oekonomie und Gärtnern schädlichen Insekten* (Leipzig, 1787), p. 198; Hermann von Ihering, “Tethys: Ein Beitrag zur Phylogenie der Gastropoden,” *Morphologisches Jahrbuch: Eine Zeitschrift für Anatomie und Entwicklungsgeschichte*, ed. Carl Gegenbaur (Leipzig, 1876): pp. 44–48; and Arthur Adams and Henry Adams, *The Genera of Recent Mollusca* (London, 1858), p. 43.

66. Daniel Jenisch, *Über die hervorstechendsten Eigenthümlichkeiten von Meisters Lehrjahren* (Berlin, 1797), pp. 79–80.

67. Sedgwick, “Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet,” pp. 220, 221.

68. See Susan E. Gustafson, *Goethe’s Families of the Heart* (London, 2016), and Wilson, *Goethe Männer Knaben: Ansichten zur “Homosexualität,”* trans. Angela Steidele (Berlin, 2012).

the temptation to carry out a redemptive or utopian, radical queer reading of what Becker-Cantarino nevertheless rightly considers “Goethe’s poetic vision of a patriarchal society.”⁶⁹ More structurally speaking, we have on the one side *Goethe’s misogyny* and on the other side moments of a more *transgressive fluidity*, but the ambiguity *between* these two different tendencies should not be recuperated as something *generally* transgressive. This is because the queer aspects of *Wilhelm Meister* do not stand in for the whole; they are welcome countermoments, but we cannot make these moment function as synecdoches just because we find them to be appealing or sympathetic.⁷⁰ Any (allegedly) transgressive or liberating reading has to face up to this impulse to totalization, for such readings are not necessarily more immune to movements of totalization than the more conservative (or more negative) readings that they attempt to displace.

This becomes evident as we progress from del Cossa’s *The Annunciation*, which imagines the mystery of immaculate conception via the snail’s pregnancy, to the misogynist depiction of Philine’s pregnancy. Unsurprisingly, Philine is not likened to the Virgin Mary; instead her lover Friedrich compares her to Maria Magdalena. In Philine’s case the miracle is not “how did she get pregnant?” but “how did she not get pregnant until now?” In the eighth book of *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, Goethe stages his own annunciation of Philine’s pregnancy: “Philine can’t let herself be seen, doesn’t even want to look at herself, for she is pregnant. You can’t imagine anything more shapeless and ridiculous than she is” jeers her lover Friedrich (WMA, p. 342). In the sequel, *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years*, Philine will have become a speed seamstress with voracious scissors and several children. Her pregnancy appears like a domestication of her libidinal force as well as retaliation for her disgust with pregnant women.⁷¹ Like that, Philine’s maternity not only marks the end of her theater career but also a literary decline in that pregnancy is the end of the sexual metaphor Philine. The ideology of high literature is paternal insofar as in literary works we celebrate ambiguity and uncertainty (*pater semper est incertus*), potentiality (potency), and dissemination (semen)—all values associated

69. Becker-Cantarino, “Patriarchy and German Enlightenment Discourse: From Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* to Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,” in *Impure Reason: Dialectic of Enlightenment in Germany*, ed. Wilson and Robert C. Holub (Detroit, 1993), p. 52.

70. Similarly, W. Daniel Wilson, while carefully reflecting the motive of cross-dressing in *Wilhelm Meister*, comes to the conclusion that Goethe’s gender continuum is organized by a masculinist asymmetry; see Wilson, “Performing Gender in *Wilhelm Meister*: Goethe on Italian Transvestites,” *Warm Brothers: Queer Theory and the Age of Goethe* (Philadelphia, 2000), p. 130.

71. See Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Voßkamp, 40 vols., (Frankfurt, 1991), 1:359–992.

with metaphorical language. Wilhelm neither knows what to be nor if or how many children he fathered.⁷² Hamlet (staged by Wilhelm) does not know what to do—in other words, the realm of *not knowing* is where great literature happens. Literature blushes before the corporeality of the mother, her body of evidence, her literality.⁷³

Philine, c'est moi

Philine is a female literary character without resentfulness and as that as unlikely a figure as a male German writer without resentment: Goethe, whom Novalis described as “a wholly practical poet. He is in his works—what the Englishman is in what he wears—highly simple, nice, comfortable and durable.”⁷⁴ Pairing Philine and Goethe, the slut and the stud, is a provocation—and provoke I *must* for I do not share Benjamin Bennett’s optimism of “an unrelenting revolutionary or subversive potential”⁷⁵ of “*Goethe as Woman*.”⁷⁶ Tellingly, Goethe exclusively encouraged comparisons with his *male* protagonist Wilhelm—so why look for Goethe in Philine’s *Koffer* or crypta? The work sometimes exceeds its author, and although Goethe probably would have been bewildered or offended by the comparison with Philine, his texts in fact suggest a strong kind of fraternity or sorority: just as Philine is shunned by the theater group, Goethe is sexually policed by his editors, friends, lovers. Both perverts rejoice in making uncomfortable those who try to discipline them; in this regard, Philine’s relationship to Wilhelm, in whom she elicits both attraction and repulsion, appears not so different from von Stein’s relationship with Goethe, who was “maddeningly impetuous and foolish with her, trampling on her sensitivities, and shocking her with his ribaldness and vulgarities.”⁷⁷ Philine and Goethe both flee monogamy like the plague and are said to have used others like the Kantian sucked-out lemon in order to satisfy their enormous appetites, which in

72. Heidi Schlipphacke remarks that in the case of Philine’s first child, it is wholly uncertain who the father is—Wilhelm, Friedrich, or someone else; see Heidi Schlipphacke, “‘Die Vaterschaft beruht nur überhaupt auf der Überzeugung’: The Displaced Family in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 102, no. 3 (2003): 316. “In Goethe’s novel, women are creatures of the body, but fathers most decidedly are not” (Elisabeth Krimmer, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: Paternity and *Bildung* in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*,” *German Quarterly* 77, no. 3 [2004]: 265)

73. Andrew Parker challenges the idea of the mother’s literality in *The Theorist’s Mother* (Durham, N.C., 2012), p. 19. According to Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo (1997; New York, 2004), p. 27, in the age of surrogacy, even motherhood has become uncertain.

74. Novalis, “Über Goethe,” in *Schriften*, ed. Richard Samuel, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1981), 2:640.

75. Benjamin Bennett, *Goethe as Woman: The Undoing of Literature* (Detroit, 2001), p. 255.

76. *Ibid.*

77. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, p. 358.

Goethe's case included debauching the young pastor's daughter Friederike Brion. Finally, the fundamental claim on which this essay rests is that Philine serves as an allegory of sexual metaphor: she is a character that excels in the Ovidian art of hiding her artfulness—the art of the author, that is.

“What happens when a male author identifies with his female protagonist to the point of fusion or *confusion*?” Naomi Schor calls “this mysterious creative process *female im-personation*.”⁷⁸ Schor is not commenting on Philine here but on Emma Bovary, who is the perfect point of comparison—for which other two female characters are capable of evoking such strong, conflicting reactions? “He’s created a leading lady whom he challenges us to despise. But does he despise her?” Roxana Robinson provokes Gustave Flaubert readers in the *New Yorker*.⁷⁹ Whereas Flaubert became famous for creating mixed main characters, with whom we can only identify with reservation, Goethe actually modeled this complex reception situation in *Wilhelm Meister*, a work greatly admired by Flaubert.⁸⁰

The mixed nature of Emma and Philine is also reflected in the way they are gendered (Charles Baudelaire called Bovary a “strange androgynous creature”).⁸¹ Likewise, we saw that Philine, “the real Eve, the progenitrix of the whole female race,” surrounds herself with hermaphroditic metaphors bending gender categories. Philine is not simply woman—rather, her character displays a lot of traditionally male traits such as sexual autonomy and, following Goethe, “spirit (*Geist*)” (WMA, p. 55). In his aggressive review of “Eleutherie Holberg’s *Melanie das Findelkind*,” Goethe sets Philine apart from another sensual female character reasoning that the latter lacks the “spirit, through which (Philine) cozies up to us.”⁸² What instigated Goethe’s critique of Holberg (Caroline Paulus) was, according to Becker-Cantarino, that not only Holberg was a female novelist but also that she

78. Naomi Schor, “For a Restricted Thematics: Writing, Speech, and Difference in *Madame Bovary*,” in *The Future of Difference*, ed. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (Boston, 1985), p. 186.

79. Roxana Robinson, “Teaching *Madame Bovary*,” *New Yorker*, 5 Nov. 2017, www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/teaching-madame-bovary

80. Quoting Flaubert: “I don’t aim to be a Goethe, because candles pale in the sunlight” (Laurence M. Porter and Eugene F. Gray, *Gustave Flaubert’s Madame Bovary: A Reference Guide* [Westport, Conn., 2002], p. 61). See also Porter, *A Gustave Flaubert Encyclopedia* (Westport, Conn., 2001), p. 151. In regard to the reception effect of mixed character in *Wilhelm Meister*, see Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Goethe; or, the Writer,” in vol. 4 of *Representative Men: Seven Lectures*, (1876; Boston, 1904): “Goethe’s hero . . . has so many weaknesses and impurities and keeps such bad company, that the sober English public, when the book was translated, were disgusted” (p. 279).

81. Charles Baudelaire, “*Madame Bovary par Gustave Flaubert (1857)*,” *Critique Littéraire*, vol. 6 of *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1961), p. 652.

82. Goethe, “Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele, von ihr selbst geschrieben: *Melanie das Findelkind*: Wilhelm Dumont von Eleutherie Holberg,” in vol. 40 of *Goethes Werke* (Weimar, 1901), p. 378.

brought “arguments against natural law philosophy which propagated the separate spheres for male and female as ‘natural’ gender roles.”⁸³ Thus, ironically, by trying to make his female character more *male* in talking of her (traditionally male-defined) “spirit,” Goethe only intensifies his own *female impersonation*. So while Philine becomes man through Goethe, Goethe is becoming woman; while Goethe becomes an affirmatively slutty woman, Philine is becoming a coquettish man.⁸⁴ And just like Flaubert supposedly exclaimed “Emma Bovary, c’est moi,” Goethe could have felt: “Philine, das bin ich.”

But if Goethe and Philine were to form one hermaphroditic body, then why does Goethe’s account of her change so drastically between the different versions of *Wilhelm Meister*? Perhaps Goethe does not identify with his character until he has become her; maybe Philine is a concealed part of Goethe that only appears on the surface belatedly because this affinity is at first too upsetting. One could see in fact in the merging of an author with a Casanova complex and his charmingly slutty character an idea of Goethe’s and Flaubert’s favorite philosopher, Benedict de Spinoza, according to whom identification with the Other (*affectuum imitatio*) is a way of expanding one’s soul.⁸⁵ In his autobiography, Goethe gets drunk on the influence Spinoza’s *Ethics* presumably had on his life:

To be unselfish in everything, the most unselfish in love and friendship, was my highest pleasure, my maxim, my practice, so that this audacious later saying “If I love you, what’s it to you?” [*Wenn ich dich liebe, was geht’s dich an?*] is more or less spoken from my heart.⁸⁶

Notwithstanding his general misunderstanding of Spinoza (who is, after all, not invested in the idea of renunciation), Goethe, one gets the impression, is pulling the rug from under his own feet by letting the sensual slip in again.⁸⁷ Goethe paraphrases Spinoza’s thought: “He who loves God

83. Becker-Cantarino, “Goethe and Gender,” p. 182.

84. It is only fitting that a brilliantly androgynous woman like Rahel Varnhagen, upon being compared to Philine, responds in Philine fashion by *acting* offended: “Friends all say that Philine resembles me. Maybe. I sometimes act offended; I am a *well-bred* girl, a decent missy, that is” (Rahel Varnhagen, Letter to David Veit, 2 Feb. 1795, vol. 7 of *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Konrad Feilchenfeldt et al. [Munich, 1983], p. 70).

85. On the concept of *affectuum imitatio*, see Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (New York, 1998), pp. 86–87.

86. Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, vol. 14 of *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Klaus-Detlef Müller (Frankfurt, 1986), p. xiv.

87. Horst Lange, “Goethe and Spinoza: A Reconsideration,” *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011): 24–26.

cannot strive that God should love him in return” with the question “If I love you, what’s it to you?”⁸⁸ This sentence “spoken from my heart” actually goes back to Philine’s dry remark: “‘And if I love you, what’s that to you?’” (*WMA*, p. 139). Lukács does not miss the scandal that “of all his characters, Goethe puts his most inner sense of life—his mode of relating to nature and to human beings, the *amor dei intellectualis*, which he adopted in a humanized fashion from Spinoza—into the mouth of Philine.”⁸⁹ Philine speaks through Goethe, and Goethe speaks through Philine. She asks Wilhelm if I have love for you, what’s it to you?” after having saved his belongings during the robbery and while caring for him so that he can recover. Wilhelm fears that this sacrifice will oblige him to her, but she makes it plain that if she felt lovingly towards him this would not be any of his business. The unmarked self-citation, akin to a form of irony or free indirect discourse, bears precisely on the content cited; when Goethe speaks through Philine, can this be taken as the author’s avowal of a certain love for his character? Or, is it, perhaps more threateningly, the sign of a certain identification?

Indeed, a truly radical Spinozism would make it difficult to distinguish between these two possibilities and would, moreover, demand a love for even what is most threatening, the object of a forbidden identification. To think through the love of Goethe, and Goethe’s version of *amor dei intellectualis*, we must first have *philia* for Philine and think through the love of Philine. Coming full circle, this shameless love of Philine requires us to think through as well the paradox of loving metaphor *as such* and in its undoing of the very logic of the *as such*—and thus to learn to love the surplus, the already ravished lemon, the nuts and buckles of language, in short, so many improper names for that which refuses to be ruled and insists, now slyly and now baldly, on the prerogatives of pleasure and sensuality.

88. Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London, 1996), p. 169.

89. Lukács, “*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*,” p. 35.