

**The Elusive Transcendent:  
The Role of Religion  
in the Plays of  
Frank Wedekind**

*Fred Whalley*

**Peter Lang**

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Britische und Irische Studien  
zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur

British and Irish Studies  
in German Language and Literature

Etudes britanniques et irlandaises  
sur la langue et la littérature allemandes

Edited by H.S. Reiss and W.E. Yates

Band 23



PETER LANG

Oxford · Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · Frankfurt/M. · New York · Wien

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Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

**Whalley, Fred:**

The elusive transcendent : the role of religion in the plays of Frank Wedekind /  
Fred Whalley. - Oxford ; Bern ; Berlin ; Bruxelles ; Frankfurt/M. ; New York ;  
Wien : Lang, 2002  
(British and Irish Studies in German language and literature ; Bd. 23)  
ISBN 3-906766-43-8

British Library and Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:  
A catalogue record for this book is available from *The British Library*, Great  
Britain, and from *The Library of Congress*, USA

ISSN 0171-6662  
ISBN 3-906766-43-8  
US-ISBN 0-8204-5329-3

© Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, Bern 2002  
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Printed in Germany

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Rhys Williams and Dr Brigid Haines of the German Department at the University of Wales Swansea, who have both provided me with invaluable supervision and guidance during my years at Swansea. I am also grateful to the staff at the *Monacensia Sammlung* of the *Stadtbibliothek* in Munich for their friendly assistance. Finally, I would like to thank my family for all their support, and especially my wife Rosie: *tetelestai*.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Quest for *Leben*

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the role of the artist developed in response to the secularization and industrialization of society. In the first half of the century, the Romantic artist concentrated on the individual, creative response to the natural world; but as the century developed, scientific materialism began to make an impact. Its most obvious influence was on the school of Naturalism, which flourished briefly towards the end of the century. Naturalist writers felt that art should reproduce real life as closely as possible. As a result, art could be used to highlight some of the ways in which any human life seemed to be part of the natural mechanism of the world. However the overall impact of Naturalism itself was limited and its effect was short-lived. By the 1890s artists were increasingly drawing inspiration from the thought of Nietzsche. In his critical writing on contemporary religious and moral thinking, Nietzsche built on Darwinian ideas, but he was too idiosyncratic to be linked to any particular movement. He became the figurehead, though, for those artists who realized they did not need to be constrained by scientific laws, but instead could create their own artistic values that were free of any restriction.

What emerged in the wake of Nietzsche was the increased conviction among artists that art itself did not need to be subject to any laws at all. Instead, the role of art was to use its freedom from all laws to seek what was of value, or what in life transcended the merely scientific. In other words, the purpose of art was not to repeat what was already in existence, but to explore the limitations of what was aesthetically possible, for what might be revealed of true value. Artists drew their inspiration from Nietzsche, even though he was not the only proponent of a new, aspirational life. The era was one of liberation and dynamism: 'Everywhere [...] sprang up the cry for greater freedom, for self-expression, for more experience and less theorizing, for a fuller life, for the

recognition of the tortured, self-torturing individual'.<sup>1</sup> The artist had a new, special role, which verged on a moral imperative to strive to create beauty:

Toward the end of the century, the exaltation of art as salvation gripped a large number of students and beginning *bohémiens*. For that generation, the credo of art for art's sake, the impudent pleasure of *épater le bourgeois*, were no longer enough; now it was art for the sake of the nation, for the sake of one's higher moral self, art as the only meaningful way of life.<sup>2</sup>

The consequence of this was that, for an aesthetic élite, art itself became the determinant of human behaviour. Since religious and moral values had been undermined and all social and conventional barriers had been classified as arbitrary constructs, nowhere was out of bounds for the artistic pioneer.<sup>3</sup> Particularly attractive in this context was religious imagery: formerly sacred symbols were ideal for depicting new, potent life-symbolism. In addition, as Rhys Williams observes, 'the aesthetic and the religious were frequently brought together in opposition to what was regarded as the permissive materialism of Wilhelminian society.'<sup>4</sup> Thus the renewed interest in religious issues did not betoken a return to traditional beliefs; rather, religious imagery was reinvented in such a way as to point towards a spiritual world that existed in the mind of the artist and in contrast to the strictly empirical, materialistic world-view. It also had the advantage of its potential to offend the reactionary and the traditionally religious. An old artistic metaphor was also resurrected: if God was dead,<sup>5</sup> that meant that there was a vacancy on the throne and the artist, being a creator of sorts, was in the ideal position to take God's place. The traditional picture of the *theatrum mundi*, in which the world

1. Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (California: University of California Press, 1961), p. 97.
2. *ibid.*, p. 173.
3. Malcolm Pasley notes that 'the turn of the century is marked by a strong upsurge of artistic and religious impulses. The influence of positivist, scientific thinking proved short-lived, giving way to a variety of idealist and irrationalist creeds'. ('Modern German Literature', in *Germany: A Companion to German Studies*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 554-609 (pp. 558-59).)
4. Rhys Williams, *Carl Sternheim: A Critical Study* (Berne: Lang, 1982), p. 5.
5. 'Gott ist todt [...]. Und wir – wir müssen auch noch seinen Schatten besiegen' (*Friedrich Nietzsche, Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972-), section 5, vol. II (1973), p. 145).

was a stage and the men and women on it merely players, had been overturned: men and women themselves could now take God's place.<sup>6</sup> His morality could be theirs, and the worlds they created on the stage could be new, different and better versions of the one God had left behind.

In effect, then, art came to replace the religion that had been demolished over the course of the previous century: it did not have to mean anything or serve any purpose. If art *per se* was the criterion of judgement, beauty itself could have a meaning. Aestheticism was the principle, to the extent that the appearance and feel of a book could be more significant than the words written in it.<sup>7</sup> At the heart of this movement lay the principle of *Leben*. This was the force that sustained life and embraced all experience, known and not-yet-known, good and bad. The role of the artist was to find *Leben* in ever profounder sensations. No region was to be left unexplored for what treasures of *Leben* it might yield. The main obstacle in the artistic quest was *Bürgerlichkeit*. To the innovative artist, the *Bürger* were self-satisfied members of the middle-class, who were happy to conform unthinkingly to the dictates of tradition. Their notion of art was something popular and reactionary that was soulless, tasteless and immediately forgettable.<sup>8</sup>

In some ways Frank Wedekind typified the attitude of the avant-garde.<sup>9</sup> He was irreverent, provocative and controversial, and delighted in attacking *Bürgerlichkeit*. By the same token, however, he also

6. The relationship of Wedekind's plays to the concept of *theatrum mundi* is analysed in: Volker Klotz, 'Wedekinds Circus Mundi', in *Viermal Wedekind: Methoden der Literaturanalyse am Beispiel von Frank Wedekinds Schauspiel 'Hidalla'*, ed. by Karl Pestalozzi and Martin Stern (Stuttgart: Klett, 1975), pp. 22-47.
7. See Jost Hermand, 'The Commercialization of Avant-Garde Movements at the Turn-of-the-Century', *New German Critique*, 29 (Spring/Summer 1983), pp. 71-83.
8. The vapid art that the aesthetes found so objectionable was epitomized by the popular magazine *Die Gartenlaube*, which specialized in 'stereotyped romances on the Cinderella theme' (Robin Lenman, John Osborne and Eda Sagarra, 'Imperial Germany: Towards the Commercialization of Culture', in *German Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by Rob Burns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 9-52 (p. 24).)
9. In his early play *Die junge Welt (Kinder und Narren)* Wedekind attacks Naturalism, and in particular its exponent Gerhart Hauptmann. Hauptmann had used Wedekind's reports of his troubled family background as the basis of his play *Das Friedensfest*, a breach of confidence which Wedekind found hard to forgive.

caricatured self-important artist-figures. The world of his plays was pervaded with the quest for *Leben* and it is clear that he was influenced by the highly-charged atmosphere of his era and in some way wished to dramatize a response to it; but he also displayed an ambivalence towards pretentious artists and their pompous attitudes. Likewise he did not seem to share the desire for mere aesthetic delight. He criticized society around him, in particular its hypocrisies and its groundless moral standards. There was, however, an ambiguity at the heart of his works that seems to have stemmed from Wedekind's reluctance, for all his condemnation of the world around him, to introduce any positive alternatives to it. His work seemed to embrace nothing but negation, and ultimately to lack a clearly definable centre. Nevertheless, it has been a challenge for Wedekind's critics to attempt to identify the 'true' Wedekind beneath the masks and disguises that are evident from his plays, the versions of himself on the stage and his questionable apologies.

At the time he was writing, critics were divided over whether he ought to be classified as a misunderstood moralist, or a second-rate dramatist who excited controversies to divert attention towards himself.<sup>10</sup> The problems that concerned his contemporaries continued to frustrate critics throughout the twentieth century. In his monograph on Wedekind, Hartmut Vinçon outlines the critical response from the time when Wedekind's work was first acknowledged until the present.<sup>11</sup> If it is possible to summarize briefly the nature of Wedekind-criticism, it has been that, precisely because of the apparent lack of a central core of thought, he can be made to seem to support all points of view. Vinçon concludes the introduction to his work with part of a speech made by Rudolf Frank in 1964 to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Wedekind's birth: 'Heute noch [...] leidet Wedekinds Werk unter einer Verständnislosigkeit, die mit der Borniertheit der wilhelminischen Epoche wetteifern kann'.<sup>12</sup>

Part of the reason for this incomprehension is the way in which critics have tended to concentrate on aspects of how Wedekind's notion

10. For an example of the former, see Joachim Friedenthal's 'Monographie' in *Das Wedekindbuch*, ed. by Joachim Friedenthal (Munich: Müller, 1914). The latter view is represented by Franz Blei's *Über Wedekind, Sternheim und das Theater* (Leipzig: Wolff, 1915).

11. Hartmut Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987).

12. Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, p. 2.

of morality – and sexual morality in particular – manifested themselves in his plays. The aim of this work is to show how this idea of morality was itself concerned with two major questions that provide the basis for his exploration of all other issues. The first question is whether it is possible to have religion without God. The second, which follows on from it, is the issue of whether it is possible to have morality without religion. Wedekind was more of a dilettante than a philosopher, and his works frequently present him tinkering with the same issues in different ways rather than offering any solutions, but nevertheless his wrestling with these two questions pervades his work. Indeed, he was far more preoccupied with religious questions than his critics have hitherto acknowledged: in everything he wrote, from the letters of his youth to his last plays, there are discussions of religious issues. His view of religion itself seems to have remained fairly constant throughout his career: his plays demonstrate a rejection of inherited religious practices, but suggest that he was never quite satisfied with anything that might serve as a substitute for them. The two questions which lie behind his work are linked by a sense of the quest for a verity, for anything that might be of eternal validity. A recurring motif in his plays is that of a search for transcendent meaning within a particular realm, and the ultimate failure of the seeker. Within the repeated cycle of failures, it is possible to see how Wedekind's notion of the religious could underlie his view of art and morality, for it was as if everything could be justified within the terms of that search for the transcendent.

In this context, Wedekind was conforming to the prevailing trends. Art and religion had always been fairly near relations, and reification of the Deity goes back as far as primitive idolatry. Substitution of one for the other was an idea that waxed and waned throughout time and the turn-of-the-century manifestation of it had in common with Romanticism the notion that intensity of experience equated to a sense of the religious. Like his contemporaries, Wedekind found in religion a rich source of images to illustrate the joy and despair of artistic creation. The artist became priest, prophet and God, the creator of an enhanced reality. For Wedekind, this involved the invention of a series of characters who might be able to point the way to truth. He was to leave nothing unsearched, no region or area that might be concealing the path to the transcendent. God might have been declared dead, but Wedekind was determined to find out if there was anything else that could be put in God's place.

His biographer, Artur Kutscher, records that as a teenager Wedekind declared himself to be an atheist.<sup>13</sup> Despite this, Wedekind was evidently fascinated by religion from a young age: his letters and a school-essay from this period indicate his preoccupation with the debate between *Egoismus* and Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the poetry he wrote in his youth, a large part of which was published in the collection entitled *Die vier Jahreszeiten*, delights in eroticism, solipsism and religion. The artist becomes a suffering martyr or a Christ-figure ('Gott und Welt'; 'Selbstersetzung'); Holy Communion is associated with the sexual act ('Die neue Communion'; 'Debutant'). Altars, devils, sacrifices, paradise-gardens, apples of temptation and prayers all feature in the collection. His attitude to Christianity during this period is best illustrated by his poem 'Das neue Vaterunser', which he had published in 1892 under the pseudonym Hugo Freiherr von Trenck. It combines mockery of Christianity with a praise of the erotic.<sup>15</sup>

The discussion of this poem in the works of two critics, Alfons Höger and Josephine Schröder-Zebralla, illustrates why it is necessary for there to be a further investigation of the role of religion in Wedekind's plays. They both argue that Wedekind was attempting to establish a new religion that united sensuality with Christianity.<sup>16</sup> In this way, they see religion as a factor within another realm, namely Wedekind's interest in sex. Similarly, Thomas Medicus examines Wedekind's notebooks to explore the ways in which Wedekind seemed to be creating a sexual Utopia to which he gave the name 'Die große Liebe', but

13. 'Schon 1881 nennt Wedekind sich einen Atheisten. Er zweifelt auch am göttlichen Ursprung von Gewissen und Gefühl [...]. Er leitet sie aus der Erziehung und dem Umgang mit Menschen überhaupt ab.' (Artur Kutscher, *Frank Wedekind: Sein Leben und seine Werke*, 3 vols (Munich: Müller, 1922-1931), I (1922), 52.)
14. For a picture of Wedekind's background and his letters and early works, see Rolf Kieser, *Benjamin Franklin Wedekind: Biographie einer Jugend* (Zurich: Arche Verlag, 1990). Wedekind's school-essay, "'Behandelt jedermann nach seinem Verdienst, und wer ist vor Schlägen sicher?'" Shakespeare: *Hamlet*' is published in *Frank Wedekind: Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. by Manfred Hahn (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1969), III, pp. 277-80.
15. See *Werke*, ed. Hahn, II, pp. 671-87.
16. See: Josephine Schröder-Zebralla, *Frank Wedekinds religiöser Sensualismus: 'Die Wiedervereinigung von Kirche und Freudenhaus?'* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1985); Alfons Höger, *Hetärismus und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im Frühwerk Frank Wedekinds, Text und Kontext Sonderreihe*, 12 (Copenhagen: Fink, 1981).

Medicus largely ignores the spiritual component.<sup>17</sup> The problem with each of these works is that, in assuming that Wedekind was interested in religion only insofar as it pertains to sexuality, they fail to take seriously enough Wedekind's debate with religion itself. Only John Hibberd, in an article on Wedekind's play *Die Zensur*, has displayed any awareness of the complex wrangling with religious issues that actually takes place within Wedekind's plays.<sup>18</sup> The idea that Wedekind might have had pretensions to theology is one that is somewhat at odds with the notion of an artist whose fundamental preoccupation was sex, but what emerges from the plays is nevertheless the picture of a writer who took a keen interest in religious issues. In addition, the series of notebooks that he kept for a great part of his career, which remain largely unpublished,<sup>19</sup> show that he had a thorough knowledge of the Bible and reveal a particular interest in the Gospels and the life of Christ; they also contain numerous essays and notes that are concerned with religious issues.

If one concentrates on the theme of religion itself in the corpus of Wedekind's work, what becomes clear is that religion is not a mere adjunct to other, more important subjects. Instead, it helps to throw light on otherwise problematic areas in the realms of art, sex and morality. There is a considerable overlap in Wedekind's plays; but, if it is to be possible to identify how Wedekind's own assessment of himself has any validity, it is essential to understand at the outset what he understood the role of the religious to be. It is not, however, the purpose of this work to argue that Wedekind was merely interested in theology, to the exclusion of all other issues; rather, it is important to understand that religion is an essential component in the plays and must not be overlooked. In the critical response to Wedekind, the focus has largely been on the themes of the moral, the erotic and the artistic. Thus if this work takes a somewhat one-sided approach in its attempts to unravel the religious threads

17. Thomas Medicus, *Die große Liebe: Ökonomie und Konstruktion der Körper im Werk von Frank Wedekind* (Marburg: Metro Verlag, 1982).

18. John Hibberd, "Die Wiedervereinigung von Kirche und Freudenhaus": Wedekind's *Die Zensur* and his ideas on religion', *Colloquium Germanica*, 19 (1986), 47-67.

19. The notebooks, hereafter referred to as *Nb*, are in the Münchner Stadtbibliothek/Literaturarchiv (Signatur L 3501). Unless otherwise indicated, I have silently corrected or omitted mis-spellings or alterations in the manuscripts.



in the plays, it is in the interests not of negating, but of redressing the balance with the other important areas.

I will begin by locating Wedekind in his philosophical and theological context and will then examine his plays chronologically, in the interest of bringing out the role of the religious in each case. From this it will be possible to discover how each play contributes to the overall picture of Wedekind's response to religion, art and morality, a picture which becomes clear only when the whole of his career is taken into consideration.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Rejection of Christianity: *Elins Erweckung* and *Frühlings Erwachen*

At first glance, Frank Wedekind's response to religion is almost the stereotyped reaction of a writer of his era. The obvious ridicule with which he treats some religious subjects means his dabbling in the area can be dismissed as being merely the means for him to shock and provoke a society that, at least superficially, retains its devout traditions. Beneath the mocking exterior, however, it is possible to discern a more serious discussion. Two of his early works, *Frühlings Erwachen* and the fragment *Elins Erweckung*, display some of the characteristics that were to feature in his debate with religion throughout his career.<sup>1</sup> He questions the formal role of Christianity in society, and though he might appear to be setting out a wholesale critique of religious thinking, a closer examination of his plays reveals that he was actually investigating what religious belief entailed. It becomes clear that in many ways he was conforming to the trends of theology and philosophy that prevailed in Germany during the nineteenth century, and it is possible to discern the influence of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer in particular. An essential philosophical component of these plays is the notion of the selfish *Ego* and its manifestation in human behaviour, such as its role in individual religious belief. The point at which the *Ego* makes itself most visible is, according to Wedekind, in the sexual realm. This helps to explain why issues pertaining to sexuality are so prevalent in his works; but he also weaves in religious themes, because it seemed bourgeois society and Christianity had combined to repress natural sexuality.

It is necessary first of all to establish how far Wedekind was simply following contemporary cultural trends, and in particular the philosophy

1. *Frühlings Erwachen* was written in 1891. *Elins Erweckung* was recorded as being written in 1887, though a fragment of it was first published in 1894. (See: Frank Wedekind, *Gesammelte Werke*, 9 vols (Munich: Müller, 1912-21), IX (1921), 2. Further reference to Wedekind's *Gesammelte Werke* will be by volume and page number only.)

of Nietzsche.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to ascertain how far Nietzsche directly influenced Wedekind, though it seems likely that Wedekind would have agreed with Nietzsche's thinking on Christianity as summarized, for instance, in his 'Versuch einer Selbstkritik' at the start of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*:

Christenthum war von Anfang an, wesentlich und gründlich, Ekel und Überdruß des Lebens am Leben, welcher sich unter dem Glauben an ein 'anderes' oder 'besseres' Leben nur verkleidete, nur versteckte, nur aufputzte. Der Haß auf die 'Welt', der Fluch auf die Affekte, die Furcht vor der Schönheit und Sinnlichkeit, ein Jenseits, erfunden, um das Diesseits besser zu verleumden, im Grunde ein Verlangen in's Nichts, an's Ende, in's Ausruhen, hin zum 'Sabbat der Sabbate' – dies Alles dünkte mich, ebenso wie der unbedingte Wille des Christenthums, *nur* moralische Werthe gelten zu lassen, immer wie die gefährlichste und unheimlichste Form aller möglichen Formen eines 'Willens zum Untergang', zum Mindesten ein Zeichen tiefster Erkrankung, Müdigkeit, Mißmuthigkeit, Erschöpfung, Verarmung am Leben, – denn vor der Moral (in Sonderheit christlichen, das heißt unbedingten Moral) *muß* das Leben beständig und unvermeidlich Unrecht bekommen, weil Leben etwas essentiell Unmoralisches ist, – *muß* endlich das Leben, erdrückt unter dem Gewichte der Verachtung und des ewigen Nein's, als begehrens-unwürdig, als unwerth an sich empfunden werden.<sup>3</sup>

Here, Nietzsche himself uses the term that defines the age, *Leben*. Rasch explains that *Leben* lay at the centre of the common pursuit of the era for an 'Einheitlichkeit des Zeitstils':

Alle Formprinzipien, die in der Literatur dieser Zeit wirksam werden, lassen sich schließlich zurückbeziehen auf diesen Lebensbegriff, der die [...] entscheidende Erfahrung jener Jahrzehnte, die Erfahrung der Einheit und Allverbundenheit des gesamten Seienden mit enthält. Leben ist das Grundwort der Epoche, ihr Zentralbegriff, vielleicht noch ausschließlicher geltend als der Begriff Vernunft für die Aufklärungszeit oder der Begriff Natur für das spätere 18. Jahrhundert.<sup>4</sup>

The ideas which Nietzsche expresses, notably the rejection of any notion of a *Jenseits*, the criticism of the anti-*Leben* stance of Christianity and the overturning of the concept of morality such that a denial of the body is itself declared to be immoral, would have identified him as a conveni-

2. Wolfdietrich Rasch notes, 'die Wirkung Nietzsches auf die Literatur um 1900 ist unabsehbar groß'. 'Aspekte der deutschen Literatur um 1900' in *Zur deutschen Literatur seit der Jahrhundertwende* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1967), pp. 1-49 (p. 40).

3. Nietzsche, *Werke*, section 3, vol. I, pp. 12-13.

4. Rasch, 'Aspekte', p. 17.

ent point on which Wedekind could focus as his ideas developed. It would be inaccurate, however, to say that Wedekind wholeheartedly embraced all that Nietzsche had to offer; for where Nietzsche saw the advantage in seizing on the opportunities presented by *Leben*, Wedekind also saw validity in the pessimism of Schopenhauer. Alfons Höger notes that, although Nietzsche's influence on Wedekind was significant, especially in the areas of 'die Hinwendung zum Individuum, die Ablehnung der (christlichen) Mitleidsmoral, das Infragestellen bürgerlicher Werte, der illusionlose Blick auf die bestehenden Verhältnisse',<sup>5</sup> Schopenhauer was of even more importance in shaping his ideas:

Bei der Diskussion, inwieweit Schopenhauer für Wedekind Bedeutung gehabt hat, wurde vor allem Wert auf den Begriff 'Objektivität des Willens' als metaphysische Bezeichnung des Körpers, des Leibes gelegt.<sup>6</sup> Dies geschah deshalb, weil die Egoismustheorie von zwei Voraussetzungen ausgeht: Der Mensch handelt nach seiner Natur. Diese Natur ist seine biologische Bestimmung, die sich in den einzelnen Personen verschieden ausprägt. Unter einem höheren Gesichtspunkt handelt der Mensch also absolut moralisch, wenn er seiner eigenen Natur folgt.<sup>7</sup>

The term 'Objektivität des Willens' is important in this area, because it explains why Wedekind concentrated on the realm of sexuality:

Die Befriedigung des Willens verschafft Lust, die Nichtbefriedigung Unlust. Wenn von der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft gerade der Geschlechtstrieb systematisch unterdrückt und der Verfolgung ausgesetzt wird, dann ist es kein Wunder, das jeder Einzelne in Bezug auf seinen Leib als 'Objektivität des Willens' mehr Unlust als Lust erfährt und daß die endgültige Lust-Unlust-Bilanz negativ ausfällt. Damit ist die metaphysische Basis für die Hervorhebung der Lust, und insbesondere die Lust im geschlechtlichen Bereich, gesichert, und das Leben erhält nun einen Sinn, insofern der Einzelne für den Lebensgenuß kämpft, d.h. für jene Lust, die ihm der Leib als Objektivität des Willens zur Verfügung stellt.<sup>8</sup>

5. Alfons Höger, *Frank Wedekind: Der Konstruktivismus als schöpferische Methode*, (Königstein: Scriptor Verlag, 1979), p. 58.
6. He further explains that Schopenhauer used the term 'Objektivität des Willens' to refer to the body, because 'der ganze Leib (ist) nichts Anderes, als der objectivierte, d.h. zur Vorstellung gewordene Wille' (*ibid.*, p. 47).
7. *ibid.*, p. 58.
8. *ibid.*, p. 60.

In this respect, Wedekind's drama is concerned with the question of whether it is possible to retain a sense of the transcendent, if all human behaviour is governed solely by *Egoismus*, which is itself most evident in the sexual realm. Höger explains that philosophically it was possible for Darwinism and Pessimism to give an explanation for life, and this view was represented by Eduard von Hartmann, 'der davon ausgeht, daß am Ende der Geschichte nur noch Lebewesen existieren, die zu der Erkenntnis gelangt sind, daß Nicht-sein besser als Da-sein ist'.<sup>9</sup> However, even this teleological philosophy presupposes a concept of order in nature, which was not necessarily shared by Wedekind. His universe is too chaotic to be governed by any one principle and his characters have to adapt to the unruly circumstances in which they find themselves. In *Frühlings Erwachen*, for example, Melchior pursues his *Egoist* philosophy only until it harms Wendla, when he acknowledges his responsibility. Ella, the embodiment of *Leben* in *Elin's Erweckung*, is perceived to be an ordinary prostitute in the eyes of the other men in the play. Indeed, Elias's adulation of her is ultimately made to seem faintly ridiculous. It is as if Wedekind is determined to undermine anything that might be interpreted as a definitive statement of his overall philosophy, so that his critique of society is not combined with any possible alternatives to the status quo. In *Frühlings Erwachen*, the Church is partly responsible for the suffering of the children, as the result of its willingness to support the bourgeois values within school and family that curb the children's development. In *Elin's Erweckung*,<sup>10</sup> the Church that Elias represents can itself be seen to be the source of bourgeois values. He is a theological student who has begun to doubt his calling and his faith. Nevertheless, his training has influenced the way in which he speaks, deals with other people and thinks – in particular with regard to sexuality. He experiences sexual feelings, but is forced to deny them because they are not appropriate in one connected with the Church. He is lodging with Nettchen Schimmelpfennig and has hinted to her that, once he has

9. *ibid.*, p. 59.

10. The introduction to the play records the name-change of the protagonist from Elias to Elin (IX, 2, though the text retains the name Elias). Wedekind's original draft gave his name as Emanuel (see Kutscher, I, 169), which, in the context of the play, is ironic given its meaning, 'Gott mit uns' (Isaiah 7. 14, Matthew 1. 23. Biblical quotations are taken from: *Die Bibel nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers*, rev. edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1991).)

completed his studies and become a pastor, he will marry her, thus ensuring for both of them a safe, bourgeois existence. Because he is currently financially dependent on her, he cannot make it too obvious that his intentions do not really involve marrying her at all. He always has useful biblical phrases to hand, and uses them to avoid real conversations, so he is able to hide his distaste for Nettchen behind his mask of religiosity.

His opening monologue reveals his desire to be reconciled to the beauty of nature which he can see outside his window, but his theological training has ignored the wonders of creation that can be observed, and is concerned instead with the study of books. He wants to be able to feel part of nature, but instead is imprisoned in his studies. There is no connection between the God about whom he is writing in his sermon and the beauty of the world outside, because the two have become separated. For Elias, the Christian God exists in the Bible and in heaven, but not in the world, which is under the control of nature. The ecstatic vision of his opening monologue is followed by the desire to reclaim the innocence he remembers of his childhood, and then replaced by the despair that awaits him as he sits down at his desk to begin work. His distaste for his work is exacerbated by the fact that it combines his future bourgeois career as a pastor with the arid theology, which he finds it impossible to reconcile with the world of wonder he perceives. His words also recall the opening monologue of Goethe's *Faust*, in which Faust describes his disillusionment with arid academia. It is the cue for Faust to embark on his own search for *Leben*, with the help of Mephistopheles and Gretchen. In *Elias Erweckung*, these roles are recalled in the characters Oskar and Ella.

Elias is further burdened, however, by an overwhelming sense of guilt, brought on by the sexual desires that are a part of the natural world from which he is alienated, and yet which are not allowed to be acknowledged as he undergoes his theological training. The conflict comes to the surface when he has a dream in which the suffering Christ changes into Elias's sister, for whom Elias then experiences incestuous desire. This represents his state of being torn between the bourgeois world with which he has grown up, and which will offer him a career, and the sensual desires that are in him and have been brought to a head by his dream. Wedekind uses him partly as a satirical representation of the Church, inasmuch as he is patronizing and judgemental, and filled with

bourgeois values which he defends with frequent references to the Bible; but Wedekind also wants to convey Elias's real dilemma, which is his sense of being caught between the safe, bourgeois world that he knows and has been brought up with, but which denies natural sexuality, and the world of *Leben* that has been pointed to in his dream.

Alfons Höger and Josephine Schröder-Zebralla both agree that, as the latter describes it, the play illustrates Wedekind's attempt, 'ein "neues" Evangelium zu schreiben'.<sup>11</sup> Their interpretations follow Kutscher's argument that *Elins Erweckung* is related to Wedekind's blending of the erotic with the Christian in 'Das neue Vaterunser'.<sup>12</sup> In particular, Schröder-Zebralla sees Elias's rejection of religion in favour of sexuality as illustrative of a process by which traditional religious belief is replaced by a new religion of sexual experience. Each of these interpretations concentrates on what can be discerned from the play of Wedekind's attitude to sex rather than Christianity. For example, in Schröder-Zebralla's description of 'Das neue Vaterunser' and *Elins Erweckung*, she writes that, having displayed his antipathy towards Christian theology, 'Wedekind [gibt] in diesen beiden Dichtungen sein frühestes Bekenntnis zu einer sensualistischen Religion'.<sup>13</sup>

The portrayal of religion in the play is, however, far more equivocal than she describes. A close study reveals that Elias cannot really be said to have much of a faith to reject. What purports to be his Christianity is in fact a nature-worship, the Christian surface of which results in selfishness, guilt and shame. Wedekind is thus presenting a watered-down, weak Christianity that denies the problems that Elias experiences and is concerned with theology instead of people and, like Elias's sermon, is divided between the present and the heavenly future, to the

11. Schröder-Zebralla, p. 71. For a summary of these interpretations, see Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, p. 185.

12. They also refer to what Kutscher described as Wedekind's plan for a continuation of the play, which involves Elias going on to marry Ella, and Nettchen marrying a 'Schweinemetzger' who had already tried wooing her (IX, 13). This helps to remove some of the ambiguity that surrounds the play as it stands, inasmuch as it shows Nettchen remaining happily bourgeois and Elias breaking free from the clutches of repressive theological training; but given Wedekind's depiction of marriage in his later works, such as the *Lulu*-plays, *Franziska* and *Schloß Wetterstein*, it is not necessarily a guarantee of a happy ending. (See: Höger, *Hetärismus*, p. 58; Schröder-Zebralla, p. 73; Kutscher, I, 169.)

13. Schröder-Zebralla, p. 71.

extent that it can be confident in neither. In this respect, he belongs to a theological tradition, established by Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century, of pseudo-panteism. Schleiermacher's theology is described by A.S. Peake:

Finite and isolated selves as we are, an experience is possible to us in which we transcend these limitations and know ourselves to be one with the universe. For the individual is at root one with the universal life, the cosmic energy finds its point of manifestation in the individual consciousness, the life which throbs in the All pulsates also in the One. And when there comes to any finite spirit this sense of the All in the One and the One in the All, in that ecstatic moment, that flash of illumination, religion is born. The core of the religious experience is thus emotional, but it is emotion at its highest, created by the intuition of unity and emancipating the individual from the finite by making it one with the Infinite life.<sup>14</sup>

Elias's opening monologue reveals his sense of isolation from the world's natural beauty, and the isolation is made worse because the sexual desire he experiences is not only hinting at the desire for union, but is also the cause of the guilt that arises as the result of his notion that such desire is wrong. Though he is not aware of it, he is to find this unity with the Infinite in sexual experience. As the play opens, Schleiermacher's 'universal life' is in nature. It is only as Elias discusses his feelings with his friend Oskar, and ultimately sleeps with the prostitute Ella, that he is to realize that he can be united with the universe through the power of sex. It is important to note, however, that the Christian faith he apparently rejects does not run very deep. In his opening monologue, Elias bemoans his separation from nature: 'O Glück, o Sonnenschein! O könnt' ich eins / Mit euch mich fühlen!' (IX, 4). But absent from this paean is any reference to a God who created it. Instead he worships nature itself:

So wollt' ich dich, o Mutter Erde, küssen  
Und, meine Augen auf dem Lichte hebend,  
Dir danken auf den Knien, erhabne Schöpfung,  
Für Blut und Odem. (IX, 4)

14. A.S. Peake, 'The History of Theology', in *Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, by A.S. Peake, B. Bosanquet and F. Bonavia (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1915), pp. 131-184 (p. 136).



Though this is only a hint that he has rejected the notion of God as the creator, the sense of a distant God is also evident in the passage he refers to in the sermon he is preparing – namely, the closing verses of Luke’s Gospel, where Christ blesses his disciples and then ascends into heaven. So Elias selects as his text the departing God – not one who is active in the world, but one who has returned to heaven, leaving humanity to suffer alone.

Rather than simply being representative of Christianity *per se*, Elias really embodies some of the philosophical and theological preoccupations with it in the nineteenth century. Schleiermacher was just one of the sources of attack on Christianity, particularly in Germany, in the nineteenth century and in particular following David Friedrich Strauß’s *Leben Jesu*, which claimed that the gospel records of Christ’s life were mythologizations. Kutscher records Wedekind’s possession of a copy of Ernest Renan’s *Leben Jesu*; Renan pursued a similar line of argument to that of Strauß.<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche’s criticism of Strauß formed one of his *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, which was essentially an attack on a Christianity that denied its own basic principles and yet wished to continue as a valid belief-system. In effect, by attacking the liberal Christianity that Nietzsche had already condemned, Wedekind was not adding anything new to an old debate.<sup>16</sup> Still, the lack of faith Elias displays here needs to be emphasized, for what he rejects has little to do with Christianity. Instead, Elias stands for an empty, academic theology which is a sterile, lifeless collection of ideas that he is quite happy to pass on to those who are willing to listen to him.

Despite his own rejection of traditional religious ideas, Wedekind was wont to include biblical quotations and allusions in his plays. They are most prominent in *Frühlings Erwachen*, *Elins Erweckung* and *Der Marquis von Keith*. In each case, such scriptural quotation serves to make a subtly ironic comment on the action of the play and to explain further the speaker’s way of thinking. It also presents a network of allusions and references that occur in more than one play, and provides an undercurrent of thematic similarity that might not otherwise be apparent. In *Frühlings Erwachen*, for example, Moritz refers to the suffering he experiences as a result of his ‘männliche Regungen’ as a ‘Gethsemane’

15. Kutscher, I, 52.

16. See Peake, pp. 166-67.

(II, 103). In a similar manner, he complains about his nervous state before his exam, 'vor dem Examen habe ich zu Gott gefleht, er möge mich schwindsüchtig werden lassen, auf daß der Kelch ungenossen vorübergehe' (II, 120; cf. Matthew 26. 39, 42). For the children of *Frühlings Erwachen*, such language is necessary because they do not have adequate words to describe their experiences of growing up, so they must use the words and the imagery that they have been taught at school.

Nettchen in *Elins Erweckung* is linked with them in this fashion, because she does her best to impress Elias with her own knowledge of the Bible, and uses similar biblical references to describe her difficulties whilst he is preparing for his exam. She, too, mentions the 'Kelch' and describes her suffering as a 'Golgotha' (IX, 6). Her method of biblical reference is, however, crude in comparison to that of Elias, and he uses her relative ignorance of the Bible as an instrument to demonstrate his superiority over her. He goes on not only to mislead Nettchen, but to put biblical quotation to all sorts of strange uses in the process.

The whole opening scene is modelled on the formal ceremony of a church service, with the bread and coffee taking the place of bread and wine, Elias making moral statements without any real foundation, preaching messages that he himself does not believe to his congregation (Nettchen), and finally taking up a collection at the end, at which Nettchen is supposed to give graciously. Elias represents a Church out of touch with the needs of its people and more interested in material than in spiritual improvement. He is also pompous and overbearing in his treatment of Nettchen, because both of them are conforming to the roles each thinks is appropriate for their situation: he is overcritical and talks down to her, and she fusses around and chides him for oversleeping, but deferentially, to demonstrate how much she is concerned for his welfare and will look after him when they are married.

Their conversation drifts between theology and triviality, and throws up some interesting issues. For instance, Elias quotes a verse from the Apocrypha, which does call into question what sort of theological training he is undergoing: he is obviously not Roman Catholic if he is contemplating marriage, and yet it is only the Roman Catholic Church that recognizes the Apocrypha as scripture.<sup>17</sup> Whatever Elias's

17. The *Vorwort* to *Die Apokryphen der Lutherbibel* explains the different responses to the Apocrypha: 'Sie kommen in der griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzung der

denomination is remains a mystery and is evidently not important, for it is arid Christianity as a whole that is being questioned, rather than a branch of it. Elias gives a false verse-reference, citing 'Jesus Sirach / Im vierundzwanzigsten' (IX, 9).<sup>18</sup> This scriptural pronouncement is itself placed in a prosaic context, for Elias switches between theology and mundane discussions of food with every sentence:

Geh mit dem Labsal nicht so teuflisch um,  
Mein süßes Nettchen. Sei getroßt und streich dir  
Ein frommes Abendbrot, wie's einer zücht'gen  
Gottsel'gen Christenjungfrau ziemt. Bedenke,  
Der Sünde Macht ist groß. (IX, 9)

His use of religious language enables him to establish a clear intellectual superiority over Nettchen, with which he feels he is able to keep her at a safe distance. He needs to do this, because where in the dream he comes to reveal sexual desire for his sister, Nettchen's maternal nature repels him. Even though he is dependent on her for his food and accommodation, he cannot countenance the prospect of marrying her. Höger describes how Elias's incestuous desire, coupled with his rejection of Nettchen, represents an essential component of Elias's wish to escape his bourgeois future:

In den ersten beiden Szenen liebt Elias Nettchen wie seine Mutter. Er ist sich über seine Verpflichtung ihr gegenüber im klaren, und der Bedeutung der ökonomischen Abhängigkeit entspricht der Ehrgeiz, den er darin legt, Pastor zu werden. Die ersten beiden Szenen zeigen einen stereotypen, sich im bürgerlichen Rahmen haltenden Lebenslauf [...] In diesem Zusammenhang funktioniert die Schwester als die Verheißung des Ausbruchs aus diesem vorbestimmten Rahmen, als Möglichkeit der Verwirklichung der eigenen menschlichen Natur, wobei der Ausbruch vorläufig durch soziale Tabus verhindert wird, da die Frau, die in Elias sexuelle Lust hervorruft, seine Schwester ist.<sup>19</sup>

Bibel vor, sind jedoch in der Sammlung der hebräischen Schriften des alten Testaments nicht enthalten. Deshalb werden sie von den reformierten Kirchen nicht als biblisch im Vollsinn anerkannt, während die katholische Kirche sie im Konzil von Trient (1546) als vollwertige Bücher der Heiligen Schrift aufzählt.' (*Die Apokryphen nach der deutschen Übersetzung Martin Luthers* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1971, 1981), p. 5.)

18. The verse Elias quotes is in fact Sirach 23. 7.

19. Höger, *Hetärismus*, p. 70.

Sexual desire here, then, provides the impetus for Elias to make the choice between pursuing the career for which his bourgeois upbringing has prepared him, or acting according to his own will. This is an important feature in the play, and in Wedekind's work as a whole. Elias has reached a point where he must choose between *Bürgerlichkeit* and *Leben*. Many of Wedekind's subsequent works are concerned with characters who are already outsiders, and choose to fight the *bürgerlich* world to which they are unsuited. Elias, on the other hand, is seen at the moment where he must decide which path he should follow: one of conformism and repression, or one of potentially hazardous liberation.

It is, of course, impossible for Elias to discuss these matters with Nettchen, which provides another explanation for his tendency to use biblical phrases: they shore up his bourgeois self-image and enable him to remain non-committal in his conversation, whilst at the same time helping to conceal his secret intentions and desires. When speaking to her, he stays on the offensive, and focuses on what he terms her lack of faith, or wisdom, and overlays it with a complex system of biblical allusions that he is confident she will not understand, thereby reinforcing his sense of superiority.<sup>20</sup> She also allows him to carry out his self-confident displays because she does not want to put him off ultimately marrying her.

Their breakfast-dialogue contains many allusions to Elias's biblical namesake, such as Elias's referring to Nettchen as 'mein barmherz'ger Rabe' (IX, 9; cf. I Kings 17. 4-6), and Nettchen's comment, 'und ist an meinem Töpfchen bis auf heute / Kein Wunder noch geschehen' (IX, 9, cf. I Kings 17. 14-16). His response, 'und zwar um deines / Unglaubens willen!' (IX, 9-10), once again shows him asserting his dominance over her. She attempts to make a clever joke, based on her own subtle biblical allusion, but he simply uses it as an excuse to complain about the food she provides. Hence her desperate cry, 'an der entsetzlichen Theologie / Sterb' ich noch Hunger!' (IX, 10).

He reaffirms the distance between them when he compares her with the Queen of Sheba, and implicitly, therefore, himself with Solomon (IX, 10, cf. I Kings 10). Similarly, when she emotionally declares her

20. Even his use of the word 'Honigseim' (IX, 9) is a reference to Sirach 24. 27: 'Denn an mich zu denken ist süßer als Honig, / Und mich zu besitzen süßer als Honigseim'.

willingness to rescue him should he come unstuck during his sermon, he retreats behind a wall of pompous religiosity. He cites Isaiah 58. 8-9:

Sieh, Nettchen, seine  
Gedanken sind nicht unsere Gedanken;  
Und unsre Wege sind nicht seine Wege.  
Denn wie der Himmel höher denn die Erde,  
Hinwiedrum auch die Erde tiefer denn  
Die Himmel alle, also stehen seine  
Gedanken über unsere Gedanken. (IX, 11)

What he intends to imply is that, as God's ways are unknowable, there is no need for Elias to explain himself. In the same way, he himself then quotes Christ in Gethsemane – 'dein Wille, nicht der meine, / Vater im Himmel' (IX, 12; cf. Luke 22. 42) – essentially to absolve himself of any responsibility in their relationship. Finally, he offers her the vision of an idyllic future:

Glaub' mir, er kommt schon, wenn er findet, daß  
Die Zeit erfüllt, und: Nettchen Schimmelpfennig,  
Wo bist du! – ruft er dich. Und du wirst freudig  
Entgegen und ihm sagen: Sieh, o Herr,  
Hier bin ich. – Und er wird dich väterlich  
Auf deine jungfräuliche Stirne küssen  
Und dich an deiner großen Hand einführen  
In seine ew'gen Herrlichkeiten... (IX, 12)

Elias deliberately misleads her by playing on her belief that he is covertly promising forthcoming wedded bliss – hence her subsequent cry, 'O mein Geliebter, / Ich hab' auf dich gewartet' (*ibid.*); but equally, Elias is telling her that, though it might be necessary for her to suffer in life, she ought to put up with it, because ultimately she will encounter exactly the sort of God she would like to have as her reward for all that suffering. It is evident that Elias himself has no such conception of God, and is simply fobbing her off with what she wants to hear. Like his use of biblical allusion, it gives no real indication of what he actually believes. His constant reference to the Bible indicates that Elias has been well taught, but it seems that the more he quotes, the greater is his ability to disguise his actual thoughts. Instead of engaging in real conversation, Elias makes pronouncements which are loosely connected

to passages of scripture. For example, Elias uses a biblical allusion to encourage sexual abstinence, when he tells Nettchen, 'Gott / Schickt seinen Engel mit dem Flammenschwert / Als Leibgardisten dir ans Bett. – Die Tugend schmeckt süß' (IX, 14). It refers to Genesis 3. 24, in which God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden: 'und er trieb den Menschen hinaus und ließ lagern vor dem Garten Eden die Cherubim mit dem flammenden, blitzenden Schwert, zu bewachen den Weg zu dem Baum des Lebens.'

The narrative of the Fall and the subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden is overturned. In the Bible it leads to the alienation of Adam and Eve from creation, and this sense of alienation is shared by Elias. His means of reconciliation is not, however, God's saving sacrifice, but human sexuality. The cherubim that are guarding Nettchen's virtue are also guarding the gate to Eden, and the implication is that what Elias is to discover is that it is after all possible to return to Eden via natural sexuality. Though he is arguing for the positive attribute of virtue, he is unknowingly foreshadowing his later sense of having found his way to paradise via his sexual experience with Ella.

Elias argues here that the right place for sex is within marriage; but he bases his argument on a passage from Ecclesiastes, which states, 'alles hat seine Zeit' (IX, 14; cf. Ecclesiastes 3). The passage is only just relevant to the extent that it states that there is a right time for all things. Its context would not immediately suggest that it refers to sex. Where Elias has been upholding his bourgeois value-system with biblical quotation, Wedekind now shows that, as the need to hide his feelings becomes greater (as his unwillingness to marry Nettchen is in danger of being revealed), so his method of reference to Bible-verses becomes more haphazard. Even Nettchen begins to notice the hollowness of Elias's argument here, when she reminds him of an example of Old Testament sexual behaviour:

Der Salomon war mir ein saubres Muster  
Mit seiner Bathseba! – Das fehlte gerade noch,  
Daß dieser Springinsfeld zum Prediger wurde  
In Israel! – Eli, du liebst mich nicht. (IX, 15)

She has become aware of Elias's back-peddalling in their relationship, despite his attempts to disguise it, and uses her own biblical illustration to drive the point home.<sup>21</sup>

Elias knows that he is on unsteady ground, because he does not even use this as an occasion to point out her ignorance – that it was David rather than Solomon (II Samuel 11). Instead, he changes the subject, and demands money from her, with a selfish misuse of Scripture: 'Evangelio / Matthäi fünfe, vierzig – so dir jemand / Den Rock will nehmen, dem laß auch den Mantel. / Ermuntre dich, mein Herz!' (IX, 15). The verse – from Christ's Sermon on the Mount – is an instruction to his followers to give to others, not to demand from them. The final demonstration of Elias's power over Nettchen is his instruction to her, 'Nun spende / Mir deinen Tau und sag': Ich danke dir' (*ibid.*) The scene ends with Nettchen giving him money, and even thanking him, as he had requested. At this point, Wedekind's satire of the Church in the figure of Elias reaches its climax: the promise of the Church of a heavenly future is like Elias's promise to marry Nettchen. Both promises are disguised by a great deal of bluster and irrelevant biblical quotations that are twisted to fit their circumstances, and then the hearer is expected to pay for the privilege. Nevertheless, Wedekind does not merely present Nettchen as the blameless victim of cruel deception. She is partly responsible, because she simply allows herself to be beguiled in this way, and effectively encourages Elias to continue unchallenged, like members of society who meekly accept doctrines of the Church and never call it to account or actually think about what they are being told to believe.

The implication of what such unquestioning acceptance of spiritual leaders as Elias can lead to, is clear when one considers Wedekind's portrayal of Pastor Kahlbauch in *Frühlings Erwachen*. Kahlbauch preaches a sermon at the graveside of Moritz, who has shot himself after receiving the guide to reproduction Melchior wrote for him, and having failed to be moved up in school. Pastor Kahlbauch is rather like Elias would be if he were to complete his training. He too gives incorrect biblical references, humiliates those who are weaker, and hardly appears

21. Elizabeth Boa describes the Freudian problems at the heart of the Elias-Nettchen relationship, which result in his finding her increasingly unattractive. He must therefore resort to ever more arcane methods of procrastination, hence this misappropriation of Ecclesiastes. (*The Sexual Circus: Wedekind's Theatre of Subversion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 170.)

to believe in anything other than the respect that people pay him. Caricature though he may be, a great deal can still be discerned from the speech he delivers at Moritz's graveside, in which he says Moritz is condemned to a threefold death for having committed suicide:

Denn wer die Gnade, mit der der ewige Vater den in Sünden Geborenen gesegnet, von sich wies, er wird des *geistigen* Todes sterben! – Wer aber in eigenwilliger fleischlicher Verleugnung der Gott gebührenden Ehre dem Bösen gelebt und gedient, er wird des *leiblichen* Todes sterben! – Wer jedoch das Kreuz, das der Allerbarmer ihm um der Sünde willen auferlegt, freventlich von sich geworfen, wahrlich, wahrlich, ich sage euch, der wird des *ewigen* Todes sterben! (II, 149)

In the same way that Elias avoids discussing marriage with Nettchen, Pastor Kahlbauch avoids talking about Moritz's death. To break death down into these three component parts is an exercise in obfuscation, the chief purpose of which is to heap the blame for Moritz's suicide wholly on his own head. By so doing, Kahlbauch also exonerates the bourgeois mourners who are present at the funeral. His argument is not biblical, for the Bible does not differentiate between the physical and the spiritual in this way.<sup>22</sup> The Roman Catholic *Lehrbuch der Moraltheologie* taught that suicide was sinful because it transgressed the fifth Commandment, and also argued, 'die Verwerflichkeit und Unsittlichkeit desselben ergibt sich [...] aus den unmoralischen Beweggründen, aus welchen er meistens hervorgeht, nämlich aus sittlicher Schwäche und Feigheit, aus Unglauben oder Mangel an lebendiger Glaubenskraft'.<sup>23</sup> Kahlbauch is, however, not remotely concerned with the causes of Moritz's suicide, other than to ensure that everyone knows that the fault lies wholly with Moritz and not with themselves.

His argument – that God has placed a cross on the individual's back as a punishment for sin – effectively reverses the biblical order, for Christ's exhortation in the synoptic Gospels is that one take up one's own cross and follow him.<sup>24</sup> The biblical symbol of liberation becomes, in Kahlbauch's words, the punishment God inflicts upon his creation,

22. See: L.L. Morris, 'Death' in, *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. by J.D. Douglas, rev. by N. Hillyer, 2nd edn (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), pp. 273-75.

23. Anton Koch, *Lehrbuch der Moraltheologie*, 2nd edn, rev. by the author (Freiburg: Herder, 1907), p. 254.

24. Matthew 16. 24; cf. Mark 8. 34; Luke 9. 23.



when Christ's death on the cross was what lifted that punishment. Kahlbauch is here using biblical imagery, but only in such a way as to heap guilt upon the weak and to strengthen his own position. Elias in *Elins Erweckung* uses the Bible in exactly the same way. Indeed, both Elias and Kahlbauch use the same image of the 'Dornenpfad' (cf. IX, 11) to describe their walks through life. Their respected positions as overseers of bourgeois values mean that their paths are far from thorny, and Kahlbauch in particular is so out of touch with the problems of the people around him that the way he tries to identify himself with his fellow sufferers in life – 'uns aber, die wir fort und fort wallen den Dornenpfad' (II, 149) – is preposterous. Kahlbauch's speech also strays into the realm of predestination, for, as Friedrich Rothe argues, Kahlbauch's words mean Moritz's suicide is 'ein sündiger, eudämonistischer Akt, eine fleischliche Verirrung, die egoistisch dem Leiden vorschnell eine Ende setzt',<sup>25</sup> but Kahlbauch concludes by praising God for 'seine unerforschliche Gnadenwahl' (II, 149). The fact that, as Kahlbauch describes it, God chooses some for himself, and others, such as Moritz, choose their own paths, introduces the same question of determinism and free will that Melchior discusses with Wendla (II, 115-16). In one of his notebooks, Wedekind refers to the apostle Paul's discussion of this point: 'Der Töpfer kann aus seinem Ton eine Opferschale oder ein *Nachtgeschirr* bilden. Da hat ihm niemand dreinzureden (Apostel *Paulus* an die Römer 9: 21).'<sup>26</sup> Wedekind did not discuss the question in his notebook, and it seems he came to no conclusions either; the point is subtly restated in Kahlbauch's words of consolation to Melchior's parents, however, when he says, 'wir wissen, daß denen, die Gott lieben, alle Dinge zum Besten dienen. 1. Korinth. 12, 15.' (II, 150). This verse forms part of Paul's hymn of praise to God for predestining the elect to be his children:

Wir wissen aber, daß denen, die Gott lieben, alle Dinge zum Besten dienen, denen, die nach seinem Ratschluß berufen sind. Denn die er ausersehen hat, die hat er auch vorherbestimmt, daß sie gleich sein sollten dem Bild seines Sohnes, damit dieser der Erstgeborene sei unter vielen Brüdern.<sup>27</sup>

25. Friedrich Rothe, '*Frühlings Erwachen: Zum Verhältnis von sexueller und sozialer Emanzipation bei Frank Wedekind*', *Studi Germanici*, 7 (1969), 30-41 (p. 36).

26. *Nb* 16, 40<sup>f</sup>.

27. Romans 8. 28-29.

For Kahlbauch, the use of the verse is simply to comfort the grieving and is wholly platitudinous. The false reference he gives (I Corinthians 12. 15) is not randomly incorrect, for that verse reads, ‘wenn aber der Fuß spräche: Ich bin keine Hand, darum bin ich nicht Glied des Leibes, sollte er deshalb nicht Glied des Leibes sein?’ In its context, this refers to all Christians forming part of one body – the Church. Here, however, it refers to Moritz, who was a member of the body of humanity whether he chose to be or not, but found in suicide a way to stop being one. So the verse and its incorrect reference combine to create the same idea of tension between those who are selected by God and those who choose to go their own way. It is Moritz’s decision to reject the role which has been set out for him, when others are willing to submit themselves to the vagaries of life, that causes Kahlbauch to condemn him in the manner he does. In *Elins Erweckung*, Elias’s ultimate rejection of the pastorate forms a similar, though considerably less drastic, break from the bourgeois future for which he has been predetermined by social convention.

Kahlbauch is unchallenged in his position of superiority over the children and adults in the play. It is noticeable in *Elins Erweckung* that Elias is in much the weaker position in his conversations with the atheist Oskar. Elias’s superior biblical allusions, with which he holds Nettchen at bay, are absent from his conversation with Oskar and he is placed in the position of weakness, as the guilt and shame he experiences as a result of his dream threaten to overwhelm him. Schröder-Zebralla discusses the significance of his dream, and concludes:

Die Heilige Kommunion ist als Metapher für Elias’ Liebesakt mit der Schwester erkenntlich. Sein Traum wird zum erotischen Wunschtraum, der ihm seine Sehnsucht nach körperlicher Liebe bewußt werden läßt: Der Traum wird zur sexuellen Ersatzhandlung. Für den jungen Theologen, der den Traum als reale Sünde begreift, können nicht mehr Vergehen zusammentreffen: Vorehelicher Geschlechtsverkehr, Ehebruch (seine Schwester ist verheiratet), die Schändung eines Sakrilegs und vor allem Inzest.<sup>28</sup>

Linking sexual intercourse and holy communion in this sacrilegious way meant Wedekind had a graphic means of illustrating his theme of sexual union becoming a substitute for Elias’s lost relationship with God. Wedekind uses a similar image in his poem ‘Die neue Communion’,

28. Schröder-Zebralla, p. 77.

which begins with the writer looking up at Lieschen as she picks apples from a tree, in an echo of the Fall-narrative, and ends with his sexual salvation:

Sieh, und am nämlichen Abend schon,  
Tief in den Kissen gebettet,  
Ward in andächtiger Kommunion  
Meine Seele gerettet.<sup>29</sup>

In the description of his dream, Elias's concentration on the whole aspect of suffering in the Christ-figure he encounters shows that he is also heavily influenced by the image of the suffering Christ that is prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church, and this becomes clearer when he finds that he has mysteriously acquired the bread and wine of the communion service, because of the teaching in the Catholic tradition of transubstantiation, that by partaking in communion the individual is sharing in Christ's broken body and shed blood: 'als Kommunion ist die Eucharistie sodann das Zeichen und die wirksamste Ursache der mystisch-realen Gemeinschaft mit Jesus Christus'.<sup>30</sup> The transubstantiation here is not that of bread changing into the body of Christ, but the body of Christ changing into that of Elias's sister. As Schröder-Zebralla observes, the fact that it is his sister whom Elias desires compounds his sense of guilt, but as Höger states, it is more the opportunity to escape the clutches of bourgeois society – which include its taboos – that he really desires. The encounter with the Christ-figure leads Elias to say 'kein Glück kannst' ich in jener Stunde, denn / Dem Manne gleich zu werden, mich gleich ihm / Für meiner armen Brüder Wohl zu opfern.' (IX, 22). Here, Elias desires to identify himself with the death-struggles of the Christ-figure before him; but in this, he claims to find joy. In terms of the will and the *Ego*, he is either selfishly egoistic and wanting to serve because it will make him feel better about himself, or because he cannot bear to see the suffering of the figure in the vision and wishes to alleviate his own sense of discomfort. In each case, Elias's altruistic desire is founded on his own selfish will, and is not related to religious conviction. Elias's faith

29. *Werke*, ed. Hahn, II, 689. A shorter version of 'Die neue Kommunion', entitled 'Unterm Apfelbaum', was published in the collection 'Die vier Jahreszeiten' (I, 61-62).

30. Koch, p. 183.

as described here is the product of exactly the same thinking along the lines of *Egoismus* that Oskar describes in the following scene, and which the children discuss in *Frühlings Erwachen*.

The advice offered by Oskar in response to Elias's suffering and the guilt he experiences as a result of his dream is:

Laß deine Geistesschafe  
An freier Alpenwand im reinen Äther  
Das kräft'ge Gras bewegten Lebens weiden,  
Du wirst dir länger kein Verbrecher sein'. (IX, 27)

In Oskar's suggestion that Elias search for sexual liberation, it is the choice of *Leben* that he offers and to him the important aspect is that Elias become sexually experienced, regardless of whether he marries or not. But Elias's sexual guilt is such that he still uses the language of sacrifice to describe a possible encounter with Nettchen:

Unser Brautnacht, Oskar,  
Vermag ich ohne Grauen nicht zu denken.  
Weiß Gott, ich liebe sie! Wie je ein Kind  
Die Mutter liebte, lieb' ich dieses Weib.  
Der Opfertod für sie wär mir ein Labsal,  
Allein zum Bund des Ehbetts, wie mir dünkt,  
Bedarf es mehr als guten Willens, mehr  
Als Opferfreudigkeit – Enthusiasmus,  
Begeisterung. (IX, 27-28)

As well as pushing Elias towards sensual experience, Oskar also challenges his faith when he refers to the poetry Elias has written (IX, 29). Elias's own description of it as 'im Sinnenrausch gezeugte Mißgeburt' (*ibid.*) enables one to deduce that it would reflect a similar pantheism to that which is evident in Elias's opening monologue. In response to Oskar's cynical accusation that Elias's faith is more to do with the convenience of marriage and career, Elias effectively agrees with him by pleading with him to cease this line of argument:

O rüttele nicht mit deiner frevlen Hand  
Am unterwühlten Bauwerk, das dem Armen  
Notdürftig nur noch Schutz und Heil gewährt!  
[...] Höllisch brennt  
Der heiße Durst nach Leben, Liebe, Freiheit

Zuzeiten in der Brust, mit wilden Flüchen,  
Dem Wehgekreisch gemarteter Natur,  
Die scheele Gnade der Entsagung treffend.  
Ein jäher Taumel faßt das eitle Herz,  
Sich selber Gott zu sein, in schrankenlosem,  
In nimmermüdem Ringen sich das All,  
Die einzig wahre Heimat zu erobern...  
(IX, 30)

His vacillation between the worlds of sensual *Leben* and restrained dogmatism is reflected in his desire here, 'sich selber Gott zu sein'. This argument emerges from his sense of abandonment by God; all he can cling to is the argument that 'unbekümmert richtet / Der ew'ge Lenker zwischen Bö's und Gut, / Und keine Formel, die ihn wegbewiese' (*ibid.*). So his spiritual battle is between what he experiences at every moment – sensuality – and a theory of a God whose non-existence cannot be proved. Elias reflects the conclusion of Pascal's Wager, that it is better to believe than not to believe; for Elias, this means he feels the need to retain even a lukewarm belief in a *deus absconditus*. Oskar argues that, in such circumstances, the more honest choice is to abandon one's faith, because otherwise Elias is open to the charge of *Egoismus* and eudemonism, if all his faith rests on is his desire to protect himself from a vaguely threatening future.

As Oskar argues, such a faith could just as easily involve belief in people living on the dark side of the moon. His further example, that one could equally believe in a person behind the nearest gravestone, and Schigolch's sudden appearance, only serve to throw Elias into further confusion and guilt, but his response – to attempt to hand Schigolch the money that Nettchen gave him and to make him leave – is a further illustration of the egoistic idea of being generous only to alleviate one's own sense of discomfort.

This argument is also evident in *Frühlings Erwachen*, where Pastor Kahlbauch and Melchior introduce questions of determinism and responsibility, and shift the argument into the realm of the religious: this involves on one side Pastor Kahlbauch's speech which combines freedom of choice for the sinner with God's predestination of the chosen, and on the other, Melchior's theories about eudemonism, such as occur in his discussion with Wendla, when he questions why she feels that she should go to visit the poor:

WENDLA Ich gehe zu ihnen, weil sie arm sind.  
 MELCHIOR Aber wenn es dir keine Freude wäre, würdest du nicht gehen?  
 WENDLA Kann ich denn dafür, daß es mir Freude macht?  
 MELCHIOR Und doch sollst du dafür in den Himmel kommen! – So ist es also richtig, was mir nun seit einem Monat keine Ruhe mehr läßt! – Kann der Geizige dafür, daß es ihm keine Freude macht, zu schmutzigen kranken Kindern zu gehen?  
 WENDLA O dir würde es sicher die größte Freude sein!  
 MELCHIOR Und doch soll er dafür des ewigen Todes sterben!  
 (II, 115)

Boa points out Wedekind's mockery of charitable sentiments here: 'the young Lady Bountiful enjoying her own goodness unmasks charity as a palliative which brings more pleasure the greater the inequality between giver and receiver'.<sup>31</sup> In addition Melchior, in his defence of the person who happens to be predisposed to greediness, is indicating his belief in some form of determinism that makes people what they are, and over which they have no control. It is he who then links it with religion, in his suggestion that charitable behaviour is necessary if one is to gain eternal life.<sup>32</sup> It indicates his ignorance of the notion of salvation by faith rather than by works and his dependence on the accusation of eudemonism as the basis for his criticism of religious belief. He has therefore been given a particular view of the Church and taken that to represent the whole of it, so as to add to Wedekind's overall portrayal of the role of the Church in shaping repressive, bourgeois morality.

The other children generally misunderstand Melchior's criticisms, but Wedekind does not simply portray them solely as innocent victims of external forces. They are partly responsible for allowing themselves to be so cruelly handled by the adults. In Martha's description of her treatment at the hands of her sadistic parents, she reports, 'Mama riß

31. Boa, p. 36.

32. Wedekind expressed a similar sentiment in a letter to his friend Adolph Vögtlin in 1881: 'Es sind nun bald zehn Jahre her, als ich in Hannover einst auf der Straße einen Mann sah, der im Vorübergehen 1 Fr. in einen am Hause stehenden Opferstock warf, währenddem neben mir jemand zu seinem Begleiter sagte, indem er auf den braven Geber zeigte: "Der will auch ein Geschäft mit unserem Herrgott machen." Diese Worte habe ich nie vergessen, und sie führten mich später im Verein mit vielen anderen Motiven auf die Überzeugung, daß der Mensch nichts thue ohne angemessene Belohnung, *daß er keine andere Liebe kennt, als Egoismus.*' Frank Wedekind, *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. by Fritz Strich, 2 vols (Munich: Müller, 1924), I, 28-29.

mich am Zopf zum Bett heraus. So – fiel ich mit den Händen vorauf auf die Diele. – Mama betet nämlich Abend für Abend mit uns’ (II, 107). The hypocrisy in the combination of cruelty and prayer is evident, and Wendla’s response is, ‘ich an deiner Stelle wäre ihnen längst in die Welt hinausgelaufen’ (*ibid.*); but in her discussion with Melchior about almsgiving, after Melchior has outlined his query about greed or generosity being predetermined characteristics, Wendla shows her own willingness to compromise:

MELCHIOR [...] Ich werde eine Abhandlung schreiben und sie Herrn Pastor Kahlbauch einschicken. Er ist die Veranlassung. Was faselt er uns von *Opferfreudigkeit!* – Wenn er mir nicht antworten kann, gehe ich nicht mehr in die Kinderlehre und lasse mich nicht konfirmieren.

WENDLA Warum willst du deinen lieben Eltern den Kummer bereiten! Laß dich doch konfirmieren; den Kopf kostet’s doch nicht. Wenn unsere schrecklichen weißen Kleider und eure Schlepphosen nicht wären, würde man sich vielleicht noch dafür begeistern können!

(II, 115-16)

Melchior’s irritation at the unsatisfactory response of conventional religion to his questions leads him to want to reject it wholesale, whereas Wendla is content to practise it for the sake of a quiet life. Wendla is unconcerned with whether it is true or not; for her, obeying her parents and not causing trouble is of greater importance. At this point, Wedekind is highlighting the collaboration of the individual with the bourgeois establishment. Nevertheless, he does not idealize Melchior as the proclaimer of a better alternative, even if he is at least trying to live according to what he believes. Melchior is attempting to establish a consistent approach to the world. In this it seems he is pursuing the thinking of Max Stirner, who in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* had pursued the idea of the selfish ego as far as he could. R.W.K. Paterson describes his philosophy:

From his study of Feuerbachian humanism he saw that the total atheist must reject not only the ideal of a transcendent God, but *all* ideals, and thus that only the nihilist can qualify as the true atheist. From his study of Feuerbach he was led to see that the rejection of the God Who is Love must be completed by rejection of that love for mankind which is sanctified by humanists as the supreme moral ideal, and thus that the true atheist is necessarily a total egoist.<sup>33</sup>

33. *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 42.

The most extreme manifestation of the influence of this philosophy is in Melchior's rape of Wendla. His thinking is very confused, for on the one hand he rejects God on the assumption that all good deeds are performed merely for the benefit of the self; but he also argues that individuals are somehow predetermined to be greedy or generous (II, 115-16). In his conversation with Moritz near the beginning, during which he explains that Moritz is not alone in experiencing 'männliche Regungen' (II, 102), he adds, 'ich sage dir alles. [...] Du wirst überrascht sein; ich wurde seinerzeit Atheist' (II, 104). By equating Melchior's encounter with sex – albeit only a theoretical one – with his abandonment of Christianity, Wedekind is establishing a relationship between Melchior and Elias in *Elins Erweckung*. The form of Christianity rejected by Melchior is evidently a remote, unsympathetic, formal and pointless social institution that serves no greater purpose than to intimidate and frustrate the children. In the face of that, it is surprising that greater numbers of children do not turn against it. Instead, Melchior's atheism is seen as something quite daring. Thus Wendla says to Thea, 'denke Dir, Melchi Gabor sagte mir damals, er glaube an nichts – nicht an Gott, nicht an ein Jenseits – an gar nichts mehr in dieser Welt' (II, 110). His egoistic atheism can also be set against Oskar's atheism in *Elins Erweckung*. Oskar does not go as far as Melchior, and has retained a humanistic love for others, or rather, for those who are his friends. Hence his desire to assist Elias, but his refusal to give money to the beggar Schigolch. Oskar is vindicated by Schigolch, however, for Schigolch demonstrates his own lack of compassion for others, by relating the time he told his adopted daughter to begin working as a prostitute as soon as she was able to, so that she could pay her own way. Schigolch describes her career in such a way as to make it a satire on traditionally Christian, bourgeois work ethics:

Kind, sag' ich nun, des Christenmenschen Tugend heißt Arbeit. [...]
 Arbeit an allen Ecken
 Für den, der Arbeit sucht.<sup>34</sup> (IX, 36)

Not only is Schigolch not distinguishing between prostitution and any other kind of work; he is also using the view of Christianity that it is

34. Schigolch here equates Christian values of work with bourgeois activity, but, that work being prostitution, mocks those same values.



there to burden people with guilt, but arguing that it is precisely the revelation that work is intended to be depressing that will lead to the liberation of being able to enjoy it. Similarly, this exhortation to work is spoken by a beggar who does no work himself. The whole scene is intended to undermine any sense of order: from the moment Schigolch appears, as if to disprove Oskar's argument for the non-existence of God, he causes disorientation in Elias's mind and embraces a multitude of philosophies. Among the instructions he claims to have given his adopted daughter is one that is a complete contradiction of his former selfishness: 'Wer nicht für andere Menschen leben lernte, / Lernt nie und nimmer für sich selber leben' (IX, 37). He embraces so many different philosophies that he even begins to sound like Elias. Indeed, Elias's compulsion to hand over his money to Schigolch is a variation on the desire he felt to give up everything and serve his earlier dream-vision of Christ, for his immediate response to any form of suffering is to try to share in it. Here is Nietzsche's 'Wille zum Untergang', but it seems that Elias is not induced to be charitable by his faith, but because it feels good – in which case, *Egoismus* dictates that he offer his money: 'Kein bitterer Fluch / Der eignen Dürftigkeit, als die Entbehrung / Des süßen Glückes, andern wohlzutun' (IX, 38). The explanation of his motivation that follows is devoid of any Christian justification for giving, but is an admission that generosity is good because it makes one feel better about oneself. Once again, Wedekind returns to the role of the selfish *Ego* in determining human motivation.

Nevertheless, Wedekind ultimately demonstrates the danger inherent in living according to one's egotistical drives and desires. In *Frühlings Erwachen*, he does not vindicate Melchior for his insight; instead, Melchior's rejection of the values of those around him eventually leads him to rape Wendla, and here Gordon Birrell sees the twin themes of *Egoismus* and sexuality united:

Melchior Gabor, for instance, has enough insight into human psychology to realize that the ideal of pure, selfless action is a fiction. From there it is only one step, albeit a very large step, to the conviction that all actions are selfish and nothing but selfish, and that moral systems are invented only to camouflage man's basic egotism. Armed with these ideas, Melchior feels free to vent his own

selfish and sadistic impulses by sexually assaulting Wendla Bergmann. He rapes her literally in the name of his philosophy.<sup>35</sup>

The process Birrell has identified here is that Melchior has rejected the religious and moral values of those around him and put in their place a system of complete selfishness. In terms of Schopenhauer's 'Objektivität des Willens', he is therefore acting perfectly morally, inasmuch as he is behaving solely according to his nature. The difficulty here, however, is that as soon as he appreciates the consequences of his actions, his selfishness evaporates. His admission that his way of thinking is a failure, and his very unegotistical feeling of guilt, is evident in the letter which he subsequently writes to Wendla which is read out by his father and is what persuades his mother that he should be sent to the *Korrektionsanstalt*. The irony here is that it is that letter which indicates that Melchior has realized that he does after all bear responsibility towards other people; and the 'christliche Denk- und Empfindungsweise' (II, 157) which his father believes will be inculcated in him at the *Anstalt*, turns out to be a complete myth.

A small glimpse of Elias's 'christliche Denk- und Empfindungsweise' is offered in the third scene of *Elins Erweckung*, in which Elias practises his sermon, while Oskar comments on the technicalities of his presentation and barely mentions the content:

[...] Je weniger  
Du sagst, desto erhabener predigst du. [...]  
Und predigst du die ganze Predigt lang  
Nicht mehr denn vier, fünf Worte, zum Exempel:  
Gott ist die Liebe, aber diese vier  
In immer frischen Tonfall, stets mit weiterm  
Augenverdrehn, ich garantiere dir,  
Du wirst den Weg zum Herzen rascher finden,  
Als wenn du den dir anvertrauten Schafen  
Mit jedem Satz was Neues produzierst. (IX, 40)

For Oskar, the purpose of preaching is to provide an emotional experience rather than to teach. This being the case, it really is immaterial what is being preached, and everything depends on the manner of presentation. As with Kahlbauch in *Frühlings Erwachen*, Wedekind

35. Gordon Birrell, 'The Wollen-Sollen Equation in Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen*', *Germanic Review*, 57 (1982), 115-22 (p. 117).

presents a caricature of a verbose pastor, who actually has very little to say, and takes a very long time to say it. Oskar corrects Elias's displays of emotion to make them appear more authentic, and is determined to excise anything remotely relevant from Elias's words: he even upbraids Elias for daring to refer to Lassalle in his sermon, because that would involve the real world (IX, 39-40). Nonetheless, the fact that Oskar recommends a message like 'Gott ist die Liebe' is, in the context, clearly supposed to be ambiguous. For Oskar, it carries the meaning that (sexual) love is God. Oskar's other instruction is, 'das Auge / Verklärt gen Himmel, aber stets mit einem / Standhaften Fuß auf gutem Knüppeldamm' (IX, 40), which also reflects a view of religion that is based on solid rationalism. Elias, however, continues to depict a world on which God has turned his back, and despite his assertion that 'auch die sünd'ge Erde ward / Nun eine andre, eine schönere, / Eine geweihtere Heimstätte' (IX, 41), his explanation of the cause of this change is a 'verklärter Glanz' – 'aus dem erschloßnen Himmel, der den Heiland / Nunmehr beherbergt' (*ibid.*). His references to 'Berg und Tal' and 'Fluß und Bach' contribute to the sense that he is preaching little more than pantheism with a hint of Christianity, but there is no suggestion that God might still be active in the world. Indeed, the only such reference comes when Elias, having been interrupted, is explaining how Nettchen helped him overcome a period of chest-pain, and he adds 'mit Gottes Beistand / Hab' ich den Unfall glücklich überlebt' (IX, 42). Still, this is not so much a testimony to God's working, as a pious cliché.

The inherent irony in the text of his sermon is that, though he might be describing the works of blessing that Christ performed whilst on the earth, Elias himself feels cursed. Thus his description of the earth as a place of human good works and God's blessing is directly opposed to life as he experiences it. This is made even more specific when he reaches his conclusion:

Sieh, der alte Fluch der Sünde,  
 Der dich Jahrtausende gedrückt, nun ist er  
 Von dir genommen, denn dein Boden hat  
 Das segnende Versöhnungsblood getrunken,  
 Das dich von allem Sündenunrat rein wäscht. (IX, 47)

The fact that he addresses these comments to the earth rather than to people implies that the earth has been reconciled to its creator, but God

did not bother to save his people at all; those who live on the earth have been left to wallow in sin and misery. His conclusion is also directed at the earth, but he adds just a tiny message of hope at the end:

[...] Wohl fließen auch noch heute  
Tränen genug auf dir und ist des Jammers  
Noch jeder Winkel voll, doch hat der Heiland  
Der Welt uns einen Trost zurückgelassen  
Für jedes Erdenleid, für alle Schmerzen,  
Für Durst und Hunger, Armut, Krankenlager,  
Für Not und Unfall, Krieg und Pestilenz... (IX, 50)

Though he may intend to go on to describe the Holy Spirit (the ‘Tröster’ of John 14. 16), the interruption of Ella and Graf Schweinitz means his ‘Trost’ will henceforth take the form of sexuality.<sup>36</sup> Oskar plays on Elias’s altruistic desires by enabling him to rescue Ella, and Elias also embraces Ella’s view of herself as the wronged, moral party, then sentimentalizes it by referring to her as ‘du arme Märtyrerin der Zivilisation’ (IX, 56). In *Der Marquis von Keith*, Simba says Scholz uses exactly the same phrase to describe her (IV, 53). Scholz also uses the imagery of escaping from a dark prison into light to describe his sudden discovery of the delights of life as a ‘Genußmensch’ (IV, 58). But the ridicule with which Simba describes his attitude, and the sarcasm with which Anna greets his enthusiasm, severely undermine any sense that there might be of Scholz’s conversion being permanent. Elias’s use of such similar motifs suggests that Wedekind was himself dubious about the universal, transcendent power of sex. Since Ella is considered by everyone else in the play (including herself) to be no more than ‘ein einfach Hurenmädchen’ (IX, 53), it is clear that the only idealization of Ella comes from Elias’s perception of her. Even on the morning after they have slept together for the first time, she gives no indication of having had the same transcendent experience, so the ability of sexuality to liberate the individual is seemingly restricted to characters like Elias.

In these circumstances he finds, like the children in *Frühlings Erwachen*, that he has a limited range of vocabulary for expressing his feelings. His means of describing his joy is to return to biblical language, but to use it differently. He refers to Ella as an ‘Eden von

36. See Schröder-Zebralla, p. 81.

Fleisch und Blut’, and continues, ‘wahrlich, du bist vom Ebenbilde Gottes / Der edlere, der göttlichere Teil’ (IX, 58). This double-allusion to the opening of Genesis reveals two aspects of Elias’s conversion which reiterate the sense of isolation he described in the opening scene, and provide a partial solution. First, Ella herself is Eden, the paradise-garden to which he has been granted access. Also, the reference to Ella as ‘Ebenbild Gottes’ draws on Genesis 1. 27: ‘Und Gott schuf den Menschen zu seinem Bilde, zum Bilde Gottes schuf er ihn; und schuf sie als Mann und Weib’. But he is shifting the focus away from the godlike elements of creation, and concentrating instead on the ability of men and women to be like God via sexuality. That he should also place Ella nearer God is testimony to his idealization of women that has also occurred as a result of his encounter.

The longest analogy he draws is that of a son returning to his ‘langentbehrtes Elternhaus’ (IX, 59), which itself draws on Christ’s parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15. 11-32). The lost idyll of childhood to which Elias referred at the start of the play has been restored because the god to whom he has been reconciled is not that of Christian belief, but the god of nature. He alludes to the same parable to describe his pang of guilt – ‘reuvoll zerknirscht, / Wie der verlorne Sohn vom Trebermahle’ (IX, 59-60, cf. Luke 15. 16). By now, though, the will of his body has overcome the feelings of guilt associated with his religious ideas; but here it has to be noted that his conversion is not as drastic as it might at first appear, given the nebulousness of his former beliefs. He has been indifferent to the Christian message of salvation, and has been concerned only with how he can work his own way to paradise, which for him is the same as union with nature. Throughout, his faith has tended to appear more like pantheism with a Christian façade; now he has experienced his will at its most evident – in the form of sexual desire – he has removed that façade. The change in him is not so much his turning away from his faith as extending what was there all along, in order to accommodate his discovery of sexuality.

His monologue over the sleeping Ella echoes the opening scene, when Elias admits that his theological studies and ambitions have got him nowhere:

Nicht würdig bin ich, Mädchen,  
Bin mit Dogmatik, Ethik, Katechetik,

Mit Homiletik und Moral nicht würdig,  
 An deinen schiefgetretenen Stiefeletten  
 Die Schnüre dir zu lösen. Sei mir gnädig,  
 Du schuldlos Lamm, für deines Bruders Frieden  
 Lächelnden Blicks geduldig hingeschlachtet,  
 Oh, drück' noch einmal mich an diese Brust.  
 Weck' ich sie nun? – Leutselige Natur,  
 In Glückes Übermaß den Dank erstickend! –  
 Es ist mir leid um dich, ehrwürdige  
 Theologie! Wollt' doch den ganzen Prachtbau  
 Für diesen einz'gen Kuß zum Trödler tragen.  
 (IX, 60)

Here there are parallels to the opening monologues both of this play and of Goethe's *Faust*; the dissatisfaction that both Elias and Faust have experienced in the confine of their studies is replaced now for Elias by the liberating sexual act. To add a greater dimension to this allusion, and to explain the role Ella has played in freeing him, Elias uses the image given by John the Baptist when preparing the way for the ministry of Christ, of unworthiness to tie Ella's shoe (Mark 1. 7). In his conversation with Nettchen in the opening scene, he used biblical reference to validate his sense of superiority; here, he reverses the process to use it to depict his powerlessness in comparison with Ella. He again compares her with Christ in addressing her as 'du schuldlos Lamm', which introduces the sacrificial-lamb imagery of Isaiah 53, where her sacrifice is for 'deines Bruders Frieden'. In other words, she has given up her own life so that he might know the peace that comes from sensual indulgence. This further illustrates the point that the experience of salvation by sex is for him alone, instead of being something that they share.

Ella's physical presence makes it much easier for Elias to believe in her and the salvation she offers him than the vague God in whom he has hitherto professed belief. She also offers a means of satisfying the desires that have been plaguing him, and which his theological training has simply refused to accommodate. Instead of being alienated from a spiritual realm that may only exist because he cannot prove its non-existence, his senses tell him that Ella is very much alive. Her physicality, however, is what also undermines his romanticization of her, for as she lies next to him, her own dream-life is revealed as she talks in her sleep, and her desire turns out to be for bread and coffee – precisely the

elements of the bourgeois breakfast rite with which Elias began his day with Nettchen. His erotic dreams, and apparent need for sensual salvation, are contrasted with her requirement of the sensual indulgence of food. He even builds her desires into his sentimental vision for her – hence the extravagant promises he makes to supply her with a feast (IX, 61). But he is soon distracted by his sexual desire for her. This suggests that his own romantic projection of what he thinks she is will interfere with his ability to relate to her properly.<sup>37</sup>

Ella's last speech makes this clearer, for if his sexual experience has enabled him to be restored to his emotions, this romantic notion is contrasted with Ella's description of his sexual activity, where his initial tentativeness is replaced with a rough lust, not really in keeping with the sentimental mood he has been establishing. Ella's closing words provide the conclusion that he is 'ganz und gar nicht so / Wie die andern sind' (IX, 65) which is not only a reminder that he is still her client and she his prostitute. She is necessarily down-to-earth about her profession, which acts as a contrast to his sentimentalization of it. His question, 'Soll ich mit bloßer Hand / Als Magdalena dir die Füße waschen?' (IX, 63), presents a case of religious role-reversal, for in John 12. 3, it is the prostitute who washes Jesus's feet. Elias is thus placing himself in the role of the sorrowful sinner coming to the feet of the Messiah and casting the prostitute in the role of the redeemer. He also quotes Christ's words on the cross to describe his state: 'O Gott, verzeih, ich weiß nicht, wie mir wird' (IX, 62) – an allusion to Luke 23. 34, and Christ's words, 'Vater, vergib ihnen: denn sie wissen nicht, was sie tun!' Here, the alteration in the words used twists the original meaning – for not only is Elias rejecting the fatherhood of God and placing himself in the same group that crucified Christ, but his implication is that he is aware of what he is doing, but not what is happening to him. As he did in his scene with Nettchen, he uses the words of Christ as a means to deny his own responsibility, for it is as if he is claiming to have embarked on a course of action that is inevitable and beyond his control. The conclusion of the play as it stands is ambiguous in that it does not look beyond Elias's happiness at escaping from his arid, bourgeois life. Had the play been completed in the way Kutscher describes, with marriage between Elias and Ella, Elias would have been at least vindicated for pursuing

37. Wedekind explores this aspect of relationships further in the *Lulu*-plays.

the course of *Leben* offered to him, even if there were no indication of what he might do to replace the bourgeois career he rejects here.

In the final scene of *Frühlings Erwachen*, the *vermummter Herr* tells Moritz that such an opportunity was also presented to him, in the person of Ilse, shortly before he killed himself. Moritz is told, ‘Sie standen doch wahrlich im letzten Augenblick noch zwischen *Tod* und *Leben*’ (II, 173). Friedrich Rothe describes Ilse as ‘eine Erscheinung des vermummten Herrn. Wie das “Leben” ist er an keine bestimmte Sphäre gebunden’.<sup>38</sup> She offers him ‘Leben’ – that is, sexual experience.<sup>39</sup> The implication is that these characters who embody *Leben* offer a salvation that is possible through sexuality, and give a meaning to life. Walter H. Sokel explains Moritz’s thinking at the point of his encounter with Ilse:

The meaning and core of life is eros, a truth which Moritz admits when he compares sexual experience to the pyramids which are the reason why one would visit Egypt. Cultivated for itself, untouched by the pressures of hostile society, eros is not tragic, but idyllic.<sup>40</sup>

This offer of *Leben* through sex really needs, however, to be set against Ilse’s own perception of her life as a model in her community of artistic hedonists. Even assuming that the guiding purpose in her life is to live according to her sexual desires, she does not give the impression of experiencing any great fulfilment from her lifestyle. She compares all the men of her circle with animals (II, 140) and she concludes, ‘bis es an euch kommt, lieg ich im Kehricht’ (II, 141). Hans Wagener suggests that Wedekind is saying here that personal desire and bourgeois society are at odds with one another:

Ilse ist sich durchaus darüber im klaren, daß ihr Lebensstil zu keinem guten Ende führen wird. Wedekind hat also mit der Gestalt Ilses keine Verherrlichung des Freudenmädchens beabsichtigt. Ein freies Ausleben des Geschlechtstriebes, der

38. Friedrich Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen: Jugendstil und Lebensphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1968), p. 15.

39. ‘Moritz versteht nicht, daß ihm Ilse “Leben” anbietet, Geschlechtsverkehr mit ihr’ (Hans Wagener, *Frank Wedekind: Frühlings Erwachen. Erläuterungen und Dokumente* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980), p. 31.

40. ‘The Changing Role of Eros in Wedekind’s Drama’, *German Quarterly*, 39 (1966), 201-207 (p. 201).



natürlichen Triebe des Menschen, ist seiner damaligen Ansicht nach innerhalb der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft nicht möglich.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, Wagener implies that the prostitutes' problems are related to bourgeois society and that it might be possible to live according to one's drives in some realm separate from bourgeois values. However, the artists' colony Ilse describes does not appear to be impeded by bourgeois considerations of decency in behaviour. Gordon Birrell notes that her *Priapa* circle has established a 'lively little cottage industry' creating pornographic works.<sup>42</sup> He also argues that Moritz is predestined not to be able to cope with the life that Ilse presents to him:

The morbid instincts of Moritz Stiefel, furthered by and supportive of middle-class morality, confront the vigorous instincts of Ilse and the masked gentleman, which reflect a Nietzschean ethic of scepticism and exuberant self-expression.<sup>43</sup> Moritz cannot be redeemed from his situation merely by placing him in a more permissive environment such as Ilse's flamboyantly lusty *Priapa* circle. If he were to follow Ilse, his surrender to Eros would doubtless lead him as surely to death as Lulu is drawn to Jack the Ripper. Ilse's account of her adventures with the sadistic, suicidal Heinrich makes it clear enough that life in the *Priapa* is anything but an idyll of uninterrupted sexual euphoria. The relaxing of social restrictions liberates the dark, destructive instincts as well as the robust, life-supportive instincts.<sup>44</sup>

Thus a universal, transcendent power of sexuality does not exist and the sexually uninhibited alternative to bourgeois lifelessness that Wedekind establishes is highly dangerous for its adherents. The darker, Dionysian side of *Leben* means that it cannot simply represent an easy, sexual liberation, and sexuality offers no long-term guarantee of happiness, or salvation from society's influence. The promise of sexual fulfilment is therefore an illusion and Wedekind's apparent idealization of it effectively serves to undermine it. The ending of *Elins Erweckung* is ambiguous here, for it presents a positive, liberated Elias, but is silent on the practicalities involved in abandoning bourgeois values to live solely according to one's desires.

41. Wagener, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente*, p. 32.

42. 'The Wollen-Sollen Equation', p. 118.

43. In a footnote here, he refers to Wedekind's anticipation of Freudian theory, 'in this case the opposition of the pleasure principle and the death instinct'.

44. *ibid.*, p. 120.

By turning his back on the Church, Elias is rejecting it as both a foundation and a product of *Bürgerlichkeit*. The Church has both these roles because, as demonstrated in the two plays, people draw on their interpretation of what the Church teaches to define their *bürgerlich* morality and yet, rather than taking a moral lead, the ministers of the Church are more *bürgerlich* than anyone in their congregations. Thus the world of the *bürgerlich* – as represented and upheld by the Church – is condemned for its repression of the instincts of *Leben*, but then the liberation offered by *Leben* itself is not depicted as any kind of improvement. The ambiguity of the endings of both *Elins Erweckung* and *Frühlings Erwachen* implies that Wedekind was unsure of where the escape of *Leben* would lead, but a pattern can already be discerned, which will be repeated throughout his works, in which his protagonists commit themselves to an unrealizable search for some means of defining or justifying their existences. For Elias and Melchior, the encounter with *Leben* is enough to highlight the inadequacy of the supposed values of *Bürgerlichkeit*, but whether they will find anything better remains a mystery. In his later plays, Wedekind was to depict the failure of the search in more spectacular ways; here, it seems he was content merely to suggest that *Leben* was a more attractive proposition than either the prosaic *bürgerlich* career offered to Elias, or death which was the alternative for Melchior. As he was subsequently to demonstrate in the *Lulu*-plays, however, the pursuit of *Leben* as an end in itself was a quest that could lead not merely to failure, but to tragedy on a massive scale.



## CHAPTER THREE

### The Elusive Transcendent in *Erdgeist* and *Die Büchse der Pandora*

Where *Elins Erweckung* ends with the apparent possibility of hope, and *Frühlings Erwachen* closes on Melchior's positive acceptance of *Leben* even within the context of the macabre graveyard scene, the *Lulu*-plays conclude with scenes of *grand guignol* horror, as Lulu is butchered by Jack the Ripper.<sup>1</sup> The action of the *Lulu*-tragedy takes place on a much wider stage than the two earlier plays, as it takes in the artistic *demi-monde* of Germany, then moves from Paris to London. The expansion of scale does not, however, involve a great change in theme: Lulu is in some ways an extension of Ella in *Elins Erweckung*. Schröder-Zebralla lists the similarities, the most significant of which are that both are prostitutes of unknown origin, have a father-figure named Schigolch and apparently offer infinite happiness.<sup>2</sup> *Elins Erweckung*, however, ends really at the starting point of the *Lulu*-plays; for Elias is seemingly released from the bonds of bourgeois society into the realm of the senses as offered by Ella. This is also the point reached in *Erdgeist* by Schwarz and Schön, but in both their cases, this apparent liberation ends in tragedy. The lure of *Leben* is strong enough to break Schwarz and Schön from the bonds of their bourgeois existences, but it cannot hold them. What Wedekind describes is not the possibility of escape from the world by some form of sexual salvation, but the fact that such an escape is impossible, and he shows that ultimately the only way to break free from the tyranny of bourgeois life is to die. The notion of transcendent *Leben* that Lulu initially represents is demolished as the hope she might seem to offer ends in death for the men of *Erdgeist* and then her own murder

1. Wedekind began to write a tragedy based on the Lulu-character in 1892, and continued to work on it until 1913, when the two separate plays, *Erdgeist* and *Die Büchse der Pandora*, were published in volume III of his *Gesammelte Werke*. (Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, pp. 49-51, 67-68.)
2. Schröder-Zebralla, pp. 91-92.

at the hands of Jack the Ripper. The conclusion of the play is, as John Hibberd argues, that the ideal of transcendent hope is a delusion:

In Wedekind's cosmology there is no transcendent God, there are no angels, and personal salvation never seems remotely possible. [...] Total lasting happiness is the objective of Schopenhauer's Will and Hartmann's Unconscious, but according to them it is an illusion. Happiness, as equated with total possession of Lulu, is perhaps unattainable.<sup>3</sup>

Lulu's death comes to represent the collapse of an ideal that in itself is never more than illusory and the power of *Leben* she embodies is ultimately not the life-force, but the death-drive. Nevertheless, it is because of her embodiment of what seem to be both life-affirming and life-destroying tendencies that it is so difficult to establish Lulu's 'true' self. But to understand Wedekind's aims in portraying her in this way, it is necessary to understand the role played by religion in the plays. In 1909, Wedekind wrote to Georg Brandes to defend his plays from an attack Brandes had made on them. When he came to discuss the *Lulu*-plays, he wrote:

Mit Moral und Religion zu arbeiten lernte ich durch das Verbot der Büchse der Pandora. Ich bin immer noch froh, daß ich diese beiden Pferden reiten gelernt habe. Ohne meine Religion wäre die Büchse der Pandora heute eingestampft. Lulu ist zwar nur die Verherrlichung des Körperlichen [...]. Ich lud ihr deshalb moralisch alle Scheußlichkeiten auf, um die Tragfähigkeit des Körperlichen zu demonstrieren.<sup>4</sup>

He does not provide any further explanation of what sort of 'Religion' he was referring to here. If Lulu is nothing more or less than the 'Verherrlichung des Körperlichen', it would seem to bear out the argument that he was attempting to establish a religion of sensuality. Instead, however, he seems to be demolishing this argument as the play develops. Elizabeth Boa writes, 'if Lulu initially represents a dream of

3. John L. Hibberd, 'The Spirit of the Flesh: Wedekind's Lulu', *Modern Language Review*, 79 (1984), 336-55 (pp. 347-48). The 'Unconscious' is Hartmann's equivalent of Schopenhauer's *Wille*. It is 'the power of the flesh [...]. The cosmic ground of consciousness, determining [...] the course of all history' (*ibid.*, p. 341).
4. Klaus Bohnen, 'Frank Wedekind und Georg Brandes: Unveröffentlichte Briefe', *Euphorion*, 72 (1978), 106-119 (p. 115).

liberated sexuality, by the end the dream is deconstructed.<sup>5</sup> Wedekind's glorification of Lulu is followed by her literally being taken apart by Jack at the end.

In drawing a religious parallel with Lulu as the 'Verherrlichung des Körperlichen', it is possible to see in her Wedekind's continuation of the themes of *Elins Erweckung* and *Frühlings Erwachen*. Kutscher writes of the *Lulu*-plays: 'Der Egoismus ist ihr Fundament und findet gerade hier seinen härtesten Ausdruck'.<sup>6</sup> Alfons Höger argues that Wedekind, moving on from Schopenhauer's and Hartmann's moral philosophies, is interested in individual, rather than universal ethics:

Wedekind [...] konzentriert sich gerade auf den Einzelnen und vertritt als letztes Ziel menschlichen Handelns den Lebensgenuß, den sich jeder erwerben soll, da er allein das Dasein sinnvoll macht, indem er es rechtfertigt. Hier beginnt die Trennung vom Pessimismus, auf den ethischen Gebiet, und nicht in Bezug auf die metaphysische Konstruktion, die Wedekind, wie auch Nietzsche in seinen Anfängen, billigt.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Wedekind presents a world which has applied Schopenhauer's principle that it is more honest to pursue one's selfish desires than to deny one's will and conform to external pressures, and shifts the emphasis away from corporate, to individual morality. But Wedekind's depiction of a world in which individuals strive for pleasure because it gives a meaning to life, results only in disappointment and tragedy. The routes of sex and money as ways to obtain happiness are both shown to be dead ends. Though this conclusion is not in itself very sophisticated, the philosophy behind it means that it represents the most likely possibility of finding a meaningful value in life and its rejection leads to a return to Hartmann's philosophy that 'Nicht-Sein' is better than 'Da-Sein'.

The *Tierbändiger* uses animal comparisons to introduce each of the characters in the prologue to *Erdegeist*, which is a reminder of the fact that this philosophy is rooted in Darwinism. This points towards the fundamental brutishness of humanity as depicted on the stage, but also establishes a particular relationship between the audience and the action. It suggests that the audience has come to see a spectacle that involves

5. Boa, p. 113.

6. Kutscher, I, 363.

7. Höger, *Der Konstruktivismus*, p. 42.

danger for the performers, and is there to indulge in the vicarious thrill of observing other people's peril. The framing device also serves to remind the audience that what it is watching is not real life, but a construct that remains under the ringmaster's control at all times. What is being played out is a series of conflicts, in which bourgeois characters break the taboos that are usually observed by the audiences who come to watch them, and the upholding of those taboos because of the ultimate punishment meted out to those who transgress.

Within this context, Lulu can, initially, be seen to represent the possibility of transcendence, by being the opposite of the brutish and instead representing a perfect unity of beauty, grace and innocence. Although it is not possible to ground Lulu on any one idea or theory, within her, and those around her, Wedekind has placed elements of the insatiable, Schopenhauerian will, and Hartmann's tendency towards self-destruction. This is most particularly evident in the *Lulu*-plays, because Lulu is a phantasmagoria of ideas as a result of her protean nature. She alters and adapts to conform briefly to the expectations of the men who desire her, but then recreates herself as another character. This is not to say that she is only a blank cypher, a screen on which the men in the play project their fantasies, because she is clearly active in her own destiny. Her adaptable personality also does not mean she is devoid of a self. When she is left alone with Schwarz, this is demonstrated by her brief attempt to assert an identity of her own:

SCHWARZ Ich liebe dich, Nelli.  
LULU Ich heiße nicht Nelli.  
SCHWARZ (*küßt sie*).  
LULU Ich heiße Lulu.  
SCHWARZ Ich werde dich Eva nennen. (III, 28)

Nevertheless, what her true self might be is slippery and elusive. Even Lulu's embodiment of the spirit of the age – *Leben* – is a spirit that is inextricably entwined with death. Alfons Höger understands this to be the result of the conflict that exists between the arid, bourgeois values of the men and the dangerous power of *Leben* that is potent in Lulu. He and Josephine Schröder-Zebralla see the *Lulu*-plays as a continuation of the theme of Wedekind's sensual religion, and Höger describes the role of women in this world view:

Die neue Religion, die Wedekind bereits im Dithyrambus des *Neuen Vaterunser* verkündet und später differenzierter ausarbeitet, ist also ein Naturalismus, der die Frau als Verkörperung der absoluten Werte transzendentaler Wirklichkeit ansieht, wie sie sich in der Natur als Realität dem Verstande gegenüber zeigen. Die Kulturwerte, die der Mann geschaffen hat, sind dagegen nur illusionäre Wirklichkeit und enthalten eine ihnen innewohnende Tendenz zur Verkümmern und Begrenzung der natürlichen Bestimmung des Menschen.<sup>8</sup>

Though Lulu may represent a transcendent ideal of *Leben*, it does not follow that Wedekind wanted to see the male-female relationship in terms of such a simple duality. Within the *Lulu*-plays, men and women alike behave in exactly the same bourgeois way that Wedekind found so objectionable. Schön's fiancée, though not seen, will clearly conform to the ideal of an obedient, submissive wife; the women in the second act of *Die Büchse der Pandora* are no less avaricious than the men. Woman *per se* does not, therefore, stand as representative of the transcendent, even if Lulu herself is supposed to be something for which the men in the plays – especially in *Erdgeist* – are striving. What is more significant is that, when each man has her in his possession as part of a bourgeois marriage, he is destroyed. If the men represent the system of values that makes up bourgeois morality, and Lulu represents a liberating spirit to break free from these values, the process of breaking away via Lulu actually leads to death. The conclusion that can be drawn here is that the only liberation Lulu can ultimately bring is not through sexuality, but through death. There is, however, little in her to suggest either that she sees anything transcendent in her role, or that she might be some kind of a martyr or prophetess.

Indeed, rather than seeing Lulu's role as a messianic one, John Hibberd sees in her a point where various trends of nineteenth-century thinking on the subject of sexuality came together.<sup>9</sup> He observes that 'the Pauline vision of the antagonism of body and soul had been given a new dimension by Schopenhauer's philosophy with its pessimistic view of man's enslavement to the Will whose fullest expression was to be found in the sexual impulse.'<sup>10</sup> Religion and philosophy had seemingly collaborated to establish an anti-sensual morality. This way of thinking was also to be found in Plato, who had described a similar dualism:

8. Höger, *Hetäritismus*, p. 146.

9. Hibberd, 'The Spirit of the Flesh', p. 343.

10. *ibid.*, p. 341.



‘Wille’ war seit Platon als ein geistig-seelischer Impuls definiert worden, der den Körper regiert. Für Platon ist Erkenntnis der Gewinn von leibfreier Souveränität. Solches Erkennen gebietet über den Körper und wird zur Quelle eines ‘reinen’ Wollens. Dieser Wille bricht die Macht des Körpers, der eine Macht des Todes, des Nicht-Seins ist.<sup>11</sup>

The power of the body is therefore that of death, the dark side of the *Leben* embodied by Lulu. The difference is in the ability of the Platonic will to exercise control over the body, whereas the Schopenhauerian *Wille* cannot even control itself. Schopenhauer’s *Wille* leads to pessimism because, in his thinking, ‘der Wille hat kein Ziel, er kreist als blinder Drang. Er berechtigt zu keinen Hoffnungen. [...] Der Wille hält einen in Bewegung, aber es sind Sklavendienste, die man dabei verrichtet.’<sup>12</sup> Lulu can be seen in this context to be driven by the insatiable *Wille*, and her clash with the bourgeois men of *Erdgeist* might be that between the Schopenhauerian and the Platonic wills, if not for the fact that the men are enslaved by the same power of the body.<sup>13</sup> Schön, for example, is intelligent enough to recognize the danger in Lulu, hence his wish to marry her off to Goll, Schwarz, and anyone else who will take her. But he is not strong enough to withstand his own desire for her. She is being used by the men in *Erdgeist*, as a means for them to satisfy their own desires. Yet, if she personifies *Wille*, she must also wish to have her own desires fulfilled. Conflict arises because each is attempting to obtain from the other the same satisfaction of the rapacious will. Their own will compels them to use others in the pursuit of the satiety of their own desire. From this it follows that the idea of the men projecting their own image of Lulu on to her, and her own participation in this process, is the product of each one’s desire to use the other to gain their own satisfaction.

Schopenhauerian pessimism is at hand to justify Wedekind the moralist, as he is showing life as it really is, having removed the veil of hypocrisy. This pessimism is, however, contained within Lulu’s life-affirming activity. Her dancing and desire to live to please herself with a

11. Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer und die wilden Jahre der Philosophie: Eine Biographie*, 2nd edn (Munich: Hanser, 1988), p. 334.

12. Safranski, p. 329.

13. In *Elins Erweckung*, Elias voluntarily submits himself to the power of the body. His rejection of the Church is part of his choice of whether he wishes to be in thrall to *Bürgerlichkeit* or the *Wille*.

total ignorance – initially, at any rate – of conscience or responsibility, point to the affirmation of *Leben*. Here, then, she comes to represent something lively and joyous rather than sombre and dark. Never far away, though, is a sense of the Nietzschean Dionysus – Lulu’s volatility – which leaves destruction in its wake. Siren-like, she lures the men of *Erdgeist* to their doom, despite their better, bourgeois judgement and her reputation. Both Schwarz and Schön are aware that they are embarking on a hazardous course of action, but they are completely powerless to prevent it.

Lulu’s role as a dancer illustrates how she can embrace the life-affirming and life-destroying elements of *Leben*. Friedrich Rothe describes how her dance represents Nietzschean *Leben*, and cites the words of ‘das andere Tanzlied’ in *Also sprach Zarathustra*: ‘dich große Binderin, Umwinderin, Versucherin, Finderin! [...] unschuldige, ungeduldige, windseilige, kindsäugige Sünderin!’ He notes that these words could easily apply to Lulu.<sup>14</sup> Schröder-Zebralla goes as far as to say, ‘in Lulus Tanz zeigt sich ihr messianischer Character – sie ist beim Tanzen dem Göttlichen nahe’.<sup>15</sup> It would not, however, be true to argue that dance therefore always represents *Leben*. In the scene between Alwa, Schön and Goll, Alwa speaks of what he has done to publicize Buddhism (III, 23). In one of Wedekind’s drafts of the play, and in the first publication of *Erdgeist*, Alwa’s play, instead of being a celebration of Buddhism, was a Terpsichorean adaptation of Nietzsche’s *Also sprach Zarathustra*:

Kommen Sie mit, Herr Medizinalrat. Im dritten Akt sehen Sie Zarathustra in seinem Kloster mit seinen Jüngern, alles die jüngsten Ballettmädchen, keine über siebzehn Jahr. Das ganze Ballet spielt in der Stadt, die da genannt ist zur bunten Kuh. Sie sehen den Seiltänzer, die wilden Hunde, das Grunzeschwein, dann sehen Sie die krumme Obrigkeit, den bleichen Verbrecher, den roten Richter. Sie sehen den letzten Menschen, die berühmten Weisen, die Töchter der Wüste, den Wächter der Nacht. Und schließlich sehen Sie mit eigenen Augen, wie Zarathustra bei einbrechender Dunkelheit den Seiltänzer, den am Nachmittag vom hohen Thurnseil gestürzt ist und den Hals gebrochen hat, mitten auf dem Marktplatz beerdigt.<sup>16</sup>

14. Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen*, p. 44.

15. Schröder-Zebralla, p. 153.

16. *Nb* 15, 2<sup>f</sup>-2<sup>v</sup>.

A different version of this scene was also published in 1902, under the title 'Frühlingsstürme'. Alwa goes on to describe his portrayal of the *Übermensch* – 'ein geflügelter Lockenkopf mit rosigen Wangen, blauen Augen, blühenden Lippen, und darunter, wo sonst der Hals anfängt, das Notwendigste, um sich, wie Nietzsche sagt, hinaufzuentwickeln.'<sup>17</sup> Wedekind is satirizing the middle-class interest in Nietzsche, inasmuch as the fierce critic of bourgeois values becomes an established part of its culture. Nietzsche's significance is reduced to that of a provider of material for spectacular musicals. This is made even more apparent in the scene in which Schwarz (whose name was originally Knote) is left alone with Lulu (Yella). He complains, 'und wenn ein Friedrich Nietzsche Auge in Auge mit der Ewigkeit erbarmungslos seine unerbittlichen Konsequenzen zieht, dann sehen diese Geldsäcke in Menschengestalt einen Wald von bengalisch beleuchteten Beinen sich vor ihrer tierischen Einbildungskraft entschleiern!'<sup>18</sup>

The passage itself condemns those who see in Nietzsche not a philosophical inspiration, but a source of light entertainment and titillation. The criticism is voiced, however, by a histrionic painter who is himself pandering to bourgeois tastes in painting Yella exactly as he is instructed. It remains debatable, therefore, whether this is a criticism of society as a whole, or simply the impassioned plea of a hungry painter, who feels it his duty to rail against all bourgeois values, whilst himself upholding them with his own work. The power of bourgeois society is such that it can embrace and defuse any of the criticisms levelled at it, and even turn them to its own uses. The later version maintains the spirit of this scene, but shifts the focus from Nietzsche to Eastern religion:

GOLL [...] Wie nennt sich doch Ihr Ballett?  
 ALWA Dalailama.  
 GOLL Ich glaubte, der wäre im Irrenhaus.  
 SCHÖN Sie meinen Nietzsche, Herr Sanitätsrat.  
 GOLL Sie haben recht. Ich verwechsle die beiden.  
 ALWA Ich habe dem Buddhismus auf die Beine geholfen.  
 GOLL An den Beinen erkennt man den Bühnendichter.  
 (III, 22-23)

17. Frank Wedekind, 'Frühlingsstürme', *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, 2 (1902), 845-858 (p. 852).

18. *ibid.*, p. 855.

It follows that the different philosophical ideas are essentially interchangeable; they can all serve as suitable material with which to satisfy an undemanding public, which is only interested in the next fashionable philosophy. This also illustrates how dance as an expression of *Leben* can be absorbed into bourgeois taste, but the role of dance in the plays is taken even further by Wedekind, for Lulu's own dancing embraces the darker side of *Leben*: a sense of the *danse macabre* is a constant presence. In the first published edition of *Erdgeist*, the conversation between Prinz Escerny and Alwa includes a description that showed the dance united with the death-drive, and restates the dangerous power of *Leben*. Escerny suggests that the people he encountered on his travels are still in touch with the passion that bourgeois society has suppressed. He describes the passionate tribal dances that he observed in Africa:

Eigentümlich, wie die rhythmische Bewegung des Körpers auf die Lebensgeister wirkt. Ich habe das schon in Afrika gesehen. Die Neger, bevor sie zum Kampf ausziehen, lassen sich von ihren Tänzerinnen vortanzen, bis sie sich vor Lebensglut nicht mehr zu halten wissen. Es kommt nicht selten vor, daß sie dann schon während des Marsches übereinander herfallen, oder gar, bevor die Vorstellung zu Ende ist, Selbstmord begehen.<sup>19</sup>

If this points towards a more natural tribe of people who are closer to nature, it also suggests that they are essentially not much different from the people in the milieu of the play. It only takes Lulu to bring out the same self-destructive impulses in the men around her. As is the case with the women Escerny describes, it is Lulu's job to dance. It seems, though, that the greatest power she wields in the dance is that of self-expression, rather than of power over men. Escerny says of her, 'wenn sie ihr Solo tanzt, berauscht sie sich an ihrer eigenen Schönheit – in die sie selber zum Sterben zu sein scheint' (III, 66). Initially, Goll exercises as much control over her dancing as he can, by teaching her and playing the music (III, 25); and when he dies, Lulu says 'der Tanz ist aus' (III, 30). During her marriage to Schwarz, her dance loses its power. She poses as a dancer for his paintings (III, 37), but when she actually dances to try to excite him, 'er gähnt und faselt etwas von Obszönität' (III, 45). Just as she has been captured in the portrait Schwarz painted

19. Frank Wedekind, *Der Erdgeist: Eine Tragödie* (Munich: Langen, 1895), pp. 149-50.

for Goll, now her dance is frozen as she becomes converted to an artwork. When caught on canvas, Lulu's beauties remain, but she is rendered safe. Thus, in *Die Büchse der Pandora*, Casti-Piani is able to sell her to the Cairo brothel on the strength of her portrait as Eve (III, 151). Schwarz's death reactivates her dancing career, and she attracts Prinz Escerny; but although he believes he can discern true self-expression in Lulu, his understanding of her from this observation is completely wrong. He says:

Was mich zu Ihnen hinzieht, ist nicht Ihr Tanz. Es ist Ihre körperliche und seelische Vornehmheit, wie sie sich in jeder Ihrer Bewegungen offenbart. [...] Sie sind eine großangelegte Natur – uneigennützig. Sie können niemanden leiden sehen. Sie sind das verkörperte Lebensglück. Als Gattin werden Sie einen Mann über alles glücklich machen... Ihr ganzes Wesen ist Offenherzigkeit. – Sie wären eine schlechte Schauspielerin... (III, 69)

He betrays here the problem which is shared by all the male characters in *Erdgeist*, which is that each of them believes he has the key to understanding Lulu's true nature. Therefore, not only do they imagine what they want to be in her, but they also believe that they have the particular gift of insight into her real self. Schön especially thinks he understands Lulu – and he has the most right to believe this, given that it was he who took her in from the street. He understands enough to know that, as with Goll and Schwarz, Lulu will destroy Escerny if she accompanies him: 'nimm den Prinzen, tanz' ihn in Grund und Boden!' (III, 75). He is, however, not strong enough to withstand her charms, for he continues, 'ich weiß, wo der Engel bei dir zu Ende ist und der Teufel beginnt.' (*ibid.*) There is in fact no indication that anyone can know this really – not even Lulu herself. The fact that she is both angel and devil is made clear from the start: in the prologue to *Erdgeist*, the *Tierbändiger* describes her as a 'Schlange' (III, 9). This would seem to align Lulu with the serpent, Satan, in the narrative of the Fall in Genesis 3. Kutscher drew attention to this aspect when he wrote, 'die Schlange bedient sich der Eva beim Sündenfall, die Schlange ist in Eva, Sinnbild einer weiblichen Kraft.'<sup>20</sup> Schröder-Zebralla, however, draws on her reading of certain ancient mythologies that understood the snake to be life-bringing to suggest that Wedekind saw Lulu not as an evil temptress, but, in the

20. Kutscher, I, 362.

words of the *Tierbändiger*, as a ‘süßes Tier’ and ‘die süße Unschuld’.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not Wedekind was aware of the ancient associations, it is clear that the main association will be with the traditional, Christian understanding of the evil, tempting serpent. This is in tension with the image of innocence that Lulu projects. She is both Eve, innocent of the difference between good and evil, and the serpent: the tempter and the one tempted. Ronald Peacock explains that this apparent contradiction can be resolved if one sees in Lulu a prelapsarian innocence that emerges from the lack of knowledge of good and evil:

If one isolates Lulu from the theatrical bombast, one sees hints of a form of existence, of being, which is wholly liberated and which is joyous; which generates beauty; which is radiant and innocently voluptuous. Lulu is not simply an animal, nor is she demonic, nor angelic; she is instinctive human joy, and freedom from guilt and shackles. In short one can say that Wedekind, with the help of extravagant effects, is trying indirectly to conjure up one image of life before the Fall, life before sin, life before social corruption.<sup>22</sup>

Though this might describe Lulu in theory, there is little in her behaviour in the play to give any real suggestion of joy. She represents the *illusion* of joy to the men around her, and she seems incapable of experiencing joy herself. Only whilst dancing does she appear to be liberated from an overwhelming sense of ennui. It is as if such innocence of good and evil as Lulu displays here is actually quite tedious. Her marriage to Goll involves her entertaining him alone, and his training her. When married to Schwarz, she longs for Goll’s whip (III, 46). She complains that their marriage is dreary because Schwarz fails to see who she really is; but Schön has no illusions about her origins, and she is bored with him too.

She might offer *Leben*, but after the thrill of the chase, the men tire of her very quickly. The crises arise because whatever images the men might harbour of Lulu before they are married, they ultimately wish her to become ordinary. In this respect, her destruction of their bourgeois existences is not because of their denial of *Leben*, but because, having tasted it, they revert to their original state. In a sense, they represent the end that *Elins Erweckung* does not have: the point at which Elias and

21. Schröder-Zebralla, p. 106.

22. Ronald Peacock, ‘The Ambiguity of Wedekind’s Lulu’, *Oxford German Studies*, 9 (1978), 105-18 (p. 114).

Ella realize that they cannot live on sensual pleasure indefinitely. Given the alternative between mundane, day-to-day living and death, for Lulu there is not much advantage in either. But the mere fact that Lulu tires so easily makes clear her need for constant entertainment. She cannot bear not to be the most important aspect in the men's lives and eventually, in her marriage to Schön, draws on a multitude of lovers to keep herself occupied. In Lulu's relationships with Schwarz and Schön, Wedekind depicts the traumatic events leading up to their marriages, and then presents the marriages themselves as tiresome endurance tests. Schwarz speaks to Lulu in clichés and is more concerned with the success of his painting than with Lulu – she is there to decorate his life and be painted (III, 35-38). After Lulu and Schön are married, Schön is only interested in his financial affairs:

LULU Könntest du dich denn nicht frei machen? Ich würde so gerne mit dir durch die Anlagen fahren.

SCHÖN Gerade der Tag, an dem ich auf der Börse sein muß. Du weißt, daß ich heute nicht frei bin. Meine ganze Habe liegt auf den Wellen.

LULU Lieber wollte ich schon beerdigt sein, als mir mein ganzes Leben so durch meine Habe verbittern lassen. (III, 81)

Wedekind seems to be searching for some middle way, by which *Leben* can coexist with everyday life; but none can be found, save for within the very narrow confines of the idealized life that Lulu seems initially to promise for the men, in which they can use art to turn her into what they want her to be: thus Goll creates his own private dancer; Schwarz his perfect artist's model; Schön his star. This process continues into *Pandora*, where Rodrigo wants her to be his acrobatic assistant-cum-wife and Alwa is engaged on his doomed project to write a play about her. Each of these is an image of Lulu as an artistic product and it is only within this illusory world of art that the Lulu of transcendent liberation can be found. What is true for the men is also true for Lulu herself: though it is never quite clear what she is looking for, a bourgeois marriage does not seem to be it. Equally, just as she destroys all the false images and the men who invent them, so the world finally destroys her. Where the men and Lulu have all been seeking the gratification of their own desires, what remains is the bourgeois structures against which they have offended but which, ultimately, they uphold by being forced to submit to them.

This reinforcement of bourgeois institutions occurs because each of the men who gains possession of Lulu also gains that aspect of aestheticized *Leben* which they desire in her. In each case, the fact that the men then reject her in favour of their bourgeois pursuits implies that society and *Leben* simply cannot coexist, and that *Leben* itself is inadequate as a substitute for conventional modes of behaviour. The men have come to Lulu with their own idea of what she will be like, as have all those who encounter her, such as those who say they wanted to marry her (III, 86), but whatever it is, ultimately they desire a bourgeois wife. When Alwa describes Schön's fiancée to Lulu, he says of her, 'ich glaube nicht, daß ihr ein Opfer auf dieser Welt zu groß wäre um seinetwillen' (III, 63). Though she is not seen, enough can be ascertained of her to know that she will embody the bourgeois values that are antithetical to Lulu, and the will-to-self-destruction that is inherent in the egoistical understanding of self-sacrifice, as personified by Nettchen in *Elins Erweckung*, and Molly in *Der Marquis von Keith*.

Audrone Willecke describes a similar trait in Lulu's character, but one which manifests itself in an entirely different manner. She describes Lulu's desire to be dominated; not that Lulu wishes to serve others as such, but she wants to be controlled:

On her triumphal march over the corpses and the ruined lives of her male victims, Lulu is actually in search of a master, of a strong male who can tame her. She yearns for the whip of her dead husband Goll, believes she has found her equal in the ruthless intelligence of Schön, and upon his defeat dreams of a 'Lustmörder'. Lulu's innermost desire is to be mastered.<sup>23</sup>

This conflicts with the sense that she might, in some way, be representative of liberation. In addition, Willecke points towards the insubstantial promise of the alternative world Wedekind proposes: 'he evokes a mythical realm of "nature" beyond the confines of the patriarchal capitalist order'.<sup>24</sup> The methods he uses to imbue this world with a certain authenticity need to be highlighted, for often they involve a deliberately mysterious style that disguises the lack of substance. This is particularly true for another crucial aspect to the discussion of Lulu's 'true' identity:

23. Audrone B. Willecke, 'Frank Wedekind and the "Frauenfrage"', *Monatshefte*, 72 (1980), 26-38 (p. 28).

24. *ibid.*, p. 29.



for instance, where Lulu appears to embody manifold classical themes and concepts, Wedekind has actually designed her to be devoid of a centre. He renders her mysterious by presenting her as a fatherless ‘Wunderkind’ – a Christ-parallel (III, 86); just before Schigolch makes his first entrance, Lulu says, ‘(visionär) – Du? –Du?’ (III, 38) and closes her eyes in a mysterious fashion, to suggest a mystical, but indefinable link between her and Schigolch; the *Tierbändiger* describes her as ‘das wahre Tier’ and ‘die Urgestalt des Weibes’ (III, 8-10). Each of these aspects, together with the different names that Lulu is given throughout the play, provides an opportunity to discover a new facet of Lulu’s character. None, however, can claim to be the definitive understanding. The reason for this is that, though she might suggest any number of ideas, she does not represent one to the exclusion of any other, for the greater the number of parallels that can be drawn, the more mysterious her provenance can appear.

Among the references to other historical and literary characters, Josephine Schröder-Zebralla has drawn out references to the life of Christ, in support of her theory that Lulu represents a female Christ-figure, who dies in the name of Wedekind’s sensual religion. The parallels to Christ are, however, not that clear. Schröder-Zebralla argues that Christ was, in Wedekind’s words, a ‘Feind der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft’, as was Lulu; that little is known about their childhoods; that Christ spent time with women; and that he was silent when questioned by Pilate.<sup>25</sup> In effect, though, the parallels are all fairly minor; and Wedekind, who obviously knew the Bible well, would have been able to insert far more evident references if he had intended there to be a stronger relationship between Lulu and Christ.<sup>26</sup> It seems more likely that the parallels Schröder-Zebralla has identified are part of Wedekind’s overall scheme of creating a network of loose connections, rather than clear identifications. A greater link between Christianity and the *Lulu*-plays really comes in Wedekind’s *Vorwort* to *Die Büchse der Pandora*, which he wrote in 1906. For this, Wedekind compares his battles to gain the publication of *Die Büchse der Pandora*, with Christ’s

25. Schröder-Zebralla, pp. 139-49.

26. Naomi Ritter also identifies a connection between Lulu as Pierrot and Christ: ‘Many images of 18th- and 19th-century Pierrots – haloed, martyred figures in white satin – bespeak the ironic Christ-figure’. (Naomi Ritter, ‘The Portrait of Lulu as Pierrot’, in *Frank Wedekind Yearbook 1991*, pp. 127-140 (p. 128).)

appearance at his trial before the Sanhedrin (III, 105-06). Hans-Jochen Irmer summarizes Wedekind's argument:

Solange die bürgerliche Gesellschaft existiert, befindet sich der Dichter, der als Anwalt der Menschlichkeit auftritt, in der Situation des Angeklagten. Er wird immer wieder 'wegen Gotteslästerung zum Tode verurteilt' und 'gekreuzigt'. Wedekind sieht hier kein Ende ab. Das Ende, das er wünscht, ist in seinem Werk moralisch, nicht gesellschaftlich.<sup>27</sup>

Wedekind's association of himself with Christ places him within the neo-Romantic tradition of artistic self-perception as a tortured, misunderstood prophet.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, as that is the image of Christ he had culled from his reading of the Bible, it is easy to see how he could claim to share in the same sense of being misunderstood that Christ had faced before the Sanhedrin.<sup>29</sup> It is as if he is here ridiculing those who upheld bourgeois values by turning the words of Christ against the selfsame values which purported to be founded on his teachings. His conclusion is a flourish that enables him to claim that Christ is on his side, but without requiring him to explain any further: 'ich dränge mich ohne ausdrückliche Aufforderung nicht zu der Aufgabe, die Aussprüche unseres Religionsstifters vor dem Richter zu verteidigen' (III, 107). The superior cleverness of this display disguises the lack of a centre to his argument, and the same is true for the whole of the *Vorwort*, from its assertion that Geschwitz is the central character in *Die Büchse der Pandora*, to the moralistic conclusion.<sup>30</sup> Corbet Stewart observes:

Towards the end of his preface, he distinguishes between two kinds of morality, social and human, pointing the contrast between 'bürgerliche Moral, zu deren Schutz der Richter berufen ist, und menschliche Moral, die sich jeder irdischen

27. *Der Theaterdichter Frank Wedekind: Werk und Wirkung* (Berlin: Henschel, 1975), p. 145.

28. cf. Williams, pp. 5-6.

29. See my chapter on *Karl Hetmann, der Zwergriese (Hidalla)*.

30. Artur Kutscher cites the author in his refutation of the argument that Geschwitz is the leading character: 'Diese Behauptung ist eine Notlüge, die von den Tatsachen der künstlerischen Gestaltung korrigiert wird. Lulu ist natürlich die tragische Hauptperson. Wedekind hat mir gestanden, er habe das gesagt in der Hoffnung, die juristisch zensorischen Beanstandungen des Schlusses seiner Dichtung dadurch beheben zu können, daß er die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Geschwitz lenkte.' (Kutscher, I, 375-76.)

Gerichtsbarkeit entzieht'. [...] Before what tribunal, if not an earthly one, human morality is to be judged, we are not told, and there is scant suggestion in Wedekind's work as a whole, of any sort of transcendent court of appeal.<sup>31</sup>

It is this kind of attempt to define morality while rejecting anything that might provide a basis for it that leads to many of the difficulties in studying Wedekind. Later in the *Vorwort*, he writes, 'wenn die menschliche Moral höher als die bürgerliche stehen will, dann muß sie allerdings auch auf eine tiefere umfassendere Kenntnis vom Wesen der Welt und des Menschen gegründet sein' (III, 106-07). Stewart also takes issue with this:

'Menschliche Moral' would then presumably be a morality which could make due allowance for, even accommodate, the primal, vital forces embodied by Lulu. But Lulu is too Protean a figure, too resistant to definition for such accommodation to be possible. [...] Unless defined in relation to some metaphysical force about which Wedekind seems unable to provide us with any information, 'menschliche Moral' is in the end no *more* than 'menschlich' – and so nebulously that it cannot really be described as morality at all.<sup>32</sup>

It is for this reason that Wedekind can portray himself as a moralist in the *Vorwort*, because he is in no danger of actually setting out any form of recognizable morality. Thus he can criticize what he perceives as the faults in the society around him, but cannot be criticized for anything he might suggest that could be put in its place. Lulu might herself represent some kind of liberation, but, as Stewart argues, she embodies so many different elements that it is difficult to elucidate exactly what it is.

What Lulu provides for her husbands is also only ever the apparent possibility of a return to paradise. Possession of her quite clearly does not deliver any long-term relief from the need for social conformity. The possibility of liberation that is presented to Lulu herself is that of going abroad. On two occasions she is offered the chance to go to Africa (by Escerny and Casti-Piani) and Geschwitz offers her a ticket to America, but Lulu refuses in each case. Finally, Africa comes to Lulu in the person of Kungo-Poti, 'Erbprinz von Uahubee' (III, 185), who bludg-

31. 'Comedy, Morality and Energy in the Work of Wedekind', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 56 (1987), 56-73 (pp. 64-65).

32. Stewart, p. 65.

eons Alwa and runs away.<sup>33</sup> There are no idylls to be found elsewhere in the world, and when Geschwitz makes her offer, Lulu's response is: 'ich kann in keiner anderen Stadt mehr glücklich sein' (III, 167). Even allowing for Lulu's abhorrence of Geschwitz, and reluctance to become a prostitute in Casti-Piani's case, her ability to seize any opportunity to escape in other circumstances suggests that if she felt any of these were a suitable escape route, she would take it. Instead, she knows that her condition will remain the same wherever she is.<sup>34</sup>

If it is unclear what form of liberation Lulu is offering, it is also not quite clear what she represents liberation from. Though the *Lulu*-plays seem to be concerned with some idea of sexual liberation, they also involve a severe criticism of a society that is obsessed with money, for Wedekind chooses, especially in the second act of *Die Büchse der Pandora*, to carry out a critique of money; this notion is also present in *Erdgeist*, where both Schwarz and Schön are more interested in the prospect of making money than they are in spending time with Lulu. The gambling scene in *Die Büchse der Pandora*, however, makes it clear that if Lulu is supposed to represent the will roaming free, the will is ultimately more interested in money than in sex. The men of *Erdgeist* were momentarily distracted by Lulu's attractions, but returned to their everyday pursuits. In *Die Büchse der Pandora*, these are pursuits shared by everybody. Where in the *Vorwort* Wedekind refers to Lulu's 'rein passive Rolle' (III, 102), it is not Geschwitz who takes on the active part – she only acts in accordance with Lulu's will – but the desire for money. The first act of *Pandora* revolves around Lulu, even if it is largely concerned with those who are awaiting her; the second act is dominated by money – even Lulu's furious machinations are caused by her desire to avoid financial difficulty. Finally, in the third act, her

33. 'Der um die Jahrhundertwende noch nicht vollständig erforschte afrikanische Kontinent galt vielen Zeitgenossen als enthusiastisch-symbolisches Ziel einer von Zivilisationsmüdigkeit und Pioniergeist gespeisten Sehnsucht nach Abenteuer und unmittelbarer Erlebnisfähigkeit.' (Frank Wedekind, *Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. by Elke Austermühl (Darmstadt: Häuser, 1994-), IV (1994), 447.) The picture of Africa that emerges in these plays, however, is that of a place populated by people who are little different from those of Lulu's own *demi-monde*.
34. cf. Hermann Casimir in *Der Marquis von Keith*, who says, 'ein früherer Klassenkamerad schreibt mir aus Afrika, wenn man sich in Afrika unglücklich fühle, dann fühle man sich noch zehnmal glücklicher, als wenn man sich in München glücklich fühle' (IV, 37).

sexuality itself has to be placed under the same yoke, as she is forced to take up prostitution, which is precisely the fate she wished to avert in her dealings with Casti-Piani.

In *Erdegeist*, Wedekind provides examples of individuals who have obtained economic and social success, and crowned their success with Lulu; he shows this up to be a sham. In *Pandora*, the success is universal and is the result of the temporary rise in the value of the *Jungfrauaktien* that are the source of everyone's wealth. The strangeness of such a value-system is illustrated in the scene in which all the participating gamblers celebrate their good fortune:

MAGELONE Alle Welt hat gewonnen; es ist nicht zu glauben!

BIANETTA Mir scheint, ich habe ein ganzes Vermögen gewonnen!

LUDMILLA STEINHERZ Rühmen Sie sich dessen nicht, mein Kind! Das bringt kein Glück.

MAGELONE Aber die Bank hat ja auch gewonnen! Wie ist das nur möglich!

ALWA Es ist ganz pyramidal, wo all das Geld herkommt!

CASTI-PIANI Fragen wir nicht danach! Genug, daß man den Champagner nicht zu sparen braucht!

(III, 156)

This exchange is Wedekind's paradigm for the whole capitalist system. It illustrates his sense of the hollowness of riches and the fact that the idea of everyone gaining through this system is actually not possible. This concept is expanded in the collapse of the *Jungfrauaktien*, to show the fragility of a value-system that is based on money. The winnings of the moment are taken away by the external collapse in the market. This has the effect of reducing everyone to the same level – that of animals fleeing a predator. Even Magelone's principles are discarded, as she begins to consider the same career in prostitution for her daughter that she was initially so staunch in rejecting. Given the right circumstances, it seems all human values and principles are abandoned in the name of self-preservation.

Lulu is consequently in no way unique as she is forced into the prostitute's career that she has avoided since her introduction into society. In her argument with Casti-Piani, Lulu says, as a defence against prostitution, 'wenn ich mich gegen meine Erkenntnis versündige, dann fühle ich mich am nächsten Tage an Leib und Seele beschmutzt und brauche Wochen, um den Ekel, den ich vor mir empfinde, zu über-

winden' (III, 150). Similarly, she argues with Alwa in the third act and says, 'wenn ich dich dort liegen sehe, dann möchte ich mir beide Hände dafür abhacken, daß ich mich so gegen meine Vernunft versündigt habe!' (III, 175).

This would imply that she has some sense of what, to her at least, is right and wrong – in contrast to the scene in *Erdgeist* in which Schwarz asks her about what she believes and she answers, 'ich weiß es nicht' (III, 33). The principle she seems prepared to defend is not one that could have been defined in Schwarz's terms, but sleeping with men against her will offends against it. Lulu's suggestion that she might cut off her hands is a biblical allusion,<sup>35</sup> and she cites another of Christ's violent images in *Erdgeist*, when talking to Schön about Schwarz: 'hätte er nur eine annähernd richtige Vorstellung von mir, er würde mir einen Stein an den Hals binden und mich im Meer versenken, wo es am tiefsten ist!' (III, 46).<sup>36</sup>

Lulu's appropriation of Christ's imagery of self-inflicted suffering here points to the Nietzschean sense of the will-to-self-destruction of Christianity, in that she uses masochistic images of pain and death as a response to her own sense of sinfulness. She differs from the Christian viewpoint, however, in arguing that it is her reason, and not her conscience, that is the arbiter of right and wrong. Lulu is supposed to be the embodiment of *Wille*, yet she describes her sexuality as being subject to her reason. This reason, however, is powerless to prevent her from 'sinning' against herself. This is a reversal of the position of the men, whose reason is subject to their sexuality. But her reason compels her to pursue the desires of her *Wille* anyway, so it leads to the same conclusion – submission to the will. Here, she is contrasted with Geschwitz in that Geschwitz's will is not an insatiable drive, but a focussed desire: her obsessive love for Lulu gives her a self-destructive, masochistic tendency, which leaves her literally willing to do everything humanly possible for Lulu, though she acknowledges that death will mark the end of this servitude:

35. cf. Matthew 18. 8.

36. cf. Matthew 18. 6.

O Lulu, wenn es eine ewige Vergeltung gibt, dann möchte ich nicht für dich einstehen müssen! Ich kann mich nicht darein finden, daß kein Gott über uns wacht. Und doch wirst du wohl recht haben, daß es nichts damit ist. Denn womit habe ich unbedeutender Wurm seinen Zorn gereizt, um nur Entsetzen zu erleben, wo die ganze lebendige Schöpfung vor Seligkeit die Besinnung verliert! (III, 167)

Just as Moritz experiences a sense of exclusion from the world in *Frühlings Erwachen*, so Geschwitz imagines the world to be blissful and feels accursed at being excluded from it. Also, like Elias prior to his experience with Ella, she stubbornly refuses to give up hope in Providence because of the consequences she imagines, having been brought up in a God-fearing culture, even though her experience has taught her that God seems to have something against her. Religious faith becomes something not just irrational, but even bizarre: it seems Wedekind is arguing that it is better to believe in nothing than in a vindictive God. Nevertheless, when left alone in the attic in act three, Geschwitz says a small prayer: ‘Herr Gott, ich danke dir, daß du mich nicht geschaffen hast wie diese. – Ich bin nicht Mensch; mein Leib hat nichts gemeines mit Menschenleibern.’ (III, 188). Like Moritz, her negative self-perception is related to her sexuality, and she attempts suicide. Her attempt is, though, a feeble parody. Her encounter with *Leben* is not a last-minute experience as it was for Moritz with Ilse but an experience that has gone on as long as her love for Lulu. Her separation from Lulu also represents her separation from life itself. She even prays to the portrait of Lulu for mercy – ‘mein angebetener Engel! Mein Lieb! Mein Stern! – Erbarm’ dich mein, erbarm’ dich mein, erbarm’ dich mein!’ (III, 190). Her image of God and her image of Lulu become intertwined, because both seem equally distant and promise fulfilment from their unreachable distances.

Her first words after the failure of her suicide are: ‘verfluchtes Leben! – Verfluchtes Leben!’ (III, 190) and these are echoed in the very last words of the play – her ‘O verflucht!’ as she dies. Corbet Stewart refers to the ambiguity of this, describing it as either a ‘throwaway banality or theological condemnation of the entire human race’.<sup>37</sup> Gertrud Milkereit, however, sees the words emerging from Geschwitz’s isolated position, inasmuch as she is free of conventional sexual roles,

37. Stewart, p. 66.

but is also trapped between them: ‘Doch gerade aus diesem letzten “verflucht” der Geschwitz spricht das Gegenteil von Resignation und Verzweiflung, es spricht Auflehnung und Widerstand gegen das als absurd erkannte Leben.’<sup>38</sup>

As with so much else in the play, it is not possible to resolve the ambiguity in Geschwitz’s words, in terms of whether they ultimately express resignation or defiance. Boa considers Geschwitz to have become aware of the hopelessness of life, and sees in this a contrast between Geschwitz and Schigolch, for ‘the view of life under the aspect of death leads him to conclusions different from Geschwitz’s sense of empty absurdity: he cannot be disappointed in the search for spiritual communion or transcendent meaning, since he has never looked for them.’<sup>39</sup> So Geschwitz’s pitiful and unfulfilled search for meaning is set against the sanguine pragmatism of Schigolch, who is clearly better equipped to cope in this world than any of those around him, but only because he has never bothered trying to be optimistic. He is beyond considerations of future or past hope, but exists in the moment. *Leben* becomes the opposite of a transcendent power and is reduced to a raw struggle for existence. Survival is the best that can be hoped for. Since money and sex are both revealed to be unsatisfactory bases for life, one is left with the stark emptiness that *Leben* is not the ultimate aim in life, but all that there is: even a life dedicated to its pursuit has no more likelihood of ending in happiness than any other. Schigolch faces the same situations as the others, the difference is that he does not seem to care. Boa sees in him a man from a more atavistic time, a pre-Christian worshipper of gods of naked survival, but one whose era is over:

Archaic community is no more; Schigolch’s earth gods have been overthrown by Christian faith in personal survival. But Christianity is tainted by a repressive morality. Modern secularism has not brought liberation, merely isolation and a corroding sense of absurdity [...] The economic jungle of modern capitalism seems [...] to have brought regression to a pre-cultural bestialized humanity. Only the portrait offers a fragile vision of hope, like the hope in Pandora’s box.<sup>40</sup>

38. Gertrud Milkereit, *Die Idee der Freiheit im Werke von Frank Wedekind* (Cologne: University of Cologne, 1957), p. 29.

39. Boa, p. 98.

40. Boa, p. 101.



Within the time-scale of the play, the portrait has become something of a relic. The hope it represents is insubstantial and nebulous. Geschwitz's prayer to the portrait also enables it to take on the dimension of a religious icon. It has a power, which is evident in Alwa's sense that he is regaining some self-respect when it is hung up:

Diesem Porträt gegenüber gewinne ich meine Selbstachtung wieder. Es macht mir mein Verhängnis begreiflich. [...] Wer sich diesen blühenden, schwellenden Lippen, diesen großen unschuldsvollen Kinderaugen, diesem rosig-weißen strotzenden Körper gegenüber in seiner bürgerlichen Stellung sicher fühlt, der werfe den ersten Stein auf uns. (III, 181)

He is able to find justification for his actions within the portrait itself, and it becomes not only the symbol of a lost era, but the reason for its loss too. It refers back to the period before the current traumas began, and presents Lulu unspoiled, in the innocent white of the pierrot costume. The same power that Lulu held over Schwarz is still visible in the painting. Alwa can justify his fall, and suggests that his fate would be universal within bourgeois society. He also uses a biblical reference: 'wer unter euch ohne Sünde ist, der werfe den ersten Stein auf sie'.<sup>41</sup> This applies Christ's words to the community who were intending to stone to death an adulteress, to bourgeois society as a whole, for Schwarz means that anyone in his position would behave in the same way; he thereby exonerates himself. The portrait not only offers self-justification; it also undergoes a mock crucifixion as Alwa nails it to the wall with his shoe. The implication is that the portrait of Lulu in her prime will live on after she has died – the only prospect of life after death offered by this world seems to be in artistic depiction. Like the different images of Lulu the men in the plays have all nurtured, this illusory Lulu is the only one who will offer any kind of transcendence. Wedekind even undermines this, however, for the edge of the painting is 'abgeblättert' and 'nachgedunkelt' (III, 181-82), suggesting that its beauty, too, will wear away.

This scene serves, rather than to show Lulu's messianic character, to present her in the most squalid conditions imaginable. If she is supposed to be a prophet of the religion of sensuality, the world brings her down to extraordinary depths of sordidness. Jack only really delivers the

41. John 8. 7b.

*coup de grâce*. Wilhelm Emrich describes Lulu's death as 'nicht mehr Erfüllung, [...] kein Sieg mehr einer Idee oder wahren Natur wie im klassischen Drama. Lulu geht unter als "Schlachtvieh", nicht mehr als tragisch sühnendes Opfer.'<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, Irmer believes that Wedekind was drawing on associations with Goethe's *Faust* to evoke a transcendent ideal:

Ihr Tod ist ein scheinbarer, denn das Prinzip, das sie vertritt, wird nicht endgültig vernichtet, sondern, im Gegenteil, apothetisch verklärt. Lulu ist ein 'Vollmensch', sie vereint in sich das faustische und das mephistolische Ich. Sie ist das Nein in der gottgeschaffenen Welt, diese Welt hingegen ist das einseitig teuflische, nichtige und auf Vernichtung ausgehende Nein zum Menschen.<sup>43</sup>

The difficulty with this is, however, in defining what exactly the principle is that Lulu is supposed to represent. Transcendence in this case seems to take the form of negation, inasmuch as the principle takes the place of what it means to be human. Ronald Peacock sees in this negation a Fall that has no redemption, and interprets the play as Wedekind's own voyage of discovery:

He ends by showing us very literally that Fall of Man in which he had not really wished to believe. He sees an ideal of life-affirmation in ecstatic forms, but a reality of moral chaos. Joy turns on itself and renews evil. Wedekind's attempt, in defiance of all traditional moral systems, whether of oriental, classical, Hebraic, Christian, or humanistic origin, to find salvation in the beauty and innocence of emancipated instincts ends in failure, and the satirical revel in grotesque terms lumbers over into a lurid tragedy.<sup>44</sup>

The final act depicts a collision between Naturalism and the grotesque as Lulu leads a succession of repulsive men into her squalid garret, culminating in Jack the Ripper. Jack's presence as *deus ex machina* also introduces a process of universalization, because Lulu becomes an ordinary prostitute, one of those randomly killed by Jack the Ripper. At the same time, however, Jack comes to represent a mystical figure himself. Thomas Medicus sees Jack's role as that of the restorer of

42. 'Frank Wedekind – Die Lulu-Tragödie', in *Protest und Verheißung: Studien zur klassischen und modernen Dichtung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum Verlag, 1960), pp. 206-222 (p. 219).

43. Irmer, p. 199.

44. Peacock, p. 117.

purity, for Lulu has been tainted by the world and Jack's murder is an act which purifies her and frees her from its corrupt influence:

All dies ist Religion, wenn auch die der Lust. Wie Christus der fleischgewordene Geist ist, so ist Lulu die Geburt eines Gedankens. Ihre Opferung durch Jack läßt Lulu ins metaphysierte Unbewußte, in die völlige Stummheit, die vorher schon der Tanz als diesseitige Form repräsentierte, in den Tod als letzte Zuflucht zurückkehren. Der Teufel ist immer der beste Gehilfe Gottes.<sup>45</sup>

This 'Religion der Lust' has echoes in the utopian world Wedekind devised in *Die große Liebe*. Part of this work involves the description of an orgiastic celebration in which sacrificial boys and girls have sex until they die. Medicus outlines these rituals, as they are described in Wedekind's notebooks. The overall aim of the ceremonies is summed up in the line 'die Todeswollust vertritt die Stelle der Unsterblichkeit der Seele'.<sup>46</sup> The greatest of sins in this Utopia is 'die Sünde der Todesfurcht'.<sup>47</sup> Sex and death become near neighbours, and sex is used to render death meaningless. Sex does not represent the ideal, or point to it; it is just a part of life, as is death, indeed, it is the point in life where *Leben* can have fullest expression. Where the sacrificial rituals of the children are self-contained and related to the cycle of the seasons, in the *Lulu*-plays Wedekind wants to depict a formal transgression against bourgeois values that provides a vicarious and safe opportunity for his audiences to witness a challenge that lasts for the duration of the play and concludes with the world's removal of Lulu and its restoration of normality. That this 'normality' involves the introduction of Jack the Ripper, himself a living person with a mythical dimension, serves to highlight the importance of keeping to the conventional modes of behaviour. The artistic figure that can only ever represent an illusion of transcendence is destroyed by an actual figure whom nobody really knows.

If there is any way that Lulu's death can be seen to approach a transcendent ideal it is in this artistic sense. It is, however, a simultaneous deconstruction of that ideal. It is a religious idea of an aestheticized glorification of the earthy and the sensual, but collapses

45. Medicus, p. 105.

46. *Nb* 42, 45.

47. Medicus, p. 199.

when it encounters humanity. The children involved in the rituals of *Die große Liebe* are behind high walls, separated from the world, because people in the world are not capable of living according to an idyll of sensuality. The rites involving Lulu are played out in the theatre, and the slaying of Lulu is not in favour of a higher ideal; rather, it rounds off the ritualized pursuit of selfish aims, so that the consequence of the play as a whole will be that the audience can witness the whole range of nightmarish consequences for those who go too far in exploring the limits of what the bourgeois world will allow. In essence, Wedekind is testing the boundaries of what is acceptable, and enabling his audiences to share in the experience without the discomfort. Though the sexual realm is the most likely to provide revelation of the *Wille*, it is useless as a means of gaining access to the transcendent. The conclusion of the *Lulu*-plays is that *Leben* itself cannot serve as the basis of a philosophy of life, but even if any transcendental value it might appear to offer is purely illusory, there is still some benefit in continuing the search. Wedekind is engaged in a doomed attempt to explore the limitations of the possible and to seek for anything that might provide some form of value. Lulu is the embodiment of this quest. She represents a life that might involve far more excitement than that of Wedekind's audiences, but the horrendous way in which she is murdered as a consequence of her pursuit of *Leben* ought ultimately to make them feel a great deal happier about their own lives.



#### CHAPTER FOUR

### The Use of Biblical Allusion in *Der Marquis von Keith*

Where *Elins Erweckung* and the *Lulu*-plays were concerned with the failure of various methods of reaching a transcendent meaning in human activity, the starting-point of *Der Marquis von Keith* is a world in which the non-existence of such a transcendent is presupposed. The shift in focus that is evident in *Die Büchse der Pandora*, away from sex and towards money, becomes even clearer in *Der Marquis von Keith*, but Wedekind is not merely interested in presenting a critique of a society that has become obsessed with money. Though the plot concentrates on the career of the confidence-trickster Keith and his attempt to build a palace for the arts in Munich, whilst being visited by his unhappy friend Ernst Scholz, it is underpinned by a network of allusions to Christianity, and the Bible in particular, which serve to suggest that Wedekind is exploring the possibilities and purposes of religion in a post-Nietzschean world. At the same time, Wedekind is not drifting too far from the themes of his earlier plays, so the dialectic of egoism and pessimism is revived, in the figures of Keith, the advocate of *Leben*, and his friend, the pessimist Scholz.

In his portrayal of Scholz, Wedekind presents his sharpest criticism of the selfishness that he believes is inherent in altruism. Keith is modelled on Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and embodies an egotism that precludes the need for self-examination. His aphoristic philosophy is concerned with exposing all the ideological constructs that he takes to masquerade as morality, and he argues that morality itself is no more than a contributory factor to good business. Through the Scholz-Keith dialectic, Wedekind is thus able to present the *Übermensch* and the slave to false altruism. The role of Christianity in the play is not simply that of an ally to the weak; indeed, it is Keith who is the apologist for Christianity, which has been appropriated by the strong to provide moral support for their own activities. Wedekind thus tries to unmask religion as an ideological construct that is designed to uphold the ruling classes

and, instead of criticizing it through its practitioners, as he had in *Frühlings Erwachen* and *Elins Erweckung*, here he presents a criticism of the ideologies that he believes lie behind it. His interest here is not so much in the theology, as in the principles of Christianity, and in particular the nature of the Bible: there are many references to the Bible throughout the play, and quotations and allusions to verses and characters, which serve to highlight the disparity between the transcendent religious world referred to in scripture and the actual existence of the bourgeois individuals concerned. Keith quotes the Bible frequently and, like Elias in *Elins Erweckung*, might embody those aspects of Christianity which the bourgeoisie uses to uphold its own values; but he goes a step further, and uses both the Bible and bourgeois morality to his own ends. Friedrich Rothe describes Keith's role further:

Als geistigen Wert empfiehlt er mit apologetischer Versatilität das Christentum. Religion und Besitz sind die verschiedenen Formen derselben Sache, der gegenüber nur die Alternative von Anpassung oder Untergang gilt. Keith wird sogar zum Theologen und verteidigt gegen Ernst Scholz die gottgewollte Harmonie zwischen Reichtum und Glück.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of Christianity espoused by Keith involves a personal belief-system. The purely ideological basis of religion which he assumes, leads him to declare all religion to be a matter of personal opinion and to seek for evidence that will support him in this claim. He uses his status as a social outsider to provide him with a platform from which he can declare his profound slogans, but his wisdom is largely superficial. Burghard Dedner notes that Keith's peers are mostly unimpressed: 'Keith kann [...] mit der Brillanz seiner Aussprüche bestenfalls Provinzielle wie Ernst Scholz oder Jugendliche wie den fünfzehnjährigen Hermann Casimir beeindrucken'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is whilst teaching the impressionable Hermann that Keith begins to describe his own ideological framework. Keith describes how he is able to identify the true selfishness behind every action:

1. Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen*, p. 70.
2. Burghard Dedner, 'Intellektuelle Illusionen: Zu Wedekinds *Marquis von Keith*', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 94 (1975), 498-519 (pp. 504-05).

HERMANN Es gibt doch wohl aber höhere Güter als Reichtum!

KEITH [...] Diese Güter heißen nur deshalb höhere, weil sie aus dem Besitz hervorgehen und nur durch den Besitz ermöglicht werden. Ihnen steht es ja frei, nachdem Ihr Vater ein Vermögen gemacht hat, sich einer künstlerischen oder wissenschaftlichen Lebensaufgabe zu widmen. Wenn Sie sich dabei aber über das erste Weltprinzip hinwegsetzen, dann jagen Sie Ihr Erbe Hochstaplern in den Rachen.

HERMANN Wenn Jesus Christus nach diesem Weltprinzip hätte handeln wollen...!

KEITH Vergessen Sie bitte nicht, daß das Christentum zwei Drittel der Menschheit aus der Sklaverei befreit hat! Es gibt keine Ideen, seien sie sozialer, wissenschaftlicher oder künstlerischer Art, die irgend etwas anderes als Hab und Gut zum Gegenstand hätten. (IV, 8)

The thrust of Keith's argument – that economic principles lie at the heart of all human activities – point towards his subscribing to a primitive form of Marxist theory. The *Egoismustheorie* that is apparent elsewhere in Wedekind's work is supplemented here by Keith's argument that this is fundamentally a desire for money. Hermann's reference to Christ is to argue that there was at least one person whose altruism was without a self-centred source. Instead of responding to this, Keith refers to the abolition of slavery – a positive action of Christianity as an institution rather than anything specifically to do with Christ himself. The institution is of more relevance to him than the person, because what is important is what now remains from Jesus's teaching and how it relates to him. Keith also perceives himself in his own role as Christ; he is, however, not the saviour of the world, but of himself alone. This is made apparent in his description of the events that led to what was his equivalent of Christ's crucifixion:

Ich sollte während der Kubanischen Revolution mit zwölf Verschwörern erschossen werden. Ich falle natürlich auf den ersten Schuß und bleibe tot, bis man mich beerdigen will. Seit jenem Tage fühle ich mich erst wirklich als den Herrn meines Lebens. (*Aufspringend.*) Verpflichtungen gehen wir bei unserer Geburt nicht ein, und mehr als dieses Leben *wegwerfen* kann man nicht. Wer nach seinem Tode noch weiterlebt, der steht über den Gesetzen. (IV, 20-21)

This is an inversion of the Gospel accounts of Jesus's death and resurrection. Here, it is the 'zwölf Verschwörer' – who correspond with Christ's twelve Apostles – who die, instead of the one. All the same, as far as he is himself concerned, Keith 'died', and rose again, which again



indicates his Christlikeness. He also paraphrases the apostle Paul in arguing that, having died, he is above the law: 'Wißt ihr nicht, liebe Brüder [...], daß das Gesetz nur herrscht über den Menschen, solange er lebt?'<sup>3</sup> Paul is arguing that the Christian believers have died with Christ and are no longer subject to the Jewish, Old Testament Law; Keith, however, applies the argument to himself as one who has literally died and gained an imperishable body, and is not subject to the law of the land. He thus interprets the Bible in such a way as to provide his own self-justification. In a similar way, his phrase 'mehr als dieses Leben *wegwerfen* kann man nicht', is reminiscent of Christ's words, 'wer sein Leben zu erhalten sucht, der wird es verlieren; und wer es verlieren wird, der wird es gewinnen'.<sup>4</sup> Keith was willing to risk death in pursuit of his goals, and was rewarded with a new, indestructible body. This also gives him an extra guarantee for his success, another justification for his sense of self-assurance and his confidence that nothing can now go wrong.

In a similar way, he redefines sin in Marxist terms: 'Sünde ist eine mythologische Bezeichnung für schlechte Geschäfte. Gute Geschäfte lassen sich nun einmal nur innerhalb der bestehenden Gesellschaftsordnung machen!' (IV, 30). Sin is thus not part of a moral or religious system, but of an economic one. Dedner considers this, as one of Keith's impressive-sounding slogans, to have the same theoretical basis as all the others:

Das gedankliche Schema, dem alle diese Sätze folgen, ist unverkennbar. Keith fixiert einen idealistischen oder moralischen Begriff wie Sünde, höhere Güter, Altruismus, Gottesliebe und entlarvt ihn dann als Ideologie, als bloße Verhüllung von grundsätzlich materialistischen, profitorientierten Handlungsweisen. Das ließe an Marxsche Kapitalismusdeutungen denken, wenn nicht allzu klar wäre, daß die Demaskierungen des Zynikers Keith keine destruktiven oder gar revolutionären Ziele verfolgen.<sup>5</sup>

Thus although Keith might seem to be seeing through to the ideological core, he cannot find any other use for this insight beyond his own self-promotion; Edith Hutchins, however, questions whether it is any kind of insight at all, and writes of Keith's definition of sin, 'er ist aber so tief

3. Romans 7. 1.

4. Luke 17. 33.

5. Dedner, pp. 503-04.

philosophisch nicht, denn Keith meint speziell das Geschäft der Dirne, und da ist der Satz einfache Beobachtung, naheliegende Wahrheit. [...] Für die Simbas ist Moral eben das fremde, unfreundliche Element, nicht gefürchtet, nicht geschätzt.<sup>6</sup> If the line is taken in context, however, it is evident that Keith is using the example of the prostitute to help elaborate on his own depiction of his personal situation, because of the fact that prostitutes stand outside conventional bourgeois standards as he himself does. Sin, according to his definition, is used by the existing social hierarchy to protect the status quo, by declaring to be wrong the activities of those whose behaviour and values do not match its own. His definition must be seen in contrast to Scholz's view, having experienced the delights of a night with Simba, that 'einer Sünde, wie es die seelenmörderische Zwietracht war, in der meine Eltern zwanzig Jahre beieinander aushielten, macht sich dieses Mädchen doch in seinem seligsten Glück nicht schuldig!' (IV, 29). He pursues the notion of it being sinful to sleep with prostitutes and rejects it not ideologically, but because, like Elias in *Elins Erweckung*, Scholz has been awakened to the concept of liberation through sexuality via the prostitute who, far from being sinful, is pure and innocent. Sin, according to his definition, is thus whatever does not promote happiness, and bourgeois values preventing the termination of unhappy marriages clearly transgress this code. This needs to be seen, however, in the context of Scholz's desperate attempts to find any means of alleviating his sense of guilt. Just as Elias encountered the regenerative power of sexuality, so Scholz experiences it briefly here. But, as with his other attempts to lose his sense of guilt, the relief is only temporary.

In his attempts to deal with his guilt, he tries to identify its source as well as the means to deal with it and asks, 'ich habe mich schon allen Ernstes gefragt, ob nicht mein ungeheurer Reichtum vielleicht der einzige Grund meines Unglücks ist' (IV, 24-25). Thus he tries to blame his misery on an external cause. Keith's interjection at the notion that money could be a source of suffering, 'das ist Gotteslästerung!' (*ibid.*), is a melodramatic way for him to suggest that money is his god, and that its authority should not be questioned. His faith in money is supplemented by his own self-assurance, as he explains to Anna: 'Ich bin ein

6. Edith Hutchins, *Wedekinds Selbstdarstellungen als Moralist* (Indiana: University of Indiana, 1974), pp. 66-67.

*gläubiger* Mensch [...] Ich glaube an nichts so zuversichtlich, wie daran, daß sich unsere Mühen und Aufopferungen in dieser Welt belohnen!' (IV, 62).

In other words Keith wishes to justify his existence by the works he performs. The difference between his attitude and that of Scholz lies in his conviction that he will be rewarded for his activity. Whereas Scholz can live only in the vague hope that the right actions will somehow lead to his self-justification, for Keith it is a confidence that his eventual earthly reward will reflect the work he has put in. It is a faith which is itself geared towards his own self-assertion, and in response to his expression of how it is he believes this, Anna remarks, 'das muß man wohl, um sich so abzuheizen, wie du das tust!' (IV, 62). His religious conviction drives him onwards, but it is a self-focused belief. He has internalized the Christian God whom Nietzsche had argued was no more than an externalization of one's own desire to be grateful for what one had:

Ein Volk, das noch an sich selbst glaubt, hat auch noch seinen eignen Gott. In ihm verehrt es die Bedingungen, durch die es obenauf ist, seine Tugenden, – es projiziert seine Lust an sich, sein Machtgefühl in ein Wesen, dem man dafür danken kann. Wer reich ist, will abgeben; ein stolzes Volk braucht einen Gott, um zu *opfern*... Religion, innerhalb solcher Voraussetzungen, ist eine Form der Dankbarkeit. Man ist für sich selbst dankbar: dazu braucht man einen Gott.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Keith has taken those aspects for which Nietzsche condemned Christianity and reinterpreted them in such a way as to build himself up. It is because of his zealous commitment to serving this internal idea of God that Keith can be so dedicated to the pursuit of his aims.

Equally, Keith has assumed a position of superiority over his peers. He implies this in the same conversation with Anna, when he says, 'die Karyatiden lechzen jetzt danach, vor unserem Götterbilde die Knie beugen zu dürfen!' which is an allusion to Daniel 3, in which King Nebuchadnezzar issues a decree that, at the sound of music, everyone in the land must bow to the idol he has made: 'Wenn ihr hören werdet den Schall der Posaunen, Trompeten, Harfen, Zithern, Flöten, Lauten und aller andern Instrumente, dann sollt ihr niederfallen und das goldene

7. Nietzsche, *Werke*, section 6, vol. III, p. 180.

Bild anbeten, das der König Nebukadnezar hat aufrichten lassen.’<sup>8</sup> The implication is that Keith sees himself as Nebuchadnezzar and the three ‘Karyatiden’ as Shadrach, Meschach and Abednigo, who refuse to bow down to the idol and are thrown into a furnace.<sup>9</sup> Here, the attitude of the three businessmen is the reverse of that of the three people in the biblical narrative. The music will be produced at the *Feenpalast*, but instead of refusing to bend the knee, Keith argues that they are really enthusiastic about committing themselves to the *Feenpalast* project, Keith’s own idol to art and commerce. His hinted comparison of himself with an Old Testament king illustrates his appropriation of the Bible to act as a basis for his faith in self-aggrandizement. His individualistic interpretation of the Bible and of Christianity to provide a source of his self-confidence marks a new direction for Wedekind, for by shifting the notion of the religious away from the Nietzschean critique of a Christianity for the weak, and allowing it to be used by the strong, he presents an understanding of the religious as a virtue and a positive strength, rather than necessarily as evidence of a tendency towards debility. Keith’s treatment of the Bible means that it becomes a useful source of slogans that can be made to support his arguments. It is as though, once religious ideas have been liberated from their sources, it is possible to turn them to any purpose. For instance, in Keith’s first scene with Anna, he says to her, ‘ich lasse mich einfach willenlos treiben, bis ich an ein Gestade gelange, auf dem ich mich heimisch genug fühle, um mir zu sagen: Hier laßt uns Hütten bauen!’ (IV, 10). Boa has identified the phrase ‘Hier laßt uns Hütten Bauen’ as ‘a common tag in German, meaning “here is the place to settle”’,<sup>10</sup> as well as being a reference to the record of Christ’s transfiguration: ‘Petrus aber fing an und sprach zu Jesus: Herr, hier ist gut sein! Willst du, so will ich hier drei Hütten bauen, dir eine, Mose eine und Elia eine.’<sup>11</sup> Here, biblical reference has suffused Keith’s everyday conversation, and helps to mask the contradiction inherent in his claim to drift aimlessly, when in fact his life is one of ceaseless activity.

8. Daniel 3. 5.

9. Wedekind also refers to this incident in Daniel, in one of the ‘politische Lieder’ in his *Simplicissimusgedichte*: ‘Wie einst sangen die drei Männer im feurigen Ofen, / So singe auch ich auf den deutschen Bahnhofen’ (VIII, 76).

10. Boa, pp. 142-43.

11. Matthew 17. 4.

Elsewhere, he uses it to support his arguments, such as when his common-law wife Molly, who cannot countenance the lifestyle he is establishing in Munich, asks him to accompany her back to Bückeberg, the ‘Inbegriff konservativer Denkungsort und skurriler, philisterhafter Rechthaberei’.<sup>12</sup> There, she promises, her parents will look after both of them. This will render Keith totally inactive and he can imagine nothing worse than this, the antithesis of what he lives for – even though it is the bourgeois place to settle that he dubiously claimed to be seeking in his conversation with Anna. His response to Molly’s pleas is ‘dein Reich ist noch nicht gekommen. Laß mich allein. Bückeberg muß sich gedulden’ (IV, 19). This is a reference to the words given by Christ in the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Dein Reich komme. Dein Wille geschehe wie im Himmel so auf Erden’.<sup>13</sup> Keith is asserting with some relief the fact that her world has not impinged on his, and the bourgeois world of Bückeberg is still safely far removed from the city, and is going to stay there as long as he can help it.

But the reason for quoting this particular verse can also be seen in the rest of the prayer, which is the reversal of Keith’s way of looking at the world. The ‘Lord’s Prayer’ is concerned with asking for the Lord to provide – as in, ‘unser tägliches Brot gib uns heute’.<sup>14</sup> Earlier in the argument, Molly cried ‘wir haben morgen kein Brot auf dem Tisch’, to which Keith responded ‘dann speisen wir im Hotel Continental’ (IV, 15). By referring sarcastically to the prayer in which one defers to a higher power to ask for provision, he is showing that he would rather be going out and earning something better for himself. It is of no concern for Keith that on a given day there might be no bread, because he has the conviction that he will be getting something much better the next day. He is also classing the people who feel the need to look to a higher authority rather than within themselves, with the inhabitants of Bückeberg, the bourgeois philistines who are too weak-willed to contemplate the real nature of the world and take on responsibility for themselves. Molly comes to embody the kind of Christianity that Nietzsche condemned, the religion of introspection and fear. Her faith is not much discussed, but is evidently bound up with her bourgeois background. In a

12. *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, IV, 453.

13. Matthew 6. 10.

14. Matthew 6. 11.

later argument with Keith, she provides a clue to this in regard to the manner of her prayers: 'Ich flehe zum Himmel, daß ein furchtbares Unglück über uns hereinbricht! Das ist das einzige, was uns noch retten kann!' (IV, 63). Her misery is exemplified by the notion of her praying for disaster, and her death at the end of the play suggests that her prayer is answered, but not in a way she anticipated. For her suicide does help to precipitate Keith's downfall, but in killing herself she effectively takes matters into her own hands, and so does not simply trust to Providence to answer her prayer. Molly is thereby highlighting the question of whether prayer works, and the answer she receives is affirmative, but only because of her own actions. Prayer, it seems, is only efficacious when the person who prays also acts: instead of merely waiting for divine intervention, she has acted decisively on her own initiative. As with Scholz, though, this initiative results not in hope, but despair.

Her general sense of misery is related to her alienation from the world of *Leben* that Keith is pursuing, and her religion is part of the bourgeois system of repression, a process in which the individual is made to feel guilty without being given any opportunity to atone for that guilt, which results in a self-perpetuating cycle of miserable repression, as represented by the parents of *Frühlings Erwachen* treating their children as they themselves had been treated. Molly shares this characteristic in *Der Marquis von Keith* with Ernst Scholz, who experiences the same sense of guilt, but, whereas Molly has a sense of indefinable dread at the prospect of Keith actually being successful, Scholz's guilt has a focus – namely, the accident that occurred as the result of his interference with the railway regulations.

His guilt is also connected with biblical precedents. Boa has identified the allusions to the Bible that are recalled in the relationship between Keith and Scholz, notably those of Christ and Satan, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau and the Pharisee and the publican.<sup>15</sup> She argues, though, that the comparisons are slippery:

All these references to changelings, *Doppelgänger* brothers and pairs decoratively connect Keith and Scholz as protagonists. To some extent, they can be ordered as good Scholz and wicked Keith, but this moral distinction continually breaks down. It does not work very well with Jacob and Esau, still less with Cain and Abel, and when it comes to the Pharisee and the publican we lose sight of

15. Luke 18. 9-14.

which is which and who is who. Different orders of values clash in post-Nietzschean combat.<sup>16</sup>

This blurring of values is really no more than Wedekind's tendency to make his characters refer to other literary and historical precedents, without establishing a perfect match. Just as the figure of Lulu points towards other characters, so here do Scholz and Keith. In the Old Testament narrative, God approves of Abel's sacrifice and rejects Cain's, which results in Cain's murder of Abel; God also favours Jacob over Esau even though Jacob is a cunning usurper, thus demonstrating that God does not necessarily judge according to human behaviour, but according to his will. This provides the background to the events of *Der Marquis von Keith*, in which Keith is seemingly blessed, and Scholz is cursed. Keith is dominated by money, to the extent that 'Welt und Geld, Leben und Haben, Geschäft und Moral [harmonieren]. Alle weiteren Werte und Unwerte sind ebenfalls ökonomisch zu bestimmen: Güter und höhere Güter, Sünde, schließlich auch die Wahrheit. Die gesellschaftlichen Werte sind im Geldwert aufgegangen.'<sup>17</sup> Money is what motivates Keith and enables him to proceed with his schemes, but on the other hand, Scholz possesses money in abundance, and it is not enough for him – he demands that life provide him with some explanation for his existence. Scholz already possesses what Keith desires, but is incapable of making any use of it. Possession of money does not seem to guarantee happiness in these circumstances, but striving for it does. The Old Testament background invoked by the allusions refers to the biblical notion of the God who is in control of everything. The issue here is whether, in the post-Nietzschean context, it is still possible to talk in terms of fate or Providence, and whether mute acceptance of the status quo, or frenzied activity ought to represent the human response to circumstances.

Keith, for example, has redefined the scope of the religious to accommodate his sense of himself as a god, creating the *Feenpalast* by the power of his will, whilst Scholz is caught in the throes of self-doubt because he is incapable of acting solely for himself. His guilt – which is attributable to his sense of identification with his fellow humans –

16. Boa, p. 143.

17. Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer, 'Non Olet – altes Thema und neues Sujet: Zur Entwicklung der Konversationskomödie zwischen Restauration und Jahrhundertwende', *Euphorion*, 67 (1973), 323-58 (p. 354).

always prevents him from making the bold step that will enable him to determine his own existence. Like Keith after his miraculous escape from death, Scholz remembers a day on which he became his own master, but his notion of what this entails is effectively submission to his 'Überzeugung', such that he is in thrall to his desire to shake off the past:

Seit dem Tage, an dem ich mein eigener Herr wurde, ließ ich mich lediglich von der Überzeugung leiten, ich könne mich meines Daseins nicht eher erfreuen, als bis ich meine Existenz durch ehrliche Arbeit gerechtfertigt hätte. Diese einseitige Anschauung hat mich dahin geführt, daß ich heute aus reinem Pflichtgefühl, nicht anders, als gälte es eine Strafe abzubüßen, den rein materiellen Genuß aufsuche. Sobald ich aber dem Leben die Arme öffnen will, dann lähmt mich die Erinnerung an jene unglücklichen Menschen, die nur durch meine übertriebene Gewissenhaftigkeit in der entsetzlichsten Weise ums Leben gekommen sind. (IV, 22)

In contrast to Keith, who has no compunction for the conspirators who died all around him in South America, Scholz is racked with guilt over all those who died as a result of his intervention. The accident was caused by his 'übertriebene Gewissenhaftigkeit' and as the result of his lack of the 'seelische Gleichgewicht' that one ought to find in someone of his station (IV, 22). He seems, therefore, to have been cursed from birth with an overdeveloped sense of responsibility for others. There is now nothing Scholz can do to alter what has taken place, and he relates the alternatives with which he has experimented in an attempt simply to forget the past:

Ich ging nach England, nach Italien, fühle mich nun aber erst recht von allem lebendigen Treiben ausgeschlossen. In lachender, scherzender Umgebung, bei ohrbetäubender Musik, entringt sich mir plötzlich ein geller Schrei, weil ich mir unversehens wieder jenes Unglücks bewußt worden bin. Ich habe auch im Orient nur wie eine verscheuchte Eule gelebt. Aufrichtig gesagt, bin ich auch seit jenem Unglückstag erst recht davon überzeugt, daß ich mir meine Lebensfreude nur durch Selbstaufopferung zurückkaufen kann. Aber dazu brauche ich Zutritt zum Leben. Diesen Zutritt zum Leben hoffte ich vor einem Jahr dadurch zu finden, daß ich mich mit dem ersten besten Mädchen allerniedrigster Herkunft verlobte, um mit ihr in den Ehestand zu treten. (IV, 23)

Even his 'Zutritt zum Leben', however, involved a process of self-abnegation in his marriage to the ungrateful, lower-class woman. Just as



Elias in *Elins Erweckung* saw immense self-sacrifice in his potential marriage to Nettchen (IX, 27-28), so Scholz contemplates a similar, pessimistic future. It does not seem to occur to him that, as the accident resulted from his self-sacrificial overenthusiasm, further self-sacrifice might not provide the solution he requires of it. He also mentions the fact that he gave up his title and turned from calling himself Graf Tratenau to Ernst Scholz: ‘die Presse hatte meinen Rang und Namen zu dem Unglück, das ich heraufbeschworen, in wirkungsvollen Kontrast gesetzt. Ich hielt mich deshalb meiner Familie gegenüber für verpflichtet, einen anderen Namen anzunehmen’ (IV, 23). He does not explain whether his family actually wanted him to shed his title, for him that is immaterial. It is only his own perception that carries any value and, for Scholz, misfortune is the cause of his questioning the reason for and nature of his existence, whilst at the same time being the basis of that existence.

Scholz finally realizes this in the scene at the end of Act 4, in which he notices that Anna and Simba are rejecting him, and he cries out: ‘(in *plötzlicher Versteinerung*) – Ich trage das Kain-Zeichen auf der Stirn...’ (IV, 83). What distinguishes this reference from others is that it is a comparison Scholz makes himself; rather than leaving it implicit, or making a subtle allusion to another character via the use of a certain phrase, Wedekind causes Scholz to see this biblical precedent for himself. Scholz is identifying with the Cain and Abel narrative, which presents the world with its first sin after Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, in the form of Cain’s murder of his brother. For this act, God’s judgement comes upon Cain in the form of his curse:

‘Und nun: Verflucht seist du auf der Erde [...]. Wenn du den Acker bebauen wirst, soll es dir hinfort seinen Ertrag nicht geben. Unstet und flüchtig sollst du sein auf Erden.’

Kain aber sprach zu dem Herrn: ‘[...] Ich muß mich vor deinem Angesicht verbergen und muß unstet und flüchtig sein auf Erden. So wird mir’s gehen, daß mich totschißt, wer mich findet.’

Aber der Herr sprach zu ihm: ‘Nein, sondern wer Kain totschißt, das soll siebenfältig gerächt werden.’ Und der Herr machte ein Zeichen an Kain, daß ihn

niemand erschläge, der ihn fände. So ging Kain hinweg von dem Angesichte des Herrn und wohnte im Lande Nod, jenseits von Eden, gegen Osten.<sup>18</sup>

It is in this comparison that Scholz finds himself confronted with the guilt that has attached itself to him. Or rather, he has always felt guilty, but the difference here is that he comes to understand that there is simply no process available to him in the world that will enable him to deal adequately with it. Cain is able to call on God and at least understands his punishment. Scholz is cursed and suddenly has to come to terms with his inability to fit into, or even understand, the world around him. Like Cain, he is doomed to wander the earth; and, no matter how hard he works, he is destined to fail, and any positive effect he hopes to achieve will be outweighed by the negative. He cannot overcome his sense of guilt at the apparent injustice of his being born into a family with wealth, whilst others (notably Keith) were not, and why he, who does not want financial plenty, has it but is incapable of repaying to the world what it simply handed to him.

He comes to the conclusion that the mechanism necessary to remove his guilt does not exist. Even death cannot provide him with any relief. Coupled with the curse of the lack of success, he also carries the curse of indestructibility. Where Keith gained what he took to be the blessing of eternal life having survived the massacre, for Scholz it is an affliction. He describes a failed suicide attempt to Keith, and Simba, whilst recounting the story of the only occasion on which she saw Scholz smile, explains that it was when he was showing his awareness of the fact that he could not be killed:

Mir also radeln nach Schleißheim, und wie mir im Wald san, bricht a G'witter los, daß i moan, d'Welt geht unter. Da zum erstenmal, seit ich ihn kenn, fangt er z'lachen an. Mei, wie der g'lacht hat! Na, sag i, jetzt bist der rechte Genußmensch! Bei jedem Blitzschlag hat er g'lacht. Je mehr es blitzt und donnert hat, je narrischer lacht der! – Geh, stell dich doch net unter den Baum, sag i, daerschlagt di ja der Blitz! – Mi derschlagt koa Blitz net, sagt er, und lacht und lacht! (IV, 54)

This awareness suggests that he has the conviction that his life is controlled by some external force and that, though he may not be sure what this force is, it has a plan for him which does not allow for his death.

18. Genesis 4. 11-16.

Where Keith takes this to be an asset, for Scholz it is simply part of the curse of his existence. They are linked by their indestructibility, as they are by the fact that they both carry round with them the biblical verses that they were given as young boys. Keith sees his as the basis for his good fortune:

Zwanzig Jahre mögen es sein, da standen der junge Tratenau und ich in kurzen Schoßröckchen in der getünchten Dorfkirche am Altar. Mein Vater spielte die Orgel dazu. Da drückte der Dorfpfarrer jedem von uns einen Bilderbogen mit einem Bibelspruch darauf in die Hände. Ich habe seitdem kaum jemals eine Kirche mehr von innen gesehen, aber mein Konfirmationspruch hat sich an mir bewahrheitet, daß ich oftmals des Staunens keine Grenzen fand. Und stellt sich mir heute je eine Widerwärtigkeit in den Weg, dann kommt mich immer gleich ein verächtliches Lächeln an im Hinblick auf den Spruch: – ‘Wir wissen, daß denen, die Gott lieben, alle Dinge zum Besten dienen.’ (IV, 78)

The verse itself is the same one Pastor Kahlbauch quotes to Moritz’s parents after the funeral in *Frühlings Erwachen* (II, 150). When Anna asks Keith how he could love God, he responds:

Auf die Frage hin, *ob ich Gott liebe*, habe ich alle bestehenden Religionen geprüft und fand bei keiner Religion einen Unterschied zwischen der Liebe zu Gott und der Liebe zum eigenen Wohlergehen. Die Liebe zu Gott ist überall immer nur eine summarische symbolische Ausdrucksweise für die Liebe zur eigenen Person. (IV, 78)

This is another example of his penchant for using scriptural quotation to provide justification for his own actions. By arguing that he is one of those who are blessed because they love God, but then arguing that God is actually himself, he is engaged in a circumlocution, the main purpose of which is to dazzle his acquaintances, and to encourage his own obsessive quest for satisfaction. This also links his thinking with that of Nietzsche in his critique of religion, for Keith spells out his identification of the love of God with the love of the self. Producing a verse to support this idea also gives him the opportunity to impress with a biblical justification for his actions, given his promotion of himself to God. Scholz’s response to his verse, on the other hand, is an attempt to avoid seeing anything significant in its seemingly accurate prediction of his future:

Mir gab unser Pastor damals den Spruch: 'Viele sind berufen, aber wenige sind auserwählt.' – Aber das kümmert mich nicht! Hätte ich auch die untrüglichen Beweise dafür, daß ich selber *nicht* zu den Auserwählten gehöre, das könnte mich immer nur in meinem unerschrockenen Kampf gegen mein Geschick bestärken! (IV, 82)

The biblical context of this verse is also relevant, for it concludes Christ's parable of the wedding banquet, in which a king organizes the banquet for his son, but the invitees do not come, so he instructs his servants to bring in all people from the street to fill the hall with guests:

Da ging der König hinein, sich die Gäste anzusehen, und sah da einen Menschen, der hatte kein hochzeitliches Gewand an, und sprach zu ihm: 'Freund, wie bist du hier hereingekommen und hast doch kein hochzeitliches Gewand an?' Er aber verstummte. Da sprach der König zu seinen Dienern: 'Bindet ihm die Hände und Füße und werft ihn in die Finsternis hinaus! Da wird Heulen und Zähneklappern sein. Denn viele sind berufen, aber wenige sind auserwählt.'<sup>19</sup>

The guest's speechless reaction indicates both that he is stupefied at being caught out, and that he has no words to say in his defence. For Scholz, the verse describes the alienation from society that he has experienced. Life itself is the banquet to which he has not been invited. He determines to struggle on in the face of all the evidence that points to his exclusion, as if in an attempt to be like Keith, in determining his own fate. He argues, 'ich schwöre Ihnen, daß ich lieber auf meine gesunde Vernunft verzichte, als daß ich mich durch diese Vernunft davon überzeugen lasse, daß gewisse Menschen ohne jedes Verschulden von Anfang an von allem Lebensglück ausgeschlossen sind!' (IV, 82). His faith is therefore, like Keith's, in a form of self-improvement, but the difference is that religious concepts are applied by him in such a way as to undermine his security, as opposed to the supportive role they play in Keith's life.

Scholz becomes the stupefied guest of the parable at the moment he realizes that he is cursed as Cain was. When he finally notices that Anna thinks he has gone mad, he perceives that what he took to be his growing understanding of the way the world worked was actually driving him further away from it. This is the final confirmation that all his efforts have come to nought, and always will. His conclusion reflects his

19. Matthew 22. 11-13.

argument that madness is preferable to the notion that random fate has excluded him from the possibility of happiness. In his resolution to incarcerate himself in the *Anstalt*, he ceases to be the wandering Cain and chooses instead a living death. Alfons Höger notes that Scholz's reference to madness is a reflection of nineteenth-century philosophical thinking:

Da in Folge des Pessimismus die 'normale' Lebensauffassung aber eben von Illusionen bestimmt wird, die allein den Willen zum Leben aufrechterhalten, ist damit schon derjenige als wahnsinnig zu bezeichnen, der diese Illusionen durchschaut hat. Schopenhauer, Eduard von Hartmann, Wedekind und auch Nietzsche sind deshalb Wahnsinnige, und wenn Scholz sich als Wahnsinnigen sieht, weil er die Illusionen, die sich die Menschen über sich selbst machen, durchschaut hat, dann gehört er in dieselbe Gruppe.<sup>20</sup>

This definition of madness is actually alluded to by Scholz and Keith during the debate in their final scene together:

SCHOLZ Ich habe mich von meinen Illusionen losgerissen.  
KEITH (*höhnisch*) Schwelgst du wieder mal in der Liebe eines Mädchens aus niedrigstem Stande?  
SCHOLZ Ich habe mich von allem losgerissen. – Ich gehe in eine Privattheilanstalt. [...]  
SCHOLZ (*ruhig*) Ich bin zu Verstand gekommen.  
KEITH (*höhnisch*) – Wenn du dich in die Irrenanstalt aufnehmen lassen willst, weil du zu Verstand gekommen bist, dann – geh hinein!  
SCHOLZ Du gehörst zu denen, die man mit Gewalt hineinbringen muß!  
(IV, 92-94)

The *Irrenanstalt* comes to represent the sanctuary for those who have contemplated the pessimistic cruelty of life. Scholz and Keith speak of two different forms of illusion: for Keith, it is enough to identify what he understands as the selfish desires behind all moral or religious concepts. Scholz claims to have gone further, to have realized that all is meaningless.

In the first edition of the play, Scholz has a discussion with Anna which involves his claiming still to retain some sense of the religious. This helps to clarify his thinking and explain his subsequent, drastic conclusion:

20. Höger, *Der Konstruktivismus*, p. 114.

ANNA Sollte Ihnen denn die Religion den Frieden nicht bieten können, den Sie im Getriebe der Welt vergeblich suchen?

SCHOLZ Ohne den Glauben an eine Vorsehung wäre mir meine Existenz keine Minute erträglich. Das hindert nicht, daß ich ohne Sie nicht leben kann.

ANNA Der Marquis tröstet sich über jedes Mißgeschick durch seinen Konfirmationspruch, in dem er eine unverbrüchliche Gewähr für sein Emporkommen erblickt.

SCHOLZ Eines Menschen Leben ist kein Zufallspiel. Ich erniedrige mich nicht so tief, um an Vorbedeutungen zu glauben! [...continues as IV, 81-82<sup>21</sup>]

The explicit reference to religion here marks a significant alteration from the final edition of the play, for the world of the version in Wedekind's *Gesammelte Werke* does not allow the option of religion as a serious alternative to the world-views available. Scholz's reference in the first edition is to his belief in 'eine Vorsehung', and yet this faith is insubstantial and vague; the fact that he is more intent on demonstrating his similar need for Anna would suggest that his faith, like Keith's, is really concentrated on the present and phenomenal world; Scholz's notion of a god is not Keith's idea of the self, but a distant presence that is at best to be defied. In this, Wedekind is offering two responses to post-Nietzschean religion: Keith's commandeering of religious imagery and language and application of it to himself, and Scholz's tentative, reluctant attempt to take over responsibility for his own existence. In the later edition, Wedekind presumably removed Scholz's explicit reference to his religion because that way Scholz comes across as trying to live solely for himself, without the comfort of religion to support him; but even as it stands, what faith he has is more of a nuisance to him than an encouragement. Scholz's concept of the religious, like that of Geschwitz and Elias, is more concerned with a dread of what might be the consequences of a life without 'eine Vorsehung' than with a positive system of belief. As long as there is something out there, life can have a kind of meaning. The removal of this passage in the later edition means that the Scholz-Keith debate becomes an argument over what meaning there is in mere existence; having rejected a traditional, religious purpose, they are engaged on an attempt to find their own self-justification. Scholz argues

21. Frank Wedekind, *Der Marquis von Keith (Münchener Scenen): Schauspiel in 5 Aufzügen* (Munich: Langen, 1901), pp. 155-56.

that it is important to serve others because that way, at least one is doing some good in society. Keith finds this absurd:

KEITH (*aufspringend*) Warum soll man denn durchaus ein nützliches Mitglied der menschlichen Gesellschaft werden?!

SCHOLZ Weil man als etwas anderes keine Existenzberechtigung hat!

KEITH Ich brauche keine Existenzberechtigung! Ich habe niemanden um meine Existenz gebeten und entnehme daraus die Berechtigung, meine Existenz nach meinem Kopfe zu existieren. (IV, 74-75)

Keith assumes that, as he did not ask to be born, he is therefore entitled not to seek meaning or justification for his life, but to act in his own self-interest. Scholz disagrees, since he requires justification for his existence beyond merely the fact that he is there. Friedrich Rothe has described this tension, and in addition, sees in Keith elements of the traditional imagery of Satan:

Ernst Scholz [...] möchte der Gesellschaft nützen, nur um eine Existenzberechtigung zu haben. Keith hingegen ist überzeugter Egoist und glaubt, der Allgemeinheit am meisten zu nützen, wenn er sein Vorteil verfolgt. Seine Eigenliebe geht bis zur Selbstvergottung. Er gleicht Luzifer, der sein wollte wie Gott und sich absolut setzte. Wie Luzifer ist Keith 'als abgeschlossene Persönlichkeit vom Himmel gefallen' und als 'Krüppel zur Welt gekommen.' Keiths luziferisches Requisite, sein Feuerwerk, der Mörser, 'der mit der ganzen Hölle geladen' ist, verblendet jedoch nur ihn selbst und Scholz, der vom Mörser getroffen Keiths Wahn einer glücklichen Zukunft teilt, täuscht aber nicht die Gesellschaft.<sup>22</sup>

The distance between Scholz and Keith shifts, such that they are at times opposites as egoist and pessimist, and yet come to be *Doppelgänger* when Scholz is injured by the firework. Similarly, Keith's Christlike and satanic aspects contribute to the overall sense of a lack of centre, or fixed frame of reference. Wedekind suggests that the absolutes inherent in religious beliefs are to be seen as false and deceptive, and alter as the people who believe in them change. Keith can thus be Christlike and satanic without contradiction. Wedekind is not, however, concerned solely with demonstrating the consequences of relativism in religion. Rather, he is exploring what kind of role religion has overall, once the notion of divine revelation has been discounted. His aim is not to

22. Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen*, pp. 65-66.

destabilize systems of belief for their own sake, but to investigate what relevance they may possess once the basic principles have been abandoned, and what solutions there might be to the questions it has been the role of religion to answer.

It is partly Scholz's aim to deal with the guilt of his past. Where he becomes obsessed with finding the means to deal with past misdeeds, it is apparent that the other characters are also running from their own pasts. Scholz, Keith, Anna and Raspe are all living under aliases, and Keith even gives Sascha and Simba exotic names – as if there is something in all of their former lives that can be avoided by changing their identity. For Scholz, it is clear that this makes no difference. His desire to escape his guilt is seen in contrast to Keith's complete disregard for the past, except when it is the source of anecdotes that provide illustrations of his good fortune: his experience of cheating death when twelve people around him were killed is not cause for remorse, but is in fact a confirmation of his own blessedness.

Keith is also not interested, as Scholz is, in investigating how and why he came to be the person he is. This is an unnecessary distraction and, even if gifts are unevenly distributed, it is up to the individual to make the most of any opportunities that might be presented. Having already explained how everything in the world is an ideological construct, he goes as far as explaining how morality itself can be shown up to be only a part of business, as he explains to Hermann: 'Das glänzendste Geschäft in dieser Welt ist die *Moral*. Ich bin noch nicht so weit, das Geschäft zu machen, aber ich müßte nicht der Marquis von Keith sein, wenn ich es mir entgehen ließe' (IV, 84). John Hibberd explains, 'he does not understand these words as Wedekind would have us understood them. For the *Moral* Wedekind believed in was not a morality enshrined in social practice, but a morality which satisfied both the individual's egotism and his regard for others.'<sup>23</sup> The problem here is that it is not possible to reconcile the two halves of this equation, because egotism does not leave much room for regard for others. Keith, for example, has a healthy regard for Ostermeier, but this respect does not prevent him forging Ostermeier's signature when he needs to persuade the business-

23. John Hibberd, 'The Morality of Wedekind's Der Marquis von Keith', *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 61 (1987), 510-30 (p. 526).



men to agree to his plans. Meanwhile, Ostermeier himself is so firmly ensconced in bourgeois society that it is a minor matter for him to brush Keith aside and reap the benefits of his work.

Once Keith's shortcomings are revealed, he begins to fall apart and he cries out to Hermann: 'ich soll wieder wie ein Geächteter von Land zu Land gepeitscht werden?! – Nein! Nein! Ich darf mich nicht an die Wand drücken lassen!! – Es ist das letztmal in diesem Leben, daß die Welt in all ihrer Herrlichkeit vor mir liegt!' (IV, 88). Keith's words recall Cain's curse, but he also invokes another biblical precedent, for Keith's phrase 'die Welt in all ihrer Herrlichkeit' is a reference to the third temptation of Christ. According to the Gospel narrative, 'darauf führte ihn der Teufel mit sich auf einen sehr hohen Berg und zeigte ihm alle Reiche der Welt und ihre Herrlichkeit und sprach zu ihm: Das alles will ich dir geben, wenn du niederfällst und mich anbetest'.<sup>24</sup> Keith's notion of the world's 'Herrlichkeit' parodically compares with that of Satan's temptation of Christ.<sup>25</sup> Here, it is Keith who makes the suggestion to himself, placing himself midway between the tempter and the tempted; and by referring to the 'Feenpalast' project in such an extravagant way, it is a reminder of the enormous gulf between Keith's image of himself and the reality of his situation.

Anna's subsequent announcement that she intends to marry Casimir provides Keith with an opportunity to quote the Bible once again to prove his point: 'Mich empört, daß du nicht mehr Rassestolz in dir hast, um deine Erstgeburt für ein Linsengericht zu verkaufen!', to which she responds, 'was nicht du bist, das ist dir Linsengericht!' (IV, 90). This draws both of them into conflict over a biblical injunction, which warns, 'daß nicht jemand sei ein Abtrünniger oder Gottloser wie Esau, der um der einen Speise willen seine Erstgeburt verkaufte'.<sup>26</sup> It seems Keith is arguing that a singing career is Anna's birthright, and she cannot be allowed to give it up for money; this is of course untrue, for he has shown that he knows her not to be the best quality singer, by nature of the fact that it was his clever dress which won her her positive reviews. Her response – that everything he is not, is 'Linsengericht' –

24. Matthew 4. 8-9.

25. Hibberd also notes that, 'the allusion here to the temptation of Christ is rather clearer than the allusions to Goethe's Mephistopheles but fits the same pattern' ('The Morality', p. 525).

26. Hebrews 12. 16.

simply means that he, of all people, would be prepared to abandon everything if by doing so he might achieve some further personal gain.

Keith's rejection at Anna's hands, following on from Ostermeier's exposure of his unscrupulous business-dealing, leads to Scholz's having the upper hand when he arrives. Scholz's enthusiasm for his escape to the *Anstalt* and his zealousness for Keith to accompany him take on the dimension of a religious conversion – he even says, 'ich habe die *heilige* Überzeugung, daß es für dich das beste ist, wenn du mich begleitest.' (IV, 94).<sup>27</sup> Scholz's method of selling his vision, though, is to describe it as a *bürgerlich* idyll: 'Du findest ein behaglicheres Heim, als du es vielleicht jemals gekannt hast. Wir halten uns Wagen und Pferde, wir spielen Billard...' (*ibid.*). He now sees himself as Keith's saviour: 'Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft urteilt dich als Verbrecher ab und unterwirft dich allen unmenschlichen mittelalterlichen Martern' (IV, 95). He even describes himself as 'einen lammfrommen Gesellschafter', which introduces the imagery of the Lamb of God, in a parodic reversal of salvation: he will rescue Keith from an exotic, but troubled life and lead him into a prosaic, *bürgerlich* death.

Nevertheless, he concludes his argument by saying, 'es wäre ein matter Lichtschimmer in meiner Lebensnacht, wenn ich meinen Jugendspielen seinem grauenvollen Verhängnis entrissen wüßte' (IV, 95). This returns him to the point where he came in, as a man trying to find happiness by doing good for others. The only difference is that he has taken on the active role, and Keith is left to respond. At this point, it would seem that Scholz has the power in the relationship, but his strength is based on the fact that he is about to run away from the problem, by using his fortune to buy an escape from society. Hector Maclean describes Scholz's ascendancy over Keith at this point:

He is hateful and compelling in the last act when he has finally found himself, when he has found certainty and 'victory'. Here there is only the shadow of affirmation; Scholz has developed his negative approach to the furthest extreme, renunciation as an end in itself. His power lies in the force of its negation, which is not to be confused with passivity. Nietzsche sums it up at the end of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* as: 'einen Willen zum Nichts, einen Widerwillen gegen das Leben, eine Auflehnung gegen die grundsätzlichen Voraussetzungen des

27. My emphasis.

Lebens, aber es ist und bleibt ein *Wille!* ... lieber will noch der Mensch *Das Nichts* wollen, als nicht wollen...'<sup>28</sup>

At least Keith, for all that his current state is considerably weakened, resolves to fight on, even as he faces a series of immediate crises. Until this moment, his method has been to make promises for the future and sell a vision; but when called to account straight away, he collapses. Another saviour appears in the form of Consul Casimir, who takes on the role of the *vermummter Herr* from *Frühlings Erwachen*, offering the possibility of *Leben*, where Scholz, like Moritz, had offered death:

In Consul Casimir, der dem Helden in der Schlußszene zum ersten Mal gegenübertritt, erfährt die Erlösungsfigur des 'vermummten Herrn' von *Frühlings Erwachen* den Verlust ihrer Aura. Hier reduziert sich diese Figur, der Problematik der Anpassung in diesem Drama entsprechend, auf die Personifikation des herrschenden Bürgertums. Zwar rettet der Consul Keith von der Lynchjustiz, denn eine Leiche wäre dem Renommée des jungen Unternehmens abträglich; die einzige Chance aber, die von den Verlockungen des 'vermummten Herrn' übrig blieb, ist: erneut die Rutschbahn des Lebens zu besteigen.<sup>29</sup>

The ten thousand Marks that Casimir hands him illustrates Keith's dictum that 'ein Unglück ist für mich eine günstige Gelegenheit wie jede andere. Unglück kann jeder Esel haben; die Kunst besteht darin, daß man es richtig auszubeuten versteht!' (IV, 50). As Maclean observes, 'the departure of Scholz marks the end of the dialectic which constitutes the main dramatic force, but it is not the end of the play'.<sup>30</sup> Keith is free to start again, without even Molly, his attachment to *Bürgerlichkeit*. The money Keith receives comes from Casimir, who stands atop the *bürgerlich* pyramid. Keith's payment is to ensure that he does not trouble the bourgeois world of Munich further, but there is no reason why he cannot begin a new project elsewhere, this time with a reasonable amount of capital to set himself up.

Given that Scholz has retreated from the trials of life, in contrast to Keith's intention to continue, it would appear that Wedekind is endorsing Keith's viewpoint that any progress is still better than giving

28. Hector Maclean, 'Wedekind's *Der Marquis von Keith*: An Interpretation based on the Faust and Circus Motifs', *Germanic Review*, 43 (1968), 163-87 (p. 183).

29. Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen*, p. 73.

30. Maclean, p. 185.

up hope completely and this is in spite of the fact that Scholz's argument is based on his insight that all is meaningless, and thus any advance that Keith might make is also meaningless. Höger describes the philosophical background to Scholz's and Keith's cycle of success and failure:

Das stete Scheitern der beiden ist der allegorische Ausdruck für diese Sinnlosigkeit. Diese verweist aber wiederum auf das, was Schopenhauer als den 'blinden' Willen bezeichnet, d.h. eine Lebenskraft, die weder Zweck noch Ziel kennt, sondern sich nur im steten Kampf mit sich selber zu entfalten versucht, wobei Zerstörung und Aufbau Hand in Hand gehen und nie etwas Sinnvolles, etwas Bedeutendes erreicht wird.<sup>31</sup>

There is therefore a danger that the will to live can be extinguished by the realization that life is based on an illusion. Thus Keith refuses to acknowledge that this might be the case and retains his will to live, in contrast to Scholz, whose gaining of wisdom results in his total resignation. Hibberd observes that Wedekind 'never decided between a Nietzschean affirmation of life and an existential pessimism derived from Schopenhauer and von Hartmann.'<sup>32</sup>

This dilemma, and its lack of resolution, then, provides the context for Wedekind to introduce his discussion of Christian concepts and how they might be applied to a world that had rejected the precepts of religious faith. He makes it clear that Scholz and Keith have similar backgrounds, and yet have developed two wildly differing world-views. Scholz's resignatory sense of failure links him with Molly and the old, quasi-superstitious, guilt-inducing institution of the Church that Wedekind criticized in *Elins Erweckung* and *Frühlings Erwachen*. This, in turn, is linked with Schopenhauerian pessimism inasmuch as they both point towards a life-denying resignation. Scholz might have come to the realization that all is meaningless, but this leads him to no more than a complete withdrawal from the world. Keith, on the other hand, represents a new idea of a religion unattached to ceremony, morality, or any sense of a transcendent, but which has the positive attribute of being able to increase one's sense of self-worth and justify the pursuit of *Leben*, given the lack of any alternatives.

31. *Der Konstruktivismus*, p. 118.

32. 'The Morality', p. 514.

Scholz's solution to the problem of his guilt is to try to put it down to a curse and absolve himself of responsibility, then to run away. His search for a purpose to his life results in his concluding that he will never find one. Paradoxically, it is Keith, who claims to have seen through the illusions that mask the true ideological bases of religion and morality, who maintains the illusion of hope necessary to continue life in this context. His constantly unfulfilled desire is, like Schopenhauer's *Wille*, insatiable. As such, a cycle of failure would be no different to him from a cycle of success; in either case, the will to ever greater heights would continue unabated. His faith in himself has provided him with a means to cope with the philosophical difficulties of life, in that he regards guilt as somebody else's problem and finds meaning in constant activity, and simply rejects the possibility of failure. From this position of existential security he is able to draw on the words and positive aspects of Christianity and turn them to his own purposes, having disregarded any aspect that fails to appeal to him.

Keith's frequent references to the Bible, his method of finding religious self-justification, and his unshakeable self-belief all point towards Wedekind reinventing traditional religious ideas, having separated them from God, in such a way as to make them applicable to his era. Just as total resignation was not a path to be pursued if at all possible, so a life devoid of any sense of the spiritual would be lacking an essential characteristic, even were it founded on an illusion. Keith stands for a life in which the language and assurance available within conventional religion are appropriated by those whose self-confidence and strength are absolute, who can seek *Leben* without the distraction of existential uncertainty, and who do not feel the need to produce any kind of self-justification. This results partly in a condemnation of those who use religious language and behaviour to shore up their own value-systems, but it is also an affirmation of the validity of the religious ideas themselves. Wedekind might be bemoaning the fact that society has allowed these ideals to be absorbed into the conventions of bourgeois morality; but by trimming away the inappropriate parts such as conscience, humility and care for others, and handing over what is left to Keith, he seems to have come up with a form of Christianity in which even Nietzsche's *Übermensch* would not have had too much difficulty believing.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Life of Christ in *Karl Hetmann, Der Zwergriese (Hidalla)*

Wedekind did not persevere with the religious ideas of *Der Marquis von Keith*, for although Keith's faith in individualistic self-assertion seems to offer a positive alternative for a new type of religion, it does not, finally, transcend the limitations of *Bürgerlichkeit* that provide its context. Thus, even though Keith's faith in himself remains intact, it is clear that the machine of *bürgerlich* society will roll on without him. Such a faith can only exist if its adherents choose to be unconcerned with the circumstances in which they find themselves. Rather than pursue the theme of the individual response to the loss of traditional, religious values, which would always be restricted to the confines of *bürgerlich* society, Wedekind turned his attention to society itself and its response to the same loss of values. His reason for this change in focus was, however, not merely one of theological experimentation. Despite his own satisfaction with *Der Marquis von Keith* (he described it as 'mein künstlerisch reiftes und geistig gehaltvollstes Stück'), it was not successful in the German theatre because audiences were unable to understand it.<sup>1</sup> In response to its failure, Wedekind wrote *König Nicolo (So ist das Leben)*, a drama set in the fifteenth century, in which a deposed king returns in disguise to be a jester in the court of the king who replaced him. There he performs what to him are tragic monologues, but his audiences fail to understand them and take them to be comic masterpieces. König Nicolo is a victim of the 'Fluch der Lächerlichkeit', as the result of which his seriousness is deemed by the public to be comical. The protagonist is a misunderstood figure, whose real, serious intentions cannot be comprehended. This characteristic was also to feature in Wedekind's next play, *Karl Hetmann, der Zwergriese*, in which Hetmann is a self-proclaimed prophet who proposes a new sexual

1. See: *Werke*, ed. Weidl, II, 780-81; *Werke*, ed. Hahn, III, 348-49; *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, IV, 445, 533-34.

morality.<sup>2</sup> Hetmann challenges the society around him and gathers together a group of supporters, but remains largely misunderstood and, after he is offered a job as a clown in a circus, he commits suicide.

Hetmann is a composite figure, embodying features of three people in particular: Wedekind himself, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jesus Christ. As with all his allusive characters, Wedekind leaves ambiguous the question of how far it is possible to identify any one person with Hetmann, but it is possible to draw strong parallels with each of these figures. Hetmann is a deliberate amalgam of all of them, because through him Wedekind was able to illustrate his notion that Christ, like Nietzsche, was a critic of bourgeois society as was Wedekind himself, and they all shared the common problem of being misunderstood. It does not seem, however, to have been a seriously intended comparison. Hetmann is a very poor spokesman for a new morality: he is weak and self-absorbed, and does not offer a very consistent moral argument. In some ways also, he seems to bear the worst characteristics of Keith and Scholz in *Der Marquis von Keith*.

Like Keith, Hetmann is driven by a desire to succeed, but forced to cooperate with an unsuitable ally. In Hetmann's case, it is Rudolf Launhart who has a head for business and is able to exploit Hetmann in pursuit of his own aim, which is simply to make money. Hetmann's philosophy is central in the play, but its significance is debatable. Wedekind himself described the philosophical background as unimportant:

Seine Theorien sind nur Kolorit und bleiben völlig wirkungslos. Die Wirkung der Rolle ist die Leidenschaft. Der Zweck des Stückes war nicht Belehrung, sondern Verführung. Es ist im 4. Akt mit klaren Worten ausgesprochen: Er wollte seine Person so hoch postieren, daß die Weiber kniefällig vor ihm um Liebe jammern und jede sich glücklich schätzt, wenn er sich ihrer erbarmt.<sup>3</sup>

He is citing here the criticism voiced by Morosini, the figurehead of Hetmann's organization; but as Morosini at this point has just been offered a lucrative marriage and consequently rejected his former views, his opinion is not necessarily reliable. Still, the argument is plausible

2. The play was given the title *Hidalla, oder Sein und Haben* in its first edition, but was titled *Karl Hetmann, der Zwergriese* in its fifth and sixth editions and in Wedekind's *Gesammelte Werke*. (See *Werke*, ed. Hahn, I, 714).

3. Bohnen, p. 114.

enough, for if Hetmann's apparently selfless and never-ending activity is merely the result of his desire to gain power over women, it provides a further illustration of Wedekind's argument that egotism lies at the heart of all human behaviour, and Hetmann's self-sacrifice is unmasked as part of the image he wishes to project, which is that of a tortured prophet, whose selfless dedication to his calling will make him irresistible to women, enabling him to have power over them.

Despite Wedekind's protestations, however, it is difficult not to believe that there was some significance in the fact that Hetmann's new morality was concerned with the sexual. Artur Kutscher believed that Hetmann represented Wedekind's conclusive rejection of the ideas he had formerly held: '[Hetmann] verkörperte den Standpunkt, den er selbst mit Entschiedenheit eingenommen und dann überwunden hatte, er bereitete dem früheren Wedekind ein ironisch-tragisches Propheten-schicksal.'<sup>4</sup> The formerly-held beliefs would, for example, have included the world as portrayed in the novella *Mine-Haha oder Über die körperliche Erziehung der jungen Mädchen*, which describes a young girl's experiences in an institution cut off from the outside world, where she learns movement and dance and grows up in an environment of physical beauty and grace. This in itself reflects a small aspect of Wedekind's *Die große Liebe* project. Günter Seehaus points out that 'Kutscher hält es nach eingehender Untersuchung für ausgeschlossen, daß der Dichter die Anschauungen Hetmanns propagieren wolle (ohne allerdings die Frage zu beantworten, ob Wedekind diese Ideen zu früherer Zeit ernsthaft vertreten hätte).'<sup>5</sup> Wedekind's contemporary, Joachim Friedenthal, commented:

Ein Karl Hetmann kann ebensogut wie seine Moral der Schönheit eine des anarchischen Staates oder die Moral der Haustiere oder die Entdeckung des Marsmenschen und seines Wesens predigen. Die Predigt wird im gesamten Gefüge selbstverständlich, um den ideologischen Geist des Menschen und seine innerlich begründete Tragödie zu charakterisieren.<sup>6</sup>

4. Kutscher, II, 159.

5. Günter Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind und das Theater*, rev. edn (Munich: Rommerringen, 1973), p. 529.

6. *Das Wedekindbuch*, p. 30.



The whole question of whether Wedekind was intending to portray himself in the play arises because of the autobiographical elements contained within it: an identification of the author of *Frühlings Erwachen* and the *Lulu*-plays with the unconventional ideas of sexuality presented in *Kerl Hetmann* might have been expected. In a similar way, the relationship between Hetmann and the publisher Launhart in the play also reflects that of Wedekind himself and Albert Langen, the editor of the magazine *Simplicissimus*. Launhart is clearly implicated in Act Two as being responsible for the police finding the manuscript of Hetmann's controversial essay, 'Über das Liebesleben in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft im Vergleich zu demjenigen unserer Haustiere'. This corresponds to the incident when Wedekind was arrested for writing a satirical poem for *Simplicissimus* and, having received assurances from Langen that he would not be held responsible, was imprisoned for six months after the police found his manuscript.<sup>7</sup> In the light of this, it is tempting to draw further autobiographical parallels. This temptation must have been irresistible when it was Wedekind himself who was speaking the lines. Julius Kapp records a production of the play he observed, in which Wedekind performed the role of Hetmann:

In der Gestalt des Karl Hetmann hat er sich selbst und seine Anschauungen verkörpert. Stellen wie: 'Mich stieß die menschliche Gesellschaft einst als unbrauchbar aus. Ich ging nicht zugrunde, kam zurück und bot ihr wieder meine Dienste an [...]' Oder: 'Wie kann ich mich als normaler Mensch seit meiner frühesten Kindheit in einem so abgrundtiefen, unüberbrückbaren Gegensatz zur normalen Welt befinden?' sind direkt auf Wedekind selbst bezüglich. [...] Er selbst spielte [...] fast überall den Hetmann. Und ich muß bekennen, daß ich nie aus einem Theater einen tieferen und erschütternden Eindruck mit nach Hause genommen habe, als aus einer solchen Hidallavorstellung.<sup>8</sup>

It is not so much that Wedekind necessarily desired there to be identification of Hetmann's ideas with his, but he established enough of a relationship for it to be plausible; it was therefore possible to identify the two as one, but only to a certain extent. He could be identified with Hetmann, but by claiming not to be, could dissociate himself from any

7. Wedekind described the incident in a letter he wrote from prison to Bjoernstjerne Bjoernson on 28 September 1899 (*Gesammelte Briefe*, II, 12-18).

8. Julius Kapp, *Frank Wedekind: Seine Eigenart und seine Werke* (Berlin: Barsdorf, 1909), p. 80.

of Hetmann's sayings. This would lead to its own form of self-publicity, whereby the public persona would appear to represent the author's personality, to imply that the audience was being allowed access into the writer's deepest thoughts; in effect, this worked as a mask of his intention, because it would never be clear whether what was being seen was supposed to be Wedekind's thinking or not. It meant that anything that sounded like it might have been thought by Wedekind could be attributed to him, whilst everything else could be disregarded. What was left, however, was the image of the misunderstood writer, as Günter Seehaus suggests:

Da das Stück bekanntlich sehr viele autobiographische Züge trägt – in der um Launhart gruppierten Handlung namentlich finden sich zahlreiche Anspielungen auf den 'Simplicissimusprozeß', die dem Zuschauer noch leicht aufschlüsselbar waren –, wird häufig angenommen, Hetmanns Doktrin decke sich mit den Anschauungen des Dichters. Daß Wedekind diese Gedanken selbst ad absurdum führt, wird nicht aus der Unzulänglichkeit der utopischen Idee selbst begründet, sondern als notwendig tragische Bezirke suchende Gestaltung des eigenen Schicksals durch den immer noch mißkannten Dichter.<sup>9</sup>

Wedekind's depiction of himself was therefore not as Hetmann in terms of the philosophy, but as a result of the shared sense of public incomprehension. In effect, he was treating himself in the same way as he treated other literary and historical figures when they were used as sources for his characters, such that their lives were alluded to, but not enough for there to be total identification of Wedekind's version of a character with its prototype. Other such figures whom Wedekind incorporated into the character of Hetmann include Nietzsche and his central figure, the prophet Zarathustra.<sup>10</sup> Equally, there are references to the life of Jesus Christ, and in particular the idiosyncratic view of Christ that can be culled from the notes Wedekind made on the Gospels in his notebooks. As is characteristic of Wedekind's technique, it is not enough to claim that Hetmann definitely is one of these figures rather than any other. What is revealed by the play, however, is the way

9. Seehaus, p. 529.

10. During the scene in which Die Fürstin meets Hetmann, she wonders if he might be 'der berühmte Philosoph Herbert Spencer' (IV, 215). In an early draft of the play, the philosopher referred to was Nietzsche – though even at this stage, his name was crossed out, with Herbert Spencer's name written over the top. (*Nb* 20, 29<sup>f</sup>.)

Wedekind saw Nietzsche, Christ and himself sharing the same problems as they took a stand against bourgeois society. In the context of the play, the religious and the moral are not separated, as the religious is implied already to have been absorbed by the bourgeois morality which Hetmann intends to regenerate. This intention rests on his desire not to create a new morality for all, but one that will operate at a higher level than the one which he says is already in existence. By creating a new morality for the rich, he will leave the old one for the poor, for whom it was originally intended. His new morality for the rich élite assumes that they conform to the moral codes he affirms here and that they really do care for the poor in the way he describes, where there is no guarantee that this will automatically be the case. Indeed, after Hetmann is released from prison, his follower Brühl questions him about his philosophy. Hetmann's long reply is punctuated with the phrase 'die Rechnung war falsch' (IV, 237-39). In each of his examples, he describes how he had hoped to inspire a section of society to strive for a greater good, but had encountered indifference every time, which he then attempts to rationalize. For example, he describes his underestimation of the desire of the rich to conform to his ideas: 'Der Reiche hat die für den Armen erdachte Moral usurpiert und zieht größeren Vorteil daraus als der Arme, für den sie erdacht wurde' (IV, 237). Rather than seeing a problem in himself, he seeks one in society's response to his philosophy. He acknowledges that this is a frustrating process, but cannot believe that he might not be wanted: 'Mich stieß die menschliche Gesellschaft einst als unbrauchbar aus ihren Kreisen aus. Ich ging nicht zugrunde, kam zurück und bot ihr wieder meine Dienste an [...] An ein Dutzendmal in meinem Leben hat sich dieser Vorgang wiederholt' (IV, 216). Like Keith in *Der Marquis von Keith*, he refuses to see an end in failure, and like Scholz, he has an obsessive desire to make himself useful to society; unlike Scholz, however, instead of changing himself in order to fit society, he wants to change it to fit him.

To this end, he tries to build on arbitrary divisions within society. Though he believes bourgeois society to be founded on a distinction between rich and poor, he also differentiates between people who are ugly and beautiful, and young and old. Alan Best argues that Wedekind is not simply caricaturing Hetmann's morality here, but is satirizing a society that already has similar distinctions to those of Hetmann's *Bund*:

The League is an unwitting parody of the social structure of bourgeois society as seen from the outside and, in attempting to rise above the norms of his day, Hetmann provides the audience with an unflattering reflection of its own way of life. The League is an organisation with entry jealously restricted in an arbitrary fashion which is totally unrelated to personal capacity. It exists to promote and cherish what its members already have (wealth and beauty) and allows its members to pursue self-interest under the banner of social progress.<sup>11</sup>

Hetmann's *Bund* can be seen, then, as a microcosm of society, but with the invisible and arbitrary boundaries that usually surround society revealed. Wedekind's aim in using Hetmann to point out these boundaries is therefore to point out the contradictions inherent within society itself. Hetmann's function here is also ambiguous because of the paradox of his establishing a *Bund* that will not permit him to be a member; though he says he is only employed as its secretary, he is clearly responsible for managing and organizing every aspect of it. His attempts to explain away this contradiction are unsatisfactory, and Friedrich Rothe argues, 'den Glauben an den "Seelenadel der Schönheit", [...] und die Überzeugung, daß die Menschen mit der Moral der Schönheit "der Gottheit um eine Stufe näher" kommen, widerlegt Hetmann selbst durch das Mißverhältnis seiner Verkrüppelung und seines Schönheitsverlangens'.<sup>12</sup> The point is that it does not make sense for an ugly man to be able to appreciate a transcendent beauty that is only available to the beautiful. Although this contradiction cannot be fully resolved, it can at least be partially explained by Wolfdietrich Rasch's explanation for Wedekind's depiction of Hetmann as a limping, unattractive man, for this rests on a real-life example of a similar disparity, namely that of Nietzsche's writings and his debilitated life:

Daß Nietzsche für die Konzeption des Propheten Hetmanns mitbestimmend war, ist leicht zu zeigen. Der einsame Denker Nietzsche lebte in der Vorstellung der Zeit als derjenige, der, selber kränklich, labil, vital geschwächt, das starke Leben rühmte, die Überlegenheit der kraftvollen Menschennatur und ihres Willens zur Macht verkündete. Mit diesem Widerspruch ist Nietzsche ein Modell für Karl Hetmann, der, selber häßlich, schief gewachsen, unansehnlich, die menschliche Schönheit als höchsten Wert preist und einen 'Verein zur Züchtung von

11. Alan Best, *Frank Wedekind*, Modern German Authors, 4 (London: Wolff, 1975), p. 54.

12. Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen*, p. 79.

Rassemenschen' gründet, dem er selbst nicht angehören kann, sondern nur als Sekretär dient.<sup>13</sup>

Rasch also describes how Hetmann's teaching carries echoes of Nietzsche's Zarathustra and how Hetmann represents Wedekind's satire on the prophet-cults that were in vogue at the turn of the century, such as Stefan George's 'Maximinkult', Rudolf Steiner's 'Anthroposophie' and the 'Neue Gemeinde' of the Hart brothers.<sup>14</sup> Wedekind's prophet is critical of society, but is not really suited to the role. By virtue of Hetmann's loose similarity to Nietzsche, Zarathustra and Wedekind, it is possible for him to inhabit a world in which Wedekind can argue, 'keiner Person in meinen Stücken habe ich jemals meine eigenen Überzeugungen in den Mund gelegt' (IX, 373). Just as he tended to undermine any philosophy he might have seemed to be putting forward, so all the criticisms made by and through the figure of Hetmann are at one remove from the author and filtered through the parody-prophet idea.

This is made most evident in Wedekind's references to Christ. Kutscher reports that 'während der Arbeit an *Hidalla* und mehr noch nach ihrem Abschluß dachte Wedekind an Gestaltung des *Christusdramas*, für welches ja *Hidalla* eine Paraphrase gewesen war'.<sup>15</sup> He provides a general summary of the portrait of Christ presented in Wedekind's notebooks,<sup>16</sup> but a closer inspection reveals both a deeper understanding of Wedekind's own notion of Christ's mission, and how this pertains to Hetmann. In Wedekind's notes for *Hidalla*, for instance, he wrote:

Der Verein basiert sich auf rein christlicher Grundlage. Christus ein Freund des Lebens und Feind der Askese. Die christliche Lehre im Gegensatz zur Jüdischen eine Gegnerin der Familie. Christus hat sich nie gegen die Familie ausgesprochen, weil er sonst wohl noch viel eher hätte daran glauben müssen. Seine Lehre aber tut das denkbar möglichste, um die Familienbande zu lösen.<sup>17</sup>

13. Wolfdietrich Rasch, 'Das Schicksal des Propheten', in *Viermal Wedekind: Methoden der Literaturanalyse am Beispiel von Frank Wedekinds Schauspiel 'Hidalla'*, ed. by Karl Pestalozzi and Martin Stern (Stuttgart: Klett, 1975), pp. 60-73 (p. 60).

14. *ibid.*, pp. 60-61, 71.

15. Kutscher, II, 178.

16. *ibid.*, pp. 179-82.

17. *Nb* 16, 3<sup>f</sup>.

These principles are evident in the play *Karl Hetmann*, in which *Leben* is to be pursued compulsorily via sexuality, and conventional marriage is to be abolished. Hetmann's role in relation to that of Christ can also be understood because Wedekind saw in Judaism the equivalent to the contemporary bourgeoisie. A later notebook reveals this: 'Im Judenthum besteht die engste Verbindung zwischen Religion und Ernährung. Wer keinem geordneten Haus angehört, kann sich nicht rituell ernähren. Wer sich nicht rituell ernähren kann ist vor Gott benachteiligt, ein Beweis wie *bürgerlich* das Judenthum ist.'<sup>18</sup> His *Vorwort* to *Die Büchse der Pandora* also implies this in its distinction between 'bürgerliche Moral' and 'menschliche Moral', when referring to Christ's trial before the Sanhedrin (III, 106). In contrast to Wedekind's own self-justification in the light of his trial, he supports the Sanhedrin in its dealings with Christ:

Der hohe Rat, der Christus verurteilte, handelte nicht unsittlich, sondern sittlich. Wir würden heute ebenso handeln. Ein Mensch, der vor Gott sagt, er sei des Menschen Sohn und vor dem Menschen, er sei Gottes Sohn, ist heute ebenso unmöglich, wie es vor 1876 Jahren unmöglich war. Wenn wir das leugnen, dann sind wir schlimmere Pharisäer als die Pharisäer, die Christum der Gotteslästerung beschuldigten, denn die Pharisäer von damals haben es nicht geleugnet.<sup>19</sup>

Wedekind does not depict Hetmann's trial or subsequent imprisonment, but a court-scene with a misunderstood protagonist is included in *König Nicolo*. In it, Nicolo is accused of *lèse-majesté* when cursing his own fate as the king, and is condemned because those who hear him believe he is denouncing the new king; everyone, including his own defence-lawyer, thinks him guilty (IV, 129-37). Nicolo's own defence recalls Nietzsche's critical evaluation of religion as the projection of one's own sense of gratitude for one's happiness, and argues that he is morally right, inasmuch as he has revealed a truth by his speech that is ignored by convention, and yet, according to the law, he is guilty:

Was die Erdensöhne seit undenklichen Zeiten an ewigen Wahrheiten, gegen die sich keiner, sei er Gebieter oder Sklave, ungestraft versündigt, erfahren haben, das stellten sie unter Gottes heilige Obhut. Alles, was ihr und der Ihrigen Leib und Leben, was ihre Habe und das Gedeihen ihres Tagewerkes betrifft, das

18. *Nb* 41, 30<sup>v</sup>.

19. *Nb* 38, 39<sup>f</sup>-39<sup>v</sup>.

stellten sie in kindlichem Vertrauen in die Weisheit ihrer Vorfahren in ihres Königs Obhut. In ihrem Könige erkennt die – *niedrige Menschheit* das Abbild des eigenen Glückes, und wer dieses Abbild befleckt, der raubt ihr den Mut zur Arbeit und die Ruhe der Nacht. Dieser Untat bin ich in weit höherem Maße schuldig, als es menschliche Gerechtigkeit ermißt. (IV, 132-33)

Nicolo is referring to the image of an ordered world that has God at the top, rulers in the middle and ordinary people at the bottom, in which everyone knows their place: in other words, he is describing the *theatrum mundi*. His real crime is to suggest that this is not the way the world is. Volker Klotz argues that Wedekind himself is replacing the divinely-ordained *theatrum mundi* with what he describes as Wedekind's 'Circus mundi':

Weder richtet sich der Zirkus nach einer bündigen Textvorlage, die er als Zusammenhang aus- und aufführt. Noch kennt er Autor und Regisseur, die für ein konzises, klar geplantes Spiel aufkämen. [...] Die Zirkus-Artisten sind allein auf sich gestellt, aufs eigene Können.<sup>20</sup>

Applied to the world at large, this results in a 'turbulente Arena, in der die Akteure nebeneinander und widereinander ihr Letztes geben. Jeder gegen jeden, im rücksichtslosen Poly-Agonismus, im Allround-Kampf konkurrierender Hochleistungen. Nach der alles beherrschenden Regel wetteifernder ökonomischer Interessen'.<sup>21</sup>

The action of revealing the illusion of order in the world and being condemned for doing so involves the accusations of madness that are levelled at both Nicolo and Hetmann. Each is wholly confident that his role is justified. Nicolo knows he is the rightful king, and Hetmann believes he must change the world, but their misunderstanding of the truth leads to their rejection: Nicolo was a bad king and the people are far happier with Pietro, who usurped him; Hetmann is a dubious prophet. When everyone is against them, they have only their own conviction to keep them going. The notion of madness occurs because of the conflict between how they see the world and how it sees them – just as Scholz's 'madness' in *Der Marquis von Keith* is related to his greater insight into the way the world is. Here it is worth recalling the notion,

20. Volker Klotz, 'Wedekinds Circus Mundi', in *Viermal Wedekind* (see note 13 above), pp. 22-47 (p. 26).

21. *ibid.*, p. 26.

according to philosophical pessimism, of madness being applied to those who had greater insight into how the world actually worked. The analogy of the world as a circus results in Nicolo performing tragedies as he describes the world as he believes it to be, but to a world in which there is still belief in some kind of universal order, his words are comic. Just before his death, he is able to explain the truth of the situation to König Pietro, the king who replaced him. In contrast, Hetmann is hired by the circus-owner Cotrelly and hangs himself after Cotrelly has caused him to become aware of the truth of the way the world sees him: not as a prophet, or even a minor threat, but as a clown who does not get the joke, whose great message for the world is no more than the preposterous raving of a buffoon.

By this stage, however, Hetmann has already missed his opportunity. His last chance was to be murdered by a mob in a way that would draw massive public attention to his philosophy, and provide the fillip necessary to drive his message home. Equally important, though less evident, is the point that it is only through his death that it will be possible to unite all the contradictions that have arisen in his life, and which it will be up to his followers to put together in a meaningful way. It is implicit here that Wedekind was drawing a parallel with the career of Christ as he perceived it. From his reading of the Gospels, it is possible to piece together a clear picture of his view of Christ's life, and that is reflected in Hetmann's own life and death. Once again, although there are strong similarities, there are also great differences. Hetmann, for example, steadfastly remains an ascetic, and refuses to practise the pursuit of *Leben* that he preaches, whilst the Christ of Wedekind's view is very much a 'Freund des Lebens'.<sup>22</sup> Wedekind ignored the asceticism of Christ as reported in the Gospel narratives, in favour of Christ's overall affirmation of *Leben*, which comes through as a fundamental trait of his character as Wedekind saw it. The aspects of Christ's life in which he took most interest, with reference to Hetmann, were his attitude to the poor, his relationship with his apostles, and his own perception of his life and death. As well as this, individual aspects that Wedekind might have observed from a particular verse can serve to explain a whole aspect of Christ's teaching. For example, among Wedekind's long and detailed notes on the Gospels, he makes the following observation on

22. Kutscher, II, 179.



Matthew 19. 3:<sup>23</sup> ‘Die Pharisäer erwarten die Antwort “Ja”, da Jesus ein Gegner der Ehe ist’.<sup>24</sup> When Hetmann first comes to explain the aims of his *Bund*, he also argues that the family needs to be sacrificed in favour of his higher ideals: ‘Die allgemeine Moral steht im Dienste des höchsten menschlichen Glückes, der Familie. Dieses höchste menschliche Glück fordern wir von den Mitgliedern unseres Bundes als erstes *Opfer!*’ (IV, 205-06). Within the protocol of the *Bund*, he cites the rule: ‘Unter den Angehörigen des Bundes sind die bürgerlichen Gesetze über Ehe und Familie aufgehoben’ (IV, 207). In response to Launhart’s retort that the police will object, he describes how members of the aristocracy live in an untouchable ideal, for their riches enable them to stand above the law: ‘bis jetzt hat sich noch nicht gezeigt, daß sich die Behörden gern darum kümmern, was sich in den höchsten Gesellschaftskreisen unter Herren und Damen abspielt, die sämtlich in der Lage sind, jeden Augenblick ihren Wohnsitz zu wechseln’ (IV, 207). His point is therefore that he will create a new morality for a group of people who have no need to conform to the old one.

Hetmann’s moral system is also targeted at a very specific group – the rich and beautiful – just as Wedekind argues that Christ’s teaching was concerned solely with the poor and the outcast:

Christus sagt: Ich bin nicht gekommen für die Reichen sondern für die Armen, denen seine Lehre tatsächlich eine relative Bereicherung an Lebensglück schaffen konnte. [...] Den Reichen weicht er zurück, weil er ihm nichts zu bieten hat. Daraus ergibt sich mit schlichter Logik die Tatsache: Es ist leichter, daß ein Kamel durch ein Nadelöhr geht, als daß ein Reicher ins Himmelreich kommt. Das Himmelreich will das Glück der Mühseligen und Beladenen sein, es rühmt sich nirgends, den Reichen den Wert des irdischen Reiches ersetzen zu können.<sup>25</sup>

He notes, with reference to Matthew 15. 32,<sup>26</sup> ‘es folgen ihm also nur ausgehungerte Bettler’,<sup>27</sup> and describes Matthew 19. 24,<sup>28</sup> as ‘die Grund-

23. ‘Da traten Pharisäer zu ihm und versuchten ihn und sprachen: Ist’s erlaubt, daß sich ein Mann aus irgendeinem Grund von seiner Frau scheidet?’

24. *Nb* 18, 30<sup>f</sup>.

25. *Nb* 16, 6<sup>v</sup>.

26. ‘Und Jesus rief seine Jünger zu sich und sprach: Das Volk jammert mich; denn sie harren nun schon drei Tage bei mir aus und haben nichts zu essen; und ich will sie nicht hungrig gehen lassen, damit sie nicht verschmachten auf dem Wege.’

27. *Nb* 18, 29<sup>v</sup>-30<sup>f</sup>.

idee seiner Lehre im Gegensatz zum alten Bund. Sein Reich ist ausschließlich für die Armen'.<sup>29</sup> His view of Christ and the poor therefore has two main characteristics: first, the poor follow him because there is the promise of food; second, the rich have no need of his teaching because it is based on the prospect of future glory in the place of present suffering, which is not their experience. Wedekind considered that Christ rejected the notion of a heavenly future after death and believed that Christ's teaching was based on the earthly notion of a heaven in people's hearts. This is suggested by a note he made on Matthew 19. 23:<sup>30</sup> 'Jesus: Mein Himmelreich ist nur für die Armen. Ich aber sage: Gerade die Reichen sollen ins Himmelreich kommen, denn dazu haben sie ihren Reichtum, um sich und Anderen das neue Himmelreich damit erkaufen zu können'.<sup>31</sup>

This image of Christ is also presented in an essay Wedekind wrote on prayer, in which he argues that the usefulness of prayer is in concentrating one's mind and spirit on a particular issue, and which he concludes by citing Jesus:

Sollte es nun nicht richtiger sein, ohne Gott zu beten? – Das tun Viele mit ebenso gutem Erfolg, aber sie kommen dafür seltener dazu als es für sie von Nutzen wäre. Für die Übrigen hat die Gegenwart Gottes nichts nachteiliges, da jeder Mensch der Lehre Jesu Christi gemäß seinen Gott im eigenen Herzen trägt und sonst kein Gott existiert.<sup>32</sup>

Thus Wedekind believes that Christ came to relieve people of their burdens by promising a heaven in their hearts. Christ's mission was to the poor and the suffering, because they were most in need of reassurance in their adversity. Hetmann moves on from this to assume that morality automatically involves the poor being supported by the rich in a way that is not borne out by the rest of the play:

28. 'Und weiter sage ich euch: Es ist leichter, daß ein Kamel durch ein Nadelöhr gehe, als daß ein Reicher ins Reich Gottes komme.'

29. *Nb* 18, 30<sup>v</sup>.

30. 'Jesus aber sprach zu seinen Jüngern: Wahrlich, ich sage euch: Ein Reicher wird schwer ins Himmelreich kommen.'

31. *Nb* 18, 5<sup>f</sup>-5<sup>v</sup>.

32. *Nb* 17, 52<sup>v</sup>-53<sup>v</sup>.

Dem Armen zu helfen, der sich vom nackten Leben emporarbeitet, wie es bisher höchstes Gesetz war, bleibt auch für uns erste Menschenpflicht. Um die allgemeine Moral, die dem Armen zugute kommt, aber auch für *uns* zu selbstsüchtigen Zwecken auszubeuten und dem Unglücklichen sein Recht auf Mitleid streitig zu machen, dazu stehen wir gesellschaftlich zu hoch. Soweit wir mit unserem eigenen Glück dafür einstehen, gehen wir zur Moral der *Schönheit* über. (IV, 208)

Indeed, when after the failure of the conference Brühl questions Hetmann about his philosophy, Hetmann's 'die Rechnung war falsch' speech argues that the rich have usurped the morality that was supposed to belong to the poor (IV, 237). He does not elaborate on what this usurpation involves, but as the *Bund* sets out to exclude all but the rich élite, it is hard to see it having a need to involve the poor in any aspect of its life whatsoever. Hetmann's morality for the rich is intended to complement the Christian morality for the poor, but this assumes that his rich élite will actually assist the poor. His discovery that this is not the case does not inspire him to fight for the poor, but to move on to another group that he thinks might want his help.

His shifting aims and philosophy in this way render Hetmann a parody-Christ, a 'Prophet ohne Lehre', as Rasch describes him.<sup>33</sup> Rasch notes that one of the prerequisites to be a prophet that Hetmann possesses is a 'Bedürfnis nach Selbsterfüllung'.<sup>34</sup> Hetmann's problem is that this need is greater in him than the need to have an appropriate programme. Thus if he is rejected, the problem lies not with him, but with the message itself. Like Scholz and Keith in *Der Marquis von Keith*, the desire for self-fulfilment is paramount. Eventually, in his intention to turn his teachings loose on the general public, Hetmann becomes unselective about who should receive his message. But by this time, whatever he proclaims as his philosophy has the primary function of inciting the crowd to violence rather than teaching anything of value. The meeting with his followers before his final attempt at provoking the mob to a violent response serves as an example of how ineffective a leader he is, with arguments and tensions between each of them, to which Hetmann seems to be oblivious as he departs to view the crowd. This uneasy relationship he has with his followers is clearly supposed to echo that of

33. 'Das Schicksal', in *Viermal Wedekind*, p. 67.

34. *ibid.*

Christ and his apostles, and in particular the cynical way in which Wedekind saw it:

Die Jünger Christi hatten wirtschaftlich einen sehr guten Tausch gemacht. Vor ihrer Berufung lebten sie von ihrer Hände Arbeit, nachher von eingesammelten Geldern, wobei sie im Land umher zogen und nur ihrem seelischen Heil oblagen. Zu Christi Lebzeiten haben sie wenig gepredigt. Als sie sich schließlich steinigen, kreuzigen und enthaupten ließen, waren sie innerlich hoch entwickelte Menschen geworden, die den Tribut des Todes wohl auf sich nehmen konnten. Übrigens haben sie sich auch ebenso wie Christus während ihres Lebens der Gefahr öfter durch die Flucht entzogen.<sup>35</sup>

Like Hetmann with his followers, he saw Christ as the embattled leader of an argumentative group of individuals:

Es ist anzunehmen, daß in den letzten zwei Jahren eine geistige Auflehnung von Seiten der Jünger stattfand, daß Christus also zwischen zwei Feuern stand als er den Weg nach Jerusalem nahm. Der Höhepunkt seiner Erfolge war seit zwei Jahren überschritten und der geistige und materielle Ertrag gleich null. Die täglichen Einnahmen waren gering gegen früher. Ihr Handwerk hatten die Jünger verlernt. Wie hoch die auf Christus gesetzten Erwartungen gespannt waren, zeigt noch das Ansinnen von Johannes und Jacobus Mutter.<sup>36</sup> Wenn die Jünger praktisch dachten, konnten sie für das Unternehmen nur ein sehr trübes Ende voraussehen. Wenn die Empörung auch nicht so offen war wie die gegen Columbus in den letzten Tagen seiner ersten Überfahrt nach Amerika, so mußte für Jesu geistigen Organismus schon der unausgesprochene Zweifel (das sich an ihm *ärgern*) genügen, um ihm ein Weiterleben unerträglich zu machen. [...]

Ebenso wie es in Columbus Interesse lag, die Empörung später als eine möglichst heftige darzustellen, ebenso lag es im Interesse der Jünger später kein Wort von analogen Erscheinungen zu erwähnen.<sup>37</sup>

Hetmann decides that he must die if he is to have any hope of succeeding. The prospects for his followers look promising in financial terms, but there is little likelihood of their achieving much in the way of spreading 'Hetmannismus'. Wedekind argues that Christ's apostles were in the same situation; indeed, he believed that they were just as argumentative as Hetmann's supporters, but saw the gain in continuing

35. *Nb* 16, 6<sup>f</sup>-6<sup>v</sup>.

36. cf. Matthew 20. 20-21.

37. *Nb* 16, 7<sup>f</sup>-8<sup>f</sup>.

Christ's teaching ministry. This argument is summarized in a note Wedekind made to Mark 10. 28-31.<sup>38</sup>

Die Jünger gehörten der ärmsten Volksklasse an und lebten von ihrer Hände Arbeit, als Jesus sie zu sich rief. Während sie ihm folgten, lebten sie hauptsächlich von dem Ertrag seiner geistigen Tätigkeit. Und als er starb, standen sie geistig so selbständig und durch den Erfolg der Lehre so umworben da, daß sie ein reichlicheres Auskommen fanden, als Jesus es selbst gehabt hatte.

Sie hatten daher auch rein materiell genommen nicht die geringste Ursache, sich über schlechte Geschäfte zu beklagen wie Petrus das tut. Sie waren in des Wortes nüchternster Bedeutung aus den Letzten die Ersten geworden.<sup>39</sup>

In all this it can be seen that Wedekind saw selfishness in the behaviour of the apostles, rather than a desire to serve, and believed that Jesus had a difficult time in trying to keep them under control. Wedekind also interpreted the parables in such a way as to relate their meaning to present situations rather than eternal promises. In his reading of the parable of the wedding banquet, he focused on one small aspect of the parable without taking the rest of it into consideration. His method was to take the image of the wedding clothes and apply it to all people, rather than to those who had gained entry to the feast, and he suggested that this 'anima candida' was a matter of attitude and was available to all in the same way that all were invited to the feast, and was something for which it was worth an individual striving, 'wenn es ihm besser gehen soll'.<sup>40</sup> In place of what he saw as Christ's teaching being based on the promise of future (heavenly) reward, his version of it promised immediate satisfaction. It fitted into his notion that Christ was himself not preaching about the kingdom of heaven as a place to be reached after death, but as a present-day attitude of heart. In widening the application of the verse in this manner, Wedekind was extending a small part of

38. 'Jesus sprach: Wahrlich, ich sage euch: Es ist niemand, der Haus oder Brüder [...] verläßt um meinetwillen und um des Evangeliums willen, [...] der nicht hundertfach empfangt: [...] Häuser und Brüder und Schwestern und Mütter und Kinder und Äcker [...] und in der zukünftigen Welt das ewige Leben. Viele aber werden die Letzten sein, die die Ersten sind, und die Ersten sein, die die Letzten sind.'

39. *Nb* 18, 33<sup>v</sup>-34<sup>f</sup>.

40. *Nb* 18, 31<sup>f</sup>. (He was to discuss the notion of the 'anima candida' further in *Die Zensur*.)

Jesus's teaching to enable it to feature in his own understanding of religion, in which ideally all people would have this purity of soul for its own sake.

He also attempted to demythologize a parable by rendering its meaning specific to Christ and his relationship with the apostles. He took the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18. 21-35) to be a hinted reference to Peter's debt to Jesus: 'Jesu berechnet Petri Schuld ihm gegenüber auf 41,250,000 Mark. Daher hat Petrus alle Ursache, seinen Schuldnern zu vergeben.'<sup>41</sup>

According to Wedekind's reading, then, Christ was engaged in an ongoing power-struggle with his apostles, whose bickering and arguments amongst themselves as to who was the most important had to be held in check. Wedekind notes that Christ's response to this was to recommend the model of the innocent trust of children, in contrast to the fractiousness of the apostles. With reference to Mark 9. 42,<sup>42</sup> he wrote, 'das Kind ist wunschlos im Gegensatz zu den Jüngern, die immer aufeinander neidisch sind'.<sup>43</sup>

This power-struggle Wedekind identified in the relationship between Christ and his followers is parodically reflected in that between Hetmann and his group, but with variations. According to the Gospels, Christ selected those he wanted to be his followers. Hetmann arrives with the evidence for his claim that the *Bund* is already in existence in the form of bank-statements, with which he has surmised he will best persuade Launhart to support him (IV, 205). From the outset, then, he is tailoring his activity as leader of the organization to accommodate the wishes of its benefactors. Additionally, Hetmann is introduced in the context of the discussion between Launhart and Gellinghausen regarding which good cause their 'sozialwissenschaftliches Institut' will support, which is to say, what will make financial sense. By going to Launhart in the first place, then, Hetmann is accepting that the primary purpose of the *Bund* will have to be to make money. Wedekind's impression of Christ's apostles is that they were more concerned with what they could

41. *Nb* 18, 5<sup>f</sup>. See also *Nb* 18, 30<sup>f</sup>: 'Der Schuldner der 10,000 Talente = 41,250,000 Mark ist Petrus. Das Gleichnis ist eine Zurechtweisung der Jünger.'

42. 'Und wer einen dieser Kleinen, die an mich glauben, zum Abfall verführt, für den wäre es besser, daß ihm ein Mühlstein an den Hals gehängt und er ins Meer geworfen würde.'

43. *Nb* 18, 33<sup>f</sup>.

gain from following him, than with how they could serve him. He emphasizes the disagreements between the apostles themselves and depicts similar struggles between Hetmann's followers. They argue and accuse one another of not being committed and let him down. They all have their own objectives: Brühl is pursuing an academic career; Gellinghausen has been forced to join in because of his financial commitment; Berta pursues a bourgeois marriage with Brühl in defiance of the *Bund's* beauty-principle and Fanny is seeking to gain a response to her love for Hetmann.

The main driving force, however, is Launhart's greed. It is he who persuades Hetmann to publish the offending article and it is his desertion that leads to Hetmann's arrest and the subsequent cancellation of the *Bund's* first conference. Equally, Hetmann is dependent on the exposure that Launhart is able to generate through his understanding of the press. Launhart knows the value of publicity, arguing, 'mit Ihren Vorträgen verdienen Sie sich ein warmes Abendessen, während diese Konfiskation, besonders wenn ein Prozeß daraus wird, die Zahl unserer Abonnenten um das zehnfache erhöhen kann!' (IV, 212). Hetmann's argument that he could have read out the essay unhindered in a hundred towns indicates that his ways – and the ways Christ and his followers preached the gospel – are now outmoded. To succeed as a modern prophet, it is necessary to shock the whole of society and make an impact on the minds of everyone with one blow, rather than gradually build up support as Hetmann might have done with his peripatetic methods.

When Hetmann relaunches his career after his failure, it is Launhart who claims the credit for drawing public attention once again: 'Die ganze letzte Nummer unseres Blattes besteht aus Notizen über Ihr Wiederauftreten! In Achtzigtausend Exemplaren ist dem Publikum Ihre Berühmtheit wieder vor Augen geführt' (IV, 244). The individual now needs a manager to stage public performances and garner the necessary financial rewards for them, just as in *Erdegeist* Schön was responsible for Lulu's success as a dancer.<sup>44</sup> In the same way as Lulu's career is organized by Schön to enable her to be married off to an appropriate suitor, so Hetmann's moral pronouncements are to provide more wealth for Launhart. He even begins to try to use his influence to advise

44. cf. III, 61.

Hetmann on what he ought to say to achieve the greatest effect: ‘Sie müssen die Versammlung vor allem in einem Punkte aufs Korn nehmen, in dem Sie selber vollkommen unantastbar sind’ (IV, 244). Whatever the moral intentions of the prophet might be, they are subservient to the need to obtain publicity and sales for Launhart’s publications. In other words, the disciples are coming to dictate the policy of the prophet. By contrast, Wedekind bears some admiration for Christ for the way he saw Christ maintaining control over the unruliness of his followers, such as in his use of parables to remind them of their position in relation to him. In comparing the apostles to the group that follows Hetmann, he shows that the selfish desires that motivated the thinking of Christ’s apostles were essentially the same as those which occupied people in a similar position centuries later; only the leader’s manner of controlling them had altered.

Hetmann’s abilities in this realm were vastly inferior to Christ’s, and it is important to recognize those similarities and differences Wedekind described in the corresponding roles, because this will provide an understanding of what his aims were in his depiction of Hetmann as a parody-prophet. Firstly it is necessary to appreciate what he understood Christ’s ultimate role to be. As well as believing that Christ was preaching an idea of heaven within people’s hearts, he also concluded that Christ did not himself believe that he would return. In a note to Matthew 24. 5,<sup>45</sup> he wrote, ‘aus seinen Befürchtungen erhellt klar, daß er selbst nicht an seine Wiederkunft Parusie glaubt’.<sup>46</sup> In discussing Mark 10. 32-34, which contains Jesus’s prediction of what would happen to him when he and the apostles reached Jerusalem, he wrote, ‘die Leidenverkündigung enthält nur das Programm und kein Wort von Prophezeiung. Seine Verkündigung bezeichnet den mutmaßigen Verlauf. Die Auferstehung am dritten Tage war eine Hauptnummer des Messiasprogramms und konnte, ob sie stattfand oder nicht, keinesfalls wegbewiesen werden.’<sup>47</sup>

He also saw Christ as a cunning strategist, for his reaction to John the Baptist’s death, as explained by Wedekind, was that he had to

45. ‘Denn es werden viele kommen unter meinem Namen und sagen: Ich bin der Christus, und sie werden viele verführen.’

46. *Nb* 18, 31’.

47. *Nb* 18, 34’.



reconsider his plans in order to regain public sympathy: 'Der Märtyrertod des Johannes hatte Jesus gezwungen nun auch seinerseits in den Tod zu gehen, wenn er der erste bleiben wollte, weil Johannes schon als ein Gott gesandter Prophet verehrt wurde.'<sup>48</sup> This led to Jesus's own death, of which Wedekind wrote:

Durch seine Hinrichtung am Passafest erfuhr Jesu Behauptung, er sei der Sohn Gottes die Verbreitung einer Sensation ersten Ranges. Die Auferstehung am 3. Tage gehörte zum Messiasprogramm. Deshalb mußte sie Jesus von sich verkündigen. Ob sie stattfand durfte ihn bei seinem ausgesprochenen Haß gegen Wunder wenig kümmern. Die Schriftgelehrten bitten Pilatus, das Grab bewachen zu lassen und versiegeln es. Durch die davorstehende Wache wurde das Grab zu einer Schauwürdigkeit des Passafestes. Diesem Unfug konnten die Römer nur dadurch ein Ende machen, daß sie den Leichnam beseitigten. Mit dieser Beseitigung waren die Schriftgelehrten um den Erfolg ihrer Bemühungen betrogen. Jesu Auferstehung ließ sich nicht mehr wegbeweisen.<sup>49</sup>

This is a variation on the theory mentioned at the end of Matthew's Gospel.<sup>50</sup> Wedekind makes no mention of the reports of the sightings of Christ after the resurrection – indeed, his interest dwindles after the crucifixion, and though he does make occasional references to the letters of Paul, he disagrees with everything Paul wrote (for example, he wrote at one point, 'falsche Religion: Paulus'.<sup>51</sup>) He also understood Paul's teaching to be that all believers had to revert to ascetism, which contradicted Jesus's teaching:

Die Propheten und Messiasse bis und mit Johannes hatten als Asketen den Menschen ihre Sünden vorgeworfen und sie durch Aufforderung zur Buße vor sich selbst erniedrigt. Da kommt der lebensfrohe Jesus und findet den Ausweg, indem er sich für die sündige Menschheit opfert, um sie ihres Sünderbewußtseins zu entledigen. Paulus aber (Römer 6: 1-17) erklärt diese Tat praktisch für illusorisch und fällt in die alte Praxis der Sünde, Erbsünde und Aufforderung zur Askese zurück.<sup>52</sup>

48. *Nb* 18, 35<sup>f</sup>.

49. *Nb* 18, 32<sup>f</sup>-33<sup>v</sup>.

50. Matthew 28. 11-15.

51. *Nb* 38, 48<sup>f</sup>.

52. *Nb* 16, 28<sup>f</sup>.

This distinction between Christ and Paul is also one made by Nietzsche in *Der Antichrist*. He saw Paul taking Christ's liberating gospel and returning it to a priestly system:

In Paulus verkörpert sich der Gegensatz-Typus zum 'frohen Botschafter', das Genie im Haß, in der Vision des Hasses, in der unerbittlichen Logik des Hasses. Was hat dieser Dysangelist alles dem Hasse zum Opfer gebracht! Vor allem den Erlöser: er schlug ihn an *sein* Kreuz. Das Leben, das Beispiel, die Lehre, der Tod, der Sinn und das Recht des ganzen Evangeliums – Nichts war mehr vorhanden, als dieser Falschmünzer aus Haß begriff, was allein er brauchen konnte.<sup>53</sup>

Nietzsche's view of Paul was helpful to Wedekind, as it enabled him to pursue the argument that Christianity had been distorted from its original founder's intention. If Christ had indeed been 'lebensfroh' and Paul had been responsible for reintroducing the aspects of the Jewish law that Christ had overcome, it meant Christ was on Wedekind's side. Wedekind agreed that Christ's death helped to lift humanity's burden of sin, but saw that as the end of his role. The passage from Romans he selected that apparently showed Paul's reversion to the old notion of sin did in fact argue that Christ died for sin: for example, Paul wrote, 'wir wissen ja, daß unser alter Mensch mit ihm gekreuzigt ist, damit der Leib der Sünde vernichtet werde, so daß wir hinfort der Sünde nicht dienen. Denn wer gestorben ist, der ist frei geworden von der Sünde'.<sup>54</sup> As, however, Wedekind's understanding of this as a purely earthly process disagreed entirely with Paul's theology, he had to reject the rest of Paul's thinking. In Wedekind's sight, Jesus's teaching and subsequent death were more to do with the emotional lifting of a sense of guilt, rather than the Christian belief of the sin-sacrifice to satisfy the justice of an omniscient God. The whole basis of Paul's theology was that salvation was by faith in Christ and not by human activity. However, Wedekind's wholesale rejection of the Christian concept of salvation rendered this fundamental aspect of Paul's teaching meaningless, which meant he had to deny all of it.

The equivalent to Christ's crucifixion in the play is Hetmann's 'Opfertod'; Hetmann attempts to provoke the crowd into murdering, and

53. Nietzsche, *Werke*, section 6, vol. III, pp. 213-14.

54. Romans 6. 6-7.

thus making a martyr out of him; but this fails as the result of Morosini's calling out 'der Mensch ist wahnsinnig!' at the crucial moment (IV, 251). Among Wedekind's plans for the play (in which Hetmann was originally called Hemman) he mentions the prospect of the 'Opfertod':

Hemman will durchaus vom Pöbel erschlagen werden, da heutzutage bei der Obrigkeit doch kein Märtyrertod mehr zu holen ist. Der fremde Herr [Brühl] wird Hemman gegenüber zum vernünftigen Apostel, so wie es bei Plato für Sokrates war. Er rettet ihn durch Polizei vor des Pöbels Wut in der Überzeugung, daß Hemman der Verkündigung seiner Lehre erhalten bleiben muß und daß es zum Märtyrertod immer noch Zeit ist.<sup>55</sup>

In the final version of the play, Hetmann is rescued by Morosini, but the idea is the same. Just as Wedekind saw Christ planning his death as a response to John the Baptist's increase in popularity after Herod had had him killed, so too does Hetmann believe that the only way his message can get across properly is through his death. In both cases it is therefore for selfish motives, a drastic attempt to perform a spectacular stunt to gain the initiative in people's minds. The notion that the authorities will not provide the appropriate publicity is retained in the play, as Hetmann explains to Fanny: 'Im Kampf mit der Staatsgewalt begegnet einem die Behörde auch im schlimmsten Fall noch mit solcher Förmlichkeit, daß eine Hinrichtung wie eine zu Ehren des Hingerichteten veranstaltete würdevolle Feierlichkeit erscheint' (IV, 233).

Hetmann is at pains to persuade his followers not to prevent him from pursuing his course towards death at the hands of the mob. At the beginning of the fourth act, just before Hetmann goes out to face the crowd that he hopes will execute him, there is a scene between Hetmann and his followers that has very distant echoes of Christ's last supper with his apostles before his death. Its most notable characteristic is Hetmann's steadfast refusal to drink the 'Schaumwein' with which Launhart plies him (IV, 243-49). This involves a symbolic reversal of the attitude of the 'lebensfrohe' Christ, who offered bread and wine at his last supper. In a draft for this scene, Brühl responds to Launhart's suggestion that Hetmann drink some *Sekt* with the assertion that all are following Hetmann in his philosophy of self-denial: 'Ihr Benehmen, Herr Launhart, ist ein Hohn auf die Selbstverleugnung, die wir Übrigen

55. Nb 19, 42f.

uns hier geschworen haben!’<sup>56</sup> Wedekind subsequently removed the reference to the others having sworn an oath of abstinence, but if one substitutes ‘blasphemy’ for ‘scorn’, one gains a sense of Brühl’s quasi-religious conviction regarding Hetmann’s teaching. By concentrating on the ascetic, however, this conviction comes to resemble a religion more in tune with Wedekind’s reading of Pauline Christianity, than any kind of liberating philosophy.

Where Hetmann initially excluded himself from the *Bund* because of his ugliness, and therefore promoted *Leben* for others and ascetism for himself, his philosophy offers no more freedom than the one against which he is supposed to be rebelling. Indeed, Schröder-Zebralla argues, ‘Hetmanns Liebesgebot ist ebenso schwer zu erfüllen wie das Christliche, das noch die Feindesliebe mit einschließt.’<sup>57</sup> Hetmann’s moral superiority has the flimsiest basis and his pronouncements are also not as profound as his hyperbolic assertions would suggest. Where he claims, ‘was ich heute sage, hat seit Bestehen der Welt noch niemand ausgesprochen’ (IV, 244), Rasch argues, ‘das sind nun freilich längst bekannte Vorwürfe und Postulate aus dem Arsenal der Frauenbewegung, die zu jenen Reformbestrebungen gehört, mit denen man nach der Meinung Launharts nicht mehr “den Hund vom Ofen lockt”’.<sup>58</sup> His real aim is not to die for any cause other than the happiness he believes he can earn through being useful to others:

At one moment he admits that he has never sought anything but his own great gratification: ‘Seit ich zu denken begann, kämpfe ich um *Erhöhung* meines Lebensgenusses!’ He expects his sacrificial death to bring him the only possible unalloyed pleasure. Thus the ultimate in self-denial is unmasked as egotism perverted by false values and self-hatred.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, Wedekind is presenting the prophet as subject to the problems of *Egoismus*. Not only are his followers concerned with their own desires, but Hetmann is bound up with his own wants. Schröder-Zebralla believes his fierce desire to be based on the fact that Hetmann

56. *Nb* 26, 11<sup>v</sup>-12<sup>f</sup>. (cf. IV, 249: ‘Ihr Benehmen, Herr Launhart, ist eine unerhörte Blasphemie!’).

57. Schröder-Zebralla, p. 181.

58. ‘Das Schicksal’, in *Viermal Wedekind*, p. 69.

59. John Hibberd, ‘The Eugenist as Tyrant and Fool: Wedekind’s Karl Hetmann’, *Neophilologus*, 74 (1990), 249-64 (p. 259).

is impotent: ‘Er kann eine Frau nicht körperlich lieben, umso drängender und fanatischer wird sein Verlangen nach einem befriedigenden “Geistesakt”, den er schließlich glaubt im Opfertod “genießen” zu können, als erstes Fest, das er “mit *unbelastetem, freien* Herzen” feiern wird.’<sup>60</sup> This connects with Wedekind’s own assertion, based on the criticism voiced by Morosini, that Hetmann desires nothing more than power over women.

Hetmann’s ‘Fest’ has an equivalent in Wedekind’s reading of Christ’s life, for he emphasizes Christ’s image of a wedding to describe his own death, such as in Matthew 9. 15:<sup>61</sup> ‘Hochzeit nennt er seinen Opfertod, vielleicht weil er nie eine andere gefeiert hat, wohl aber weil Hochzeit ein Bild für Hinrichtung ist. Die Brautnacht im Brautbett bei der eisernen Jungfrau in Nürnberg. Spital spricht man von den Hochzeitsgedanken der Todeskandidaten.’<sup>62</sup> It would be somewhat inappropriate for Hetmann, whose aim it has been to abolish marriage, to use the same imagery to describe his own death, so he replaces it with that of a celebration: ‘Ich habe, seit ich auf dieser Welt bin, nie mit *unbelastetem, freiem* Herzen ein Fest gefeiert. *Einmal in meinem Leben soll mir das aber noch vergönnt sein!*’ (IV, 242)

His death is to be the crowning event of his life. The phrase he uses to describe this process is, ‘der Tod wird zur unerläßlichsten Lebensbedingung’ (IV, 242), which has become a cliché by the time Launhart uses it to complete Hetmann’s sentence for him when they are talking before the meeting in Act Four (IV, 248). Hetmann thus builds up his followers to prepare them for his death, and persuades them to swear vows that they will not defend him, so that nothing can prevent him from achieving this aim. In the same way Wedekind believed that Jesus’s death was the ultimate publicity stunt, and prepared his disciples for it by making predictions, so Hetmann becomes convinced that the only way he is to broadcast his message is through public martyrdom, even if that message involves little more than his haranguing his audience to build them up into a murderous frenzy.

60. Schröder-Zebralla, p. 175.

61. ‘Jesus antwortete ihnen: Wie können die Hochzeitsgäste Leid tragen, solange der Bräutigam bei ihnen ist? Es wird aber die Zeit kommen, daß der Bräutigam von ihnen genommen wird; dann werden sie fasten.’

62. *Nb* 18, 29<sup>f</sup>. Similar references can also be found in: *Nb* 16, 40<sup>v</sup>; *Nb* 18, 1<sup>v</sup>; *Nb* 21, 3<sup>v</sup>.

His original explanation to Fanny involves a melodramatic claim: ‘mein Lebenstrieb ließ sich von jeher nur durch die außerordentlichsten Reizmittel wach erhalten; und so bin ich nun folgerichtig bei dem alleräußersten angelangt. Wie soll ich mich über Selbstverständliches wundern: – der Tod wird zur unerläßlichsten Lebensbedingung’ (IV, 241-42). Rasch describes how Hetmann here lives according to the dictum of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra:

In dem Kapitel ‘Vom freien Tode’ lehrt Zarathustra: ‘Stirb zur rechten Zeit’. Man sollte selbst bestimmen, wann man stirbt. ‘Wichtig nehmen alle das Sterben: aber noch ist der Tod kein Fest.’ Auch in diesen Lehren vom Tode scheint Hetmann ein Schüler Zarathustras zu sein. Er will, nach dem Scheitern seiner Mission, nur noch sein Buch beenden und mit seinem freien Tod ein Zeichen geben, sich von der empörten Menge umbringen lassen. Und auch nennt er ein solches freiwilliges Ende ein Fest.<sup>63</sup>

Thus Christ’s predictions of his death and Zarathustra’s instructions are combined in Hetmann’s desire to achieve the success in his public suicide that had largely evaded him in life. His attempt fails, however, because Morosini steps in at the last moment to declare Hetmann mad. Morosini has just been presented with the opportunity to marry Mrs Grant, and fears that Hetmann’s success will lead to the loss of his income. It is not clear whether his marriage itself will be in danger, for after Hetmann’s release from prison at the beginning of act three, he and Fanny discuss why neither of them has married (IV, 230); Brühl and Berta are engaged (IV, 246), so the *Bund* has forsaken its anti-marriage stance. Morosini’s fear is, rather, ‘wozu heiraten wir uns, wenn die Gesetze der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft *aufgelöst* werden sollen!’ (IV, 250). It is not clear either how Hetmann is to achieve such a drastic effect on society, in the light of what is revealed of his new morality. Nevertheless, Morosini’s action is an affirmation of the bourgeois values that are threatened by Hetmann’s beliefs and Morosini demonstrates the principle that Hetmann outlines when talking to Brühl after his initial failure, that ‘der Reiche setzt eher sein Leben für seinen Reichtum als seinen Reichtum für sein Leben aufs Spiel’ (IV, 237).

Morosini’s renunciation of his vows and rejection of Hetmann vaguely refers to Judas’s betrayal of Christ, but equally his repudiation

63. ‘Das Schicksal’, in *Viermal Wedekind*, p. 61.

of Hetmann's teaching is reminiscent of Peter's denial of Christ. The post-resurrection expansion of Christianity is transformed here into Launhart's ability to sell copies of Hetmann's book. (Other references to the Gospels are cited in Schröder-Zebralla, as are various textual references in the play that link Christ with Hetmann.<sup>64</sup>) Wedekind's notebooks also reveal other hinted references, such as those spoken by the two women who were eventually named Mrs Grant and Die Fürstin:

Die Kommerzienrätin: Sie haben mich von 7 Dämonen befreit.  
Die Fürstin: Herodes soll den Wunsch haben, Sie zu sehen.  
Hemman: Selig die Augen, die sehen was Ihr sehen.  
Kommerzienrätin: Man sagt, Sie seien ein Volksverführer.<sup>65</sup>

Of these, only the last is quoted in the play (IV, 216), but all are veiled references to the relationship between Hetmann and Christ. Another of them introduces Wedekind into this relationship too: 'Die Fürstin: Hat die Lehre göttlichen oder menschlichen Ursprung?'<sup>66</sup> Wedekind wrote, in connection with Matthew 21. 23:<sup>67</sup> 'Welchen Ursprung hatte Jesu Lehre, göttlichen oder menschlichen? – Göttlichen! Deswegen hat man ihm so wenig geglaubt, wie man mir jetzt glaubt, denn meine Botschaft hat auch göttlichen Ursprung.'<sup>68</sup>

To understand Wedekind's claim here, it is helpful to recall the letter he wrote to Anny Barte in February 1884, in which he discussed his understanding of the word 'göttlich'. Though he was working on *Hidalla* twenty years later, the definition he gave in the letter still seems to apply:

In einer Randbemerkung Ihres lieben Epistels fragen Sie mich, mir unbekannt, aus welchem Grunde, ob ich für das Wort 'Göttlich' eine besondere Sympathie hätte. Das ist nun allerdings wahr und gewiß leicht begreiflich, weil es in meinen Augen alles das bezeichnet, was über die alltägliche Sphäre unseres Lebens hinausragt und, wenn auch beseligend, dennoch selten vollständig durchschaut

64. Schröder-Zebralla, pp. 179-80.

65. *Nb* 19, 33<sup>f</sup>. (cf. Luke 8. 2; 9. 9; 10. 23 and John 7. 12 respectively.)

66. *Nb* 19, 33<sup>f</sup>.

67. 'Und als er in den Tempel kam und lehrte, traten die Hohenpriester und die Ältesten des Volkes zu ihm und fragten: Aus welcher Vollmacht tust du das, und wer hat dir diese Vollmacht gegeben?'

68. *Nb* 18, 5<sup>f</sup>. (Similar also in *Nb* 21, 5v.)

wird von dem, der das Glück hat, etwas Göttliches zu empfinden. Aber das Göttliche hat ja auch immer etwas Dämonisches an sich.<sup>69</sup>

His understanding of the word 'göttlich' was therefore as an all-encompassing term that could describe anything out of the ordinary. His definition was vague enough to include anything unusual, and avoided any connection with the specifically religious. Indeed, his incorporation of the 'Dämonisches' meant that very little needed to be excluded. Though his interpretation of the 'göttlich' might seem like a way of describing the transcendent, there is little suggestion that Wedekind really moved on from this indeterminate definition. He did not pay much heed, for instance, to other explanations of the transcendent that might have been related to this, such as might be found in Eastern religions or the Schopenhauerian notion of the cosmic will.<sup>70</sup> His exploration of religious ideas never ventured much further than his interest in Judaism and Christianity, and in particular the person of Christ and those parts of his life which seemed to vindicate Wedekind's own. In another note, he wrote: 'Zöllner und Dirnen haben an Jesum geglaubt, sowie sie an mich glauben. Ihr habt so wenig an Jesum geglaubt zu seinem Lebzeiten, wie ihr heute an mich glaubt.'<sup>71</sup> This notion was implicit when he quoted Matthew 21. 31 as the epigraph for his next play, *Tod und Teufel (Totentanz)*.<sup>72</sup> The verse that follows indicates that Christ's meaning was not that the prostitutes and publicans would enter the kingdom of heaven because they were necessarily better than the chief priests and elders, but because they had followed the teaching of John the Baptist. In Wedekind's interpretation of the verse, however, it is possible to read his self-vindication: firstly, the publicans and prostitutes had a higher moral quality than the figures in authority; secondly, their better judgement led them to support him. His interpretation of Christ's words

69. *Gesammelte Briefe*, I, 41.

70. See Claud Sutton, *The German Tradition in Philosophy* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), p. 79.

71. *Nb* 18, 5<sup>v</sup>.

72. 'Wahrlich, ich sage euch: Die Zöllner und Huren kommen eher ins Reich Gottes als ihr.' (Erhard Weidl (in *Werke*, II, 791) draws attention to Wedekind's omission of the words 'die Zöllner' in the epigraph.)



– as an opponent of bourgeois society – enabled him to portray himself as Christ’s natural successor.<sup>73</sup>

This being the case, it is important to determine what the significance is of Hetmann’s death and what relationship it bears to Christ’s crucifixion, and what bearing these have on Wedekind’s depiction of himself in the play. The conversation Hetmann has with the circus-owner Cotrelly leads to the sudden realization on Hetmann’s part that he is not a prophet, but a clown. Just as the king in *König Nicolo* found himself a misunderstood jester, so the philosophy for which Hetmann was willing to die is ridiculed. Cotrelly says: ‘Sie wollen [...] die Unberührtheit des – des jungen Weibes als – als Verachtung der Selbstvergötterung – wieder in Mode bringen’ (IV, 263). Cotrelly’s interpretation of Hetmann’s teaching suggests that Hetmann will die misunderstood and ridiculous, as Paul Fechter argues:

Karl Hetmann stirbt ja nicht, wie er eigentlich wollte, den Tod für sein Lebenswerk, sondern geht an der Lächerlichkeit zugrunde, die er nicht ertragen kann. Er wirft sein Leben fort aus Hilflosigkeit, nicht im Kampf um seine Überzeugung. Der Moralist Wedekind läßt zuletzt im Grunde die Moral aus dem Thema ausfallen (denn Cotrellys verdrehte Zitate der Hetmannschen Lehre kann man kaum noch als Beziehung auf sie ansehen).<sup>74</sup>

Cotrelly’s request for a ‘Selbstgespräch’ with Hetmann (IV, 262) suggests his representing another side of Hetmann’s own self, such that Hetmann is provided with the opportunity to perceive himself as the world sees him:

Die Offerte, künftig als dummer August in der Manege aufzutreten, läßt Hetmann blitzartig die eigene Vergangenheit überschauen. Er war es längst und ist es noch: dummer August im Zirkus der bürgerlichen kapitalistischen Gesellschaft, wo er um so mehr Gelächter erntete, je ernster er sich für seine und, wie er meinte, für ihre Sache einsetzte.<sup>75</sup>

The drastic conclusion of the play suggests that the prophet of a new morality is no more than a mere clown, there for the diversion of a

73. John Hibberd notes that Wedekind also cited Heinrich von Kleist and Karl Kraus as allies of Christ (‘Die Wiedervereinigung’, p. 50).

74. Paul Fechter, *Frank Wedekind: Der Mensch und das Werk* (Jena: Lichtenstein, 1920), p. 98.

75. Klotz, ‘Wedekinds Circus Mundi’, in *Viermal Wedekind*, p. 39.

complacent and self-satisfied society, which has a distorted idea of what the message was in the first place. Hetmann's death, like that of Lulu, seems to be contrived to be as far from suggesting a hint of salvation as possible. Indeed, Hetmann's death conforms to the same idea that was present in the *Lulu*-plays, of a secular, ritualistic sacrifice, as the result of which *bürgerlich* life can be reasserted as the desirable norm, after the brief depiction of transgression against its standards. Hetmann's new morality has also been devoid of any notion that it might be offering something of transcendent value, and his suicide epitomizes the miserably earthbound nature of his philosophy: it is a clandestine, ignominious business wholly at odds with the spectacular martyrdom – and subsequent new, moral order – for which he had hoped. Launhart's seizure of Hetmann's text after his suicide ensures that all that will remain of Hetmann's teaching will be those elements which will gain profits for Launhart's publicity-machine. Ironically, it is Hetmann's death itself which enables Launhart to announce so confidently, 'jetzt fliegt der Name Hetmann wie ein Lauffeuer um die Erde' (IV, 266). So the ignoble failure of his suicide is what will lead to his writings being publicized – as had been his plan all along.

Thus Hetmann's failure is, paradoxically, the source of his potential success. But it is likely to be a distortion of the truth, for his name will be broadcast by the least appropriate publicist. Here, it would seem Wedekind is drawing another Christ-parallel, bearing in mind his opinion of Paul's influence on Christianity. Viewed in this way, Hetmann becomes a genuinely well-intentioned, philanthropic figure, whose teaching will be masked by his selfish followers, such that succeeding generations will be presented with a distortion of the original meaning – just as Wedekind believed happened to Christ. The ambiguity of this ending leaves room for the possibility that Hetmann's failure is not absolute, for even Launhart's version of Hetmann's writings has to be better than what would have been presented at Cotrelly's circus. This ambiguity also extends to the question of whether Hetmann's death signals the end of a genuine attempt on Wedekind's part to depict an alternative morality, or is merely the conclusion of an extravagant, ironic repudiation of his own former beliefs.

The truth of the matter seems to have been deliberately blurred by Wedekind, but elements such as the Nietzschean references and the Christ-parallels suggest that Wedekind was doing more than simply

rejecting his earlier ideas. On one level, he was jokingly speculating on what sort of career Christ might have enjoyed in Wilhelmine Germany, had Christ's preaching not been concerned with the kingdom of heaven, but with sexual morality. There is a considerable amount of self-parody in his implication that he might himself be that Christ-figure, but it does not mean that Wedekind was wholly disregarding the relationship. Christ and Nietzsche were both originally opposed to the societies around them, but Christ's values and ideas had been distorted and watered down in such a way as eventually to uphold the very elements of society they were supposed to criticize, and Nietzsche was becoming equally palatable to the bourgeoisie (hence the sarcasm of Alwa's opera in *Erdegeist*).

Hetmann's career and ultimate fate is the complete opposite of what it should have been if Wedekind were embodying these two figures: the combination of a Nietzschean call to pursue *Leben* and a Christ-figure who came to relieve people of their burden of sin and – as Wedekind saw it – without demanding anything in response, could have provided a potent spokesman for a liberating sexual morality. The fact that instead Wedekind created the weak and self-absorbed Hetmann means that he was passing judgement both on *bürgerlich* society and on his own potential to change it or conform to its standards. In *Der Marquis von Keith*, he had presented a secular world in which Keith internalized religious ideas and used them to his own ends within the bourgeois world; the world of *Hidalla* is similar, but Hetmann, unlike Keith, is unwilling to keep his philosophy to himself, and wishes everyone to have the same values and beliefs as him. His failure is also that of Wedekind, the misunderstood playwright-cum-moralist, who was aware that bourgeois morality was built on foundations as unstable as those of Hetmann's society, but found that his attempts to persuade the people around him of the seriousness of his intentions were themselves construed as the preposterous raving of a buffoon. Wedekind's aim was to get across the message that, contrary to appearances, he was an underrated artist who belonged to the tradition of the other great critics of *bürgerlich* society and that he really did have something important to say. This aim was obviously very dear to his heart, for Hetmann-like, misunderstood, semi-parodic, tragic figures – who bore some resemblance to Wedekind himself – were to make appearances in his work for the rest of his career.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Deification of Reason: *Die Zensur*

Of all the characters Wedekind created, the one who appears to be most like him is the protagonist of *Die Zensur*, Walter Buridan. Within the play itself, there are two elements that suggest Wedekind's primary concern in writing it was his desire to work out his personal problems on the stage. First, it was inspired by his problems with the censorship of his plays *Die Büchse der Pandora* and *Tod und Teufel (Totentanz)*. From the second edition onwards, he appended as an epigraph to the play a quotation attributed to *Regierungsrat* Kurt von Glasenapp, a Berlin theatre censor, referring to precisely this aspect.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, *Die Zensur* features a large element of autobiographical detail, most of which centres on the relationship between the middle-aged author Buridan (a version of Wedekind himself) and his young lover Kadidja, who bears a strong resemblance to Wedekind's young wife Tilly. If it was tempting to argue that Wedekind was Karl Hetmann in *Hidalla*, it is even more tempting to see Wedekind in Buridan. Once again, however, it is hazardous to do so without caution, and especially to assume that Buridan's words are merely Wedekind's own. It might be extremely difficult sometimes to separate the author's concerns from those of his creation, but this does not mean that a similarity between some of Buridan's ideas and Wedekind's results in their being the same person.<sup>2</sup> Buridan comes across as a spokesman for a philosophy of individual liberation that has its basis in his religious ideas, which themselves seem to stem from a philosophy of reason. Although the ideas Buridan expounds may superficially bear some resemblance to what is known of Wedekind's thinking, a closer examination reveals them to be too nebulous to represent anything like a systematic philosophy. This leads to two possible conclusions: either that Wedekind was depicting his own inability to

1. 'Wenn sich der Wedekind einbildet, daß wir ihm seines Einakters *Die Zensur* wegen *Die Büchse der Pandora* freigeben, dann täuscht er sich gewaltig' (V, 105).
2. Hartmut Vinçon observes that Buridan 'trägt mindestens ebenso Züge Gerhart Hauptmanns wie der Dichter Meier in *Kinder und Narren* Züge Wedekinds.' (Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, p. 224).

reach a satisfactory philosophical viewpoint, or that in Buridan, he was creating another Hetmann-like figure, an alternative self whose philosophy was largely irrelevant, with whom he was experimenting. Before it is possible to understand which of these is the case, however, it is necessary to understand what exactly his aims were in the play.

Structurally, *Die Zensur* is similar to the play Wedekind wrote after *Hidalla*, *Tod und Teufel* (*Totentanz*). Both are one-act plays with three scenes, featuring a dialogue between a man and a woman that sandwiches a central dialogue. In *Tod und Teufel*, this central dialogue features an entirely different couple from that involved in the scenes that surround it. It depicts what Wedekind described as ‘die Verhältnisse, unter denen ein Mephisto, wenn das denkbar wäre, sterben müßte’.<sup>3</sup> During the course of the play, Elfriede von Malchus, a campaigner against prostitution, comes to see the prostitute as a martyr; meanwhile Casti-Piani, the procurer who believes in the nobility of prostitution and whose arguments partly persuade Elfriede to change her mind, shoots himself when he sees that his ideals are false. The cause of the crossing over of their beliefs is their eavesdropping on the conversation between the prostitute Lisiska and her client Herr König, in which Lisiska asks to be abused and argues that she seeks no higher purpose in sensuality than to be mistreated; rather than being motivated by desire for joy, she repeatedly says, ‘es war stets nur der höllische Trieb, / Aus dem an Freude nichts übrig blieb’ (V, 28 ff.). Wedekind wrote that he portrayed himself in the figure of Herr König,<sup>4</sup> but this role involves little more than his being bemused at Lisiska’s masochism. Walter H. Sokel notes that Herr König’s bemusement in *Totentanz* arises because ‘Lisiska’s unexpected confession reawakens in her customer the pleasure-hating asceticism of his Christian upbringing. Instead of beating and killing the masochistic prostitute, he worships her as a saint.’<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, ‘discovering that sex is not indulgence, but mortification of the flesh, Elfriede Malchus is only too eager to espouse it. Sex has become the consecration and fulfilment of the Christian principle of suffering.’<sup>6</sup> The chief characteristic of the play is, however, not its discussion of the ideal-

3. See: *Werke*, ed. Weidl, II, 790; *Werke*, ed. Hahn, III, 351.

4. *Werke*, ed. Weidl, II, 790.

5. Sokel, p. 204.

6. *ibid.*

ization of prostitution and its relationship with Christianity, but the presentation of how the protagonists cope with a shattering blow to their notion of how the world works. This moment of realization is the same as that experienced by Karl Hetmann when Cotrelly reveals to him the truth of how the world sees him: the sudden moment at which characters understand that all they have ever considered to be true is wrong.

In his next play, *Musik*, Wedekind again depicted the massive trauma that can affect human experience, for in the person of Klara Hühnerwadel, he created a character for whom such a crisis as suffered by Casti-Piani is almost a permanent state and who is therefore wildly histrionic. In contrast to her, he created another version of the Wedekind-on-stage character, the misunderstood writer of dubious reputation Franz Lindekuh. He tries to help Klara whilst she suffers at the hands of her singing-teacher Josef Reißner, who makes her pregnant and forces her to have an abortion. Reißner then watches as she goes to prison and, when she is released, makes her pregnant again. Lindekuh attempts to help her, but at the end, when Klara's mother appears, it is Reißner who is given credit for trying to help Klara, and Lindekuh who receives the blame for her predicament. Lindekuh's difficulty lies in the fact that the hideous bourgeois characters of the play are unable to separate Lindekuh, the well-meaning man, from Lindekuh the writer of plays of questionable content.

*Musik* was a very thinly-disguised *Schlüsselstück*, which featured events from the life of Anton Dreßler, a member of Wedekind's circle of acquaintances. Wedekind's justification for presenting such a personal story on the stage was his claim that 'der Stoff erschien mir [...] so original, plastisch und abgeschlossen, daß ich ihn zum mindesten vor dem Vergessenwerden bewahren wollte'.<sup>7</sup> It was also an opportunity to transform the domestic and ordinary into the artistic. Where Wedekind had already presented the quest for a transcendent world within the theatre, it was as if he was now experimenting with the relationship between the world of ordinary existence and that of the aesthetic, by turning everyday experiences into theatrical dramas. The same argument also applies to the depiction of his domestic life in *Die Zensur*. Equally, however, within this noble pursuit of the artistic it is possible to detect his drawing on the prurient desire of the public to have an insight into

7. *Werke*, ed. Weidl, II, 792.

the private life of a controversial figure. As Leroy Shaw observes, ‘zweifelsohne hatte Wedekind das Interesse eines sensationslüstigen Publikums an der Enthüllung angeblicher Privatangelegenheiten eines berühmten Schauspielerpaares schon in seinem Plan einkalkuliert’.<sup>8</sup>

Although Wedekind would have been aware of his audience’s curiosity at peering behind the veil of the personal life of the author and his contemporaries, *Die Zensur* is not wholly autobiographical. Where the scenes that feature arguments between Buridan and Kadidja, who have been living together for eighteen months, reflect the relationship of Wedekind and Tilly, the human prototype of Dr Prantl – a Roman Catholic priest who is also a censor – is rather less obvious. In her autobiography, for instance, Tilly Wedekind recalls the writing of *Die Zensur*:

Ursprünglich sollte in dem Stück Berthe Marie Denk porträtiert werden und nach ihrer Szene mit dem Schriftsteller Buridan – in dem Frank sich selbst dargestellt hat – stürze ich mich (im Stück Kadidja genannt) aus Eifersucht vom Balkon. Als Frank mir das geplante Stück erzählte, sagte ich: ‘Da kann ich mich ja wirklich gleich vom Balkon hinunterstürzen.’<sup>9</sup> Daraufhin hat Frank seinen Entwurf geändert. Statt Berthe Marie Denk tritt ein katholischer Priester auf, den es auch gab. Es war der damals in Theaterkreisen sehr bekannte Pater Expeditus Schmidt. Wedekind hat ihm einige der ablehnenden Sätze in den Mund gelegt, die eigentlich Herr von Glasenapp über sein Werk geäußert hat. In Wirklichkeit war der katholische Priester viel toleranter als der preußische Zensor.<sup>10</sup>

The manuscripts of the play in Wedekind’s notebooks initially involve discussions between characters named ‘Ich’, ‘Er’ and ‘Sie’. Later Wedekind gave them the names Buridan, Prantl and Kadidja. Each of the names has some allusive significance. Buridan’s surname is that of the French philosopher Jean Buridan, whose imaginary donkey starved to death because it could not decide between two equidistant hay bales from which it could have eaten. This seems to represent Buridan’s inability to decide between the world of the senses which is embodied

8. Leroy R. Shaw, ‘Bekanntnis und Erkenntnis in Wedekinds *Die Zensur*’, in *Frank Wedekind zum 100. Geburtstag* (Munich: Stadtbibliothek, 1964), pp. 20-36 (p. 21).

9. Wedekind had been engaged to Bertha Marie Denk shortly before he met Tilly, so Tilly’s opposition to Wedekind’s writing about her is understandable. (See *Werke*, ed. Hahn, III, 680.)

10. *Lulu: Die Rolle meines Lebens* (Munich: Rütten und Loening, 1969), pp. 113-14.

by Kadidja and that of the spirit, as described in his discussion with Prantl.<sup>11</sup>

Prantl has been identified as Karl von Prantl, a professor of philosophy in Munich who, Erhard Weidl explains, ‘behandelt dieses Anekdote in Bd. 4 seiner *Geschichte der Logik des Abendlandes* (1870) mit positivistischem Eifer.’<sup>12</sup> Ulrike Sattel, somewhat implausibly, notes also that the name Buridan sounds like ‘Puritan’, and his forename is Cajetan, which was that of a legate of the Pope who, in 1518, tried to force Luther back under the authority of the Catholic Church.<sup>13</sup>

Kadidja was the name of a character in the fragment ‘Das Sonnenspektrum’ and the daughter of Magelone in *Die Büchse der Pandora*, and was also the name given to Wedekind’s second daughter, who was born four years after the writing of *Die Zensur*, in 1911. Tilly Wedekind wrote: ‘das Neugeborene wurde Epiphania getauft – abgekürzt Fanny – und Cadega, was die spanische, also die christliche Schreibweise von Kadidja ist, denn der Name ist eigentlich arabisch’.<sup>14</sup> Khadidja was the name of Muhammad’s first wife and according to Islamic tradition, Khadidja was approximately forty years old and Muhammad twenty-five when they married. The relationship between Buridan and Kadidja is therefore the reverse of that of Muhammad and his wife, because Khadidja had already been married twice when she met Muhammad and had thus had the experience of life that separates Buridan from Kadidja in the play.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* explains that ‘marriage to Khadidja was an important turning-point in Muhammad’s career, mainly because [...] she supported and encouraged him, fostering

11. See Kutscher, III, 42; Schröder-Zebralla, pp. 24-25; Shaw, ‘Bekenntnis und Erkenntnis’, p. 24.

12. *Werke*, ed. Weidl, II, 799.

13. Sattel, p. 190.

14. Tilly Wedekind, p. 139.

15. In his draft, Wedekind presents Kadidja’s awareness of the difference between them in clearer terms, for she says: ‘Du beschäftigst dich so ungemein viel mit Religion. Das halte ich für sehr richtig. Du hast es auch wirklich nötig bei den Erlebnissen, die du hinter dir hast. Aber soll ich mich nun deshalb auch mit Religion beschäftigen? Ich würde das schon aus dem einfachen Grunde nicht tun, weil es mich nicht kleidet. Aber was hättest du denn davon? Wenn du Frauen liebtest, die sich mit Religion beschäftigen, dann hättest du doch ein Betschwester geheiratet. Ich würde mir lächerlich erscheinen, wenn ich mich neben dir niederknien wollte’. (*Nb* 44, 6’).



his confidence in himself and his mission.’<sup>16</sup> In other words, she had exactly the opposite effect on Muhammad as the Kadidja of the play has on Buridan. This ironic allusion to Islam is a rare departure for Wedekind, whose writing on religion was otherwise concentrated almost exclusively on Christianity. It does, however, serve to highlight the lack of explicit reference to Christianity in the whole of the play, given that one of the protagonists is a Catholic priest.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Wedekind’s subtitle to the play – ‘Theodizee in einem Akt’ – endows it with a religious profundity that initially appears somewhat at odds with the domestic drama that is presented in the play itself. Wedekind’s own description of *Die Zensur* helps to explain the personal aspects, but ignores the religious ones:

Hätte ich das Kind beim rechten Namen nennen wollen, dann hätte ich den Einakter ‘Exhibitionismus’ nennen müssen oder Selbstporträt. Die Kritik hatte mir vielfach den Vorwurf gemacht, daß sich meine Dramen mit meiner eigenen Person beschäftigen. Ich wollte dartun, daß es sich der Mühe lohnt, meine Person auf die Bühne zu bringen. (IX, 449)

Just as he had explained how it was he could present someone else’s domestic problems on the stage in *Musik*, so, here, he was arguing that his own life was somehow worthy of being dramatized. Wedekind also mentioned *Die Zensur* in his ‘Vorrede zu *Oaha*’:

Was nun die sittlichen Gefahren betrifft, die eine öffentliche Aufführung meiner *Büchse der Pandora* nach sich ziehen könnte, so habe ich diese Frage in meinem Einakter *Zensur* nach allen Möglichkeiten hin erörtert und könnte mir gar nichts Besseres wünschen, als daß dieser Einakter einer Aufführung der *Büchse der Pandora* als Prolog vorausginge.<sup>18</sup>

The dangers alluded to here are, unsurprisingly, glossed over in the play itself: Prantl agrees with Buridan that his work would be harmless to an enlightened soul such as himself, but fears for the ‘arglosen Zuschauer [...], der die öffentlichen Darstellungen besucht, um sich zu zerstreuen,

16. W. Montgomery Watt, ‘Khadidja’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. by E. van Donzel, B. Lewis and Ch. Pellat (Leiden: Brill, 1960-), IV (1978), pp. 898-99 (p. 898).

17. John Hibberd observes that Wedekind achieved this by ‘divesting Prantl’s Christianity of specifically Christian dogma’. (‘Die Wiedervereinigung’, p. 55.)

18. *Werke*, ed. Hahn, III, 365.

und der, ohne etwas davon zu ahnen, mit einer Schädigung seiner sittlichen Empfindungen in sein Heim zurückkehrt' (V, 123). Here, Wedekind must have been flattering those audiences and censors who would consider their moral sensitivities to be as mature and enlightened as Prantl's. According to Wedekind's own description, however, it seems *Die Zensur* is to be a self-portrait, as well as being the 'Theodizee' of its subtitle. Its title would appear to give precedence to a reading of the play as a discussion of the role of the censor, but the subtitle points towards a religious significance that does not really fit such an interpretation.<sup>19</sup> Erhard Weidl tries to reconcile the two apparently incompatible readings:

Da es sich hier unmöglich um eine literarische Gattungsbezeichnung handeln kann, muß dieser Begriff inhaltlich auf das Werk bezogen werden, wohl in dem Sinn, daß der 'schamlose' *Exhibitionismus* des Autors darin besteht, eine irdische Problemlösung anzubieten. – In diese Richtung weist auch das von Artur Kutscher überlieferte Motto der Handschrift des Autors: *Eritis sicut dii*.<sup>20</sup>

As he goes on to explain, the words 'Eritis sicut dii' come from the biblical Fall-narrative, in which the serpent tells Adam and Eve, 'ihr werdet sein wie Gott'.<sup>21</sup> The theodicy is, by definition, a vindication of divine providence in respect to the existence of evil, yet the biblical verse cited hints that this God is within people. Friedrich Gundolf believes that the play was Wedekind's attempt at self-justification before the Church, and that Wedekind's argument was based on the fact that he was a man of religious sensibilities, even if these were not the same as those of the established Church itself:

Ohne das ästhetische Religionsgetue der Frühromantiker Tieck, Wackenroder, Friedrich Schlegel verfällt Wedekind hier doch in ihren Fehler, das eigene Bedürfnis absolut zu machen, das heißt zu vergotten. Bei jenen war es das Denken oder Dichten, bei Wedekind der Genuß, und da er diesen brünstig, inbrünstig ersehnte, wie der christliche Beter das Himmelreich, mit gespannter

19. Artur Kutscher concludes: 'Der nachträgliche Untertitel "Theodizee" soll wohl die Stimmung des einsamen, in sich gewendeten Dichters bezeichnen, ist aber nicht gerechtfertigt'. (Kutscher, III, 46).

20. *Werke*, ed. Weidl, II, 798-99. (cf. Nb 45, 1<sup>v</sup>).

21. Genesis 3. 5.

Andacht und Märtyrermut, mit Todestrutz und -grauen, so mochte er guten Gewissens seinen kirchlichen Gegnern sich als einen Frommen ausgeben.<sup>22</sup>

According to this argument it is, then, a question of whether Wedekind's notion of the religious expressed in the realm of the senses has the same validity as the more poetic versions extolled by his predecessors. The main part of the play is taken up with the attempts of Buridan to justify himself on his terms in the face of Prantl's opposition. Buridan's argument rests on his serious notion of the religious and in this, he argues from the same sense of being misunderstood that König Nicolo and Karl Hetmann claim for themselves. In this respect, where Buridan might be seen as Wedekind's own, self-justifying portrayal of himself, there is always a danger that, just as in the philosophy of *Karl Hetmann*, he is creating a system of spurious moral values to make a completely different point. Wedekind spent his career creating personae and masks, so there is no reason to believe Buridan is any more Wedekind than Hetmann or Nicolo had been. Kutscher notes that another name Wedekind considered for the play was 'Das Kostüm',<sup>23</sup> which would have pointed towards both the 'Phantasiekostüm' that Kadidja changes into and the sense of Buridan displaying a certain form of behaviour to conform to the wishes of his censors. Indeed, in this case 'Zensur' takes on the sense of self-censorship. Buridan wishes to achieve a certain aim and is forced to adopt a particular attitude if he is to have any hope of reaching his goal. This change in attitude is later described by Prantl as Buridan's donning an appropriate 'Hochzeitsgewand'.

Bearing in mind that Buridan's overriding objective is to persuade Prantl of the serious intentions behind his writing, what comes across is not so much a discussion of literary quality, but what Irmer describes as a 'weltanschauliche Debatte'.<sup>24</sup> Buridan's defence is devoid of the references to Christianity cited by Wedekind in the situations where he defended himself in public, such as in the *Vorwort* to *Die Büchse der Pandora*. Though there is no reason why Wedekind should have felt like repeating himself, the absence of a discussion involving their versions of Christianity is notable considering the fact that Buridan's interlocutor is

22. Friedrich Gundolf, 'Frank Wedekind', *Trivium: Schweizerische Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft*, 6 (1948), 187-217 (p. 202).

23. Kutscher, III, 37. (cf. *Nb* 44, 5<sup>v</sup>).

24. Irmer, p. 175.

a priest. On the other hand, Prantl's role as representative of both censor and Church means that from his language it is rarely possible to tell whether he is giving advice as priest or censor – or even if he believes there to be much of a distinction between the two roles. Though Prantl was nominally based on Pater Expeditus Schmidt, Wedekind, as noted by Tilly, placed the words of the censor Glasenapp in his mouth. In addition, Prantl's theology is significantly different from that of his Roman Catholic prototype. Kutscher recorded one of the views expressed by Schmidt, which contradicts the whole basis of Prantl's argument: 'Die Religion, der Glaube sind nach unserer Anschauung Sache der Vernunft! Diese ist des Glaubens Grundlage... Also Sie kämpfen da gegen Windmühlen'.<sup>25</sup> Prantl claims, on the other hand, 'die Religion ist nicht Sache der Vernunft! Die Religion ist Sache des Herzens!' (V, 127).

Prantl is thus supposed to represent an irrational, pious world-view, whilst Buridan tries to be purely rational. Buridan claims that his depiction of the world is merely the result of his rational way of looking at it. The consequence of this is his depiction of *Leben* at the extreme, and the savage dramas played out in the theatre reflect the true consequences of human actions in a causal – and even moral – universe. In these terms, he is therefore a moralist. He argues: 'weil ich die unvermeidlichen Folgen menschlicher Handlungen schildere, deshalb bin ich ein verbissener Menschenverächter!' (V, 130). If the world is as he describes it, then, he claims he is not acting immorally, merely portraying what is already there. Prantl does not dispute that the world is as Buridan depicts it, but takes issue instead with the 'empörende Freude, die Ihnen die hilflose Verzweiflung Ihrer Mitmenschen bereitet!' (V, 130). In other words, then, he agrees with Buridan's world-view, but does not agree that it is appropriate material for dramatic presentation. In this, he is tacitly endorsing Buridan's rationalistic way of looking at the world. Though he remains steadfastly of the opinion that religion is necessarily irrational, he never disputes the conclusions that Buridan draws as the result of his use of reason. The apologist for a religious view is, strangely, not Prantl, but Buridan – who is fiercely enthusiastic about his rationalistic religion. In a draft of the play, Buridan described how this rationalism influenced his religious ideas as far back as his childhood:

25. Kutscher, III, 45.

Ich fühle den Heißhunger nach Religion seit meiner frühesten Kindheit in mir. Meine damalige Umgebung lebte im blindesten Aberglauben. Meine beiden Eltern glaubten nur aus dem einzigen Grunde an Gott, weil sie Angst davor hatten, nicht an ihn zu glauben. [...] Aber meine Mutter betete jeden Abend mit uns. Mein Vater betete einmal mit uns am Grabhügel seiner verstorbenen Mutter. Dabei stellte sich heraus, daß das Vaterunser meines Vaters und das meiner Mutter aus ganz verschiedenen Worten bestand. Ich war damals sechs Jahre alt und sagte mir im Stillen: Wenn sie noch keine Gelegenheit gefunden haben, sich über das Vaterunser zu verständigen, dann werden sie sich schwerlich jemals verstehen. [...]

Mit vierzehn Jahren schrieb ich die erste religiöse Abhandlung. Sie war selbstverständlich eine Auflehnung. Sie richtete sich gegen den krassen Aberglauben, der uns von unserm Religionslehrer vorgetragen wurde.<sup>26</sup>

What this demonstrates is a reaction against the same religion based on mere superstition that Wedekind satirized in his earlier plays, which involved the idea that it was better to believe in the religion one had inherited to be on the safe side. Buridan's criticism is also associated with his relationship with his parents, who handed down their own superstitious beliefs, but clearly never communicated about them to each other. The importance he attaches to religion is evident in that it is his parents' disagreement over this point – which is fundamental to him – that indicates that there is a problem in their marriage, whereas to them it might simply have been too trivial to bother discussing. His teacher incurs his youthful wrath because for Buridan, religion has nothing to do with superstition. Even when very young, he believes that all religious belief should be based on reason. By contrast, Prantl argues that too much reason can have a detrimental effect on religion, because, as has happened in Buridan's case, it can lead to a loss of the necessary spiritual values. This then manifests itself in his questionable plays and his turning away from the will of the Church:

Wir haben es mit dem seelischen Wohl der Menschen zu tun. Wir können uns auf Ihre Zumutungen nicht einlassen, weil Ihrem Wirken die Aufrichtigkeit fehlt. Ihnen fehlt die seelische Lauterkeit, die *anima candida*. Es fehlt Ihnen das Hochzeitsgewand, das auch vom ärmsten Bettler gefordert wird, wenn er nicht in die tiefste Hölle geworfen werden soll. (V, 124)

26. Nb 44, 27<sup>r</sup>-28<sup>r</sup>.

This reference to the ‘anima candida’ is a complicated image, for it draws on the same parable of the wedding banquet which is alluded to in Scholz’s ‘Konfirmationsspruch’ in *Der Marquis von Keith*, where the verse ‘viele sind berufen, aber wenige sind auserwählt’ (IV, 82) applies to Scholz’s exclusion from ordinary society. Here, it is linked with Wedekind’s particular reading of the parable, which can be read in a note he made to Matthew 22. 12:<sup>27</sup> ‘Das Hochzeitsgewand ist die anima candida, die seelische Offenheit, Natürlichkeit, die derjenige, dem es schlecht geht, unter allen Umständen haben muß, wenn es ihm besser gehen soll. Ein Mörder darf kein Viehkerl sein, eine Hure darf keine gemeine Person sein.’<sup>28</sup> Wedekind’s reading of the parable argues that it says everyone, regardless of what they do, ought to have this same fundamental decency. This idea has its root in his understanding of Christ’s mission, for the parable itself is supposed to describe the kingdom of heaven. As a result of Wedekind’s understanding of Christ’s teaching, that the kingdom of heaven was to be found only in people’s hearts, it follows that he could see Christ arguing that they needed some external display to demonstrate this change of heart to others. In discussing Prantl’s desire for the outward display, Alan Best illustrates why it is necessary to understand Wedekind’s interpretation of the words to appreciate properly the image used:

In this equation Prantl reveals himself as bound to external, visual standards as Buridan is. His correlation of ‘anima candida’ and ‘Hochzeitsgewand’ suggests an untoward reliance on that outward show, which a representative of the church might have been expected to hold in less esteem.<sup>29</sup>

For Prantl, it is not merely the show of obedience that is required, but the fact that it ought to be an external demonstration of the change of heart outlined by Wedekind above. Prantl equates ‘seelische Lauterkeit’ with the ‘Hochzeitsgewand’, which corresponds to internal purity and its external display. It is true that Prantl’s meaning is partly that which Best described, for Prantl is the representative of the Church and therefore there is an institutional demonstration of obedience that is required of

27. See my chapter on *Der Marquis von Keith*, p. 91.

28. *Nb* 18, 31’.

29. Alan Best, ‘The Censor Censored: An Approach to *Die Zensur*’, *German Life and Letters*, 26 (1973), 278-87 (p. 284).

Buridan, but Prantl is not merely trying to persuade Buridan to go through the motions of a marriage ceremony: he wants Buridan quite literally to don the 'Hochzeitsgewand', which will involve him bringing not only his relationship, but also his whole life under the authority of the Church.<sup>30</sup> Buridan has hinted to Prantl that he wishes to marry Kadidja, and it is what this implies in terms of submitting to the authority of the Church rather than the act itself that is important. That Buridan understands this is indicated by his response to Prantl's threat that, without the appropriate *anima candida*, he will be condemned to hell:

Darin bewährt sich der untülbare Fluch, den ich in dieses Erdendasein mitbekommen habe! Was ich mit dem tiefsten Ernst meiner Überzeugung ausspreche, halten die Menschen für Lästerungen. Soll ich mich nun deshalb in Widerspruch mit meiner Überzeugung setzen? Soll ich mit klarstem Bewußtsein unecht, unaufrichtig, unwahr werden, damit die Menschen an meine Aufrichtigkeit glauben? Um das tun zu können, müßte ich der Lästerer sein, für den mich die Menschen halten! (V, 124)

He draws his self-justification from a number of sources here: first, there is the notion of the curse, the excuse that he can do nothing about the way he was made. Ernst Scholz in *Der Marquis von Keith* also argues that it is a curse which has made him the way he is. Then Buridan argues that the authority to which he is obedient is his 'Überzeugung'. Just as Karl Hetmann is committed to pursuing the path he believes to be true, even though it is opposed by most of society, so Buridan argues that he must follow his own sense of what is right. His claim to be honest rests on the disagreement between his living according to his own convictions and those which will be imposed on him by the dogmatic authorities of the Church. He is justified in terms of his desire to live according to the dictates of his *Wille*, rather than denying it, and is arguing that it is better to live genuinely according to his own feelings, rather than falsely under an external authority in which he does not believe.

30. Wedekind's manuscript reveals that he also considered baptism as a means of Buridan's showing his submission to the will of the Church. Prantl says: 'Ich kenne *zwei* Angelegenheiten, in denen Sie sich mir anvertraut haben. Die eine ist Ihr Wunsch, die heilige Taufe zu empfangen, die Ihnen in Ihrem Elternhaus, wo, wie Sie sagen, die größte religiöse Gleichgültigkeit herrschte, vorenthalten blieb.' (Nb 44, 39<sup>v</sup>. cf. V, 121-22.) This is another autobiographical detail, for Tilly Wedekind reports that she did not believe Wedekind himself had been baptized as a child (Tilly Wedekind, p. 106).

His attempts to behave honestly under these terms are what he equates with rational behaviour, and he uses this combination of ideas as the basis for his own notion of religion. Though it is an individualistic sense of the religious, he claims that it is fundamentally the same belief shared by everyone: ‘die ewige Gesetzmäßigkeit, vor der wir alle demütig auf den Knien liegen’ (V, 125). To illustrate its universality, he makes a brief comparison with Christianity:

Ich verstehe unter ewiger Gesetzmäßigkeit dasselbe, was der Evangelist Johannes den Logos nennt. Ich verstehe darunter dasselbe, was die gesamte Christenheit als *Heiligen Geist* anbetet. In keiner meiner Arbeiten habe ich das Gute als schlecht oder das Schlechte als gut hingestellt. Ich habe die Folgen, die dem Menschen aus seinen Handlungen erwachsen, nirgends gefälscht. Ich habe diese Folgen überall immer nur in ihrer unerbittlichen Notwendigkeit zur Anschauung gebracht. (V, 125)

As the Marquis von Keith took elements of the Bible and interpreted them in such a way as to support his cause, so Buridan redefines theological terms to reinforce his own position. He implies that the ‘Logos’ and the ‘Heiliger Geist’ are the same and that the Christian understanding of them is really just a variation on his own way of thinking. Once again Wedekind is presenting religious ideas as independent concepts that are available to anyone who wishes to express any kind of opinion. His use is particularly ironic here, for what Buridan is building up is a case for his religion of pure reason, as John Hibberd argues: ‘Buridan believes that the comfort brought by religion is knowledge of a meaningful, ordered existence of “ewige Gesetzmäßigkeit”. He worships that supposed system of laws and is happy to call it the Word or the Holy Ghost. His God is a rational system.’<sup>31</sup>

Buridan’s religious ideas are a variation on Keith’s religion of self-assertion. His worship is not merely of his own ego, but is, rather, a worship of the concept of religion itself, albeit with himself at the centre. Like Wedekind’s definition of the ‘göttlich’, Buridan’s religion encompasses whatever suits him. He endeavours to explain this to Prantl:

Darin eben besteht doch gerade die Göttlichkeit der Religion, daß sie als ewige Herrscherin in unerreichbarer Höhe über allen Wandlungen des Menschengestes

31. Hibberd, ‘Die Wiedervereinigung’, p. 55.



thront! [...] Die Religion ist vor allem die hilfreiche Trösterin im Unglück. [...] Die Religion lehrt uns jedes beliebige Unglück, das unsere menschliche Berechnung durchkreuzen möchte, von vornherein berechnen. Die Religion hat den größten und einzigen Feind des Menschen, sie hat den *Zufall* in Ketten geworfen.<sup>32</sup> Die Religion schlägt einen glänzenden Saltomortale über unsere jämmerliche Ohnmacht, in der wir ohne sie der Willkür des Schicksals überantwortet sind. Wer ihre göttliche Unüberwindlichkeit einmal erkannt hat, der sagt mit nüchternster Geistesruhe: Tod, wo ist dein Stachel! Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg! (V, 126)

Religion itself takes on the roles – that are traditionally ascribed to God – of eternal ruler and comforter, because it has a mystical power beyond that of reason, for it can explain coincidence. Buridan even draws on a biblical reference to conclude. The verse he quotes is I Corinthians 15. 55, which comes at the end of a passage Paul wrote describing the promise of eternal life, and consequently the victory over death. By identifying coincidence rather than death as the greatest enemy of humanity, Buridan is establishing an alternative purpose for religion in a world that has lost its belief in the hereafter. Religion becomes the ‘Trösterin im Unglück’, because anything inexplicable or tragic can be given a meaning in the realms of the religious. At the point where reason runs out, Buridan can fill in any gaps that remain with whatever will fit from his understanding of religion. This notion of religion is flexible enough to serve the same purpose for everyone and Prantl summarizes this disdainfully as ‘die Kunstfertigkeit, auf jede Frage eine Antwort zu finden und aus jeder Klemme einen Ausweg zu finden’ (V, 127). Buridan essentially agrees with this verdict, for he responds: ‘auf jeden Fall kenne ich nichts Bedauernswürdigeres auf dieser Welt als einen Dummkopf, der nicht an Gott glaubt!’ (V, 127).<sup>33</sup> The nature of this ‘Gott’ is

32. In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Immanuel Kant uses the nature of coincidence to support the case for the existence of a transcendent: ‘Sie beruht auf dem vermeintlich transcendentalen Naturgesetz der Causalität: Daß alles Zufällige seine Ursache habe, die, wenn sie wiederum zufällig ist, eben sowohl eine Ursache haben muß, bis die Reihe der einander untergeordneten Ursachen sich bei einer schlechthin notwendigen Ursache endigen muß, ohne welche sie keine Vollständigkeit haben würde.’ (*Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, III, 404-05n.) Buridan is describing the concomitant argument, that coincidence can be explained by religion.

33. In a letter to Georg Brandes, Wedekind explained that the point of Buridan’s argument was not that only a *Dummkopf* would not believe in God, but that ‘ein Mensch der nicht denken kann, dem das Einmaleins nicht zur Verfügung steht,

unimportant: the crucial factor is that it is the personification of his own idiosyncratic notion of religion.

This is set up in opposition to the conventional religion of which Prantl is a spokesman. Prantl's assertion that religion has nothing to do with reason establishes a polarity between Buridan's reason and Prantl's faith. Prantl argues, 'ein Mensch von sittlichen Empfindungen *kann* seine eigenen Gedanken nicht zu Ende denken! Das ist ein Ding der Unmöglichkeit! Wozu bedürften wir denn des Glaubens, wenn wir mit unserer Vernunft auskämen!' (V, 127). He expands on his argument by saying that the very nature of religion makes it unknowable: 'Ein wahrhaft gläubiger Mensch kann über seinen Glauben ebensowenig sprechen, wie ein wahrhaft keusches Mädchen über seine Keuschheit sprechen kann' (*ibid.*). Prantl's refusal to explain his apparently irrational belief means Buridan will never accept it. As such, Prantl's method for trying to persuade Buridan to come under the authority of the Church has no hope of succeeding. By excluding the possibility of rational discussion, he gives Buridan only the option of agreeing with him out of blind faith. Ulrike Sattel notes in this debate the significance of Prantl's Roman Catholicism, because of the Catholic Church's insistence on its believers' obedience to dogma:

Hier legt Wedekind eine Tendenz speziell innerhalb der katholischen Kirche offen, welche aber im gesamten gegenwärtigen Gesellschaftssystem zum Tragen kommt, nämlich daß rationale Analyse und Kritik nur soweit geduldet werden, wie sie nicht zu den Grundlagen verstoßen; die Grenze, ab wann solches Vorgehen gewaltsam von der Institution gestoppt wird, ist dabei fließend.<sup>34</sup>

As Prantl avoids discussing doctrine, it is not possible to discern where he believes these acceptable boundaries lie. Indeed, according to his argument, they do not even occur, for true faith is not a matter for discussion; it simply exists. Buridan objects to this because his whole

kann nichts besseres tun als an Gott zu glauben, da er in der Religion die Resultate menschlichen Denkens wenigstens in groben allgemeingültigen Normen gebrauchsfähig vorfindet' (Bohnen, p. 113). Thus the less one is able to use one's reason to gain an understanding of the world, the more inexplicable phenomena there will be that can otherwise be explained by this notion of God. With neither an idea of God behind everything, nor a satisfactory rational explanation, the world will be a very confusing place for the *Dummkopf* concerned.

34. Sattel, p. 177.

notion of religion is individualistic: an individual experience of the religious cannot exist within a framework of dogmatic authority, for it will become mere submission. Moreover, in Prantl's case, it is an irrational submission: if it could be explained rationally, it would no longer be pure belief.<sup>35</sup> Prantl's silence instead provides Buridan with the opportunity to outline what he believes, and Buridan goes as far as using ecclesiastical imagery to explain himself:

Ich finde, daß in dem ganzen Riesendom unseres Glaubens die Vernunft niemals aufhört. Ich finde im Gegenteil, daß die höchste Spitze dieses herrlichen Gebäudes aus der höchsten, auf ewig unübersteigbaren Entfaltung der Vernunft besteht. Ich finde, daß jeder Pfeiler, jedes Gewölbe dieses Gebäudes nur durch die Vernunft in unerschütterlichen Gleichgewicht festgehalten wird, nur durch die Vernunft seit Jahrtausenden gegen Wolkenbruch, gegen jedes Erdbeben gesichert ist. (V, 127-28)

This nominally sincere use of the image of an indestructible cathedral-in-the-air of reason is, in fact, highly suspect. Buridan has already mentioned 'reine Vernunft' in relation to the Prussian censor (V, 124),<sup>36</sup> and his apparent worship of reason here would suggest that the cathedral he describes has been built in honour of a Kantian notion of God.<sup>37</sup> However, the mere fact that this enormous edifice exists solely in Buridan's imagination and represents such a paradox – a cathedral to reason – suggests that Wedekind's real purpose in using such an image is to illustrate Buridan's inability to reconcile his ideas with the world in which he is living. Buridan goes on to claim that he has been trying to

35. This has one major advantage in relation to Wedekind's argument that he wished to be taken seriously: by not allowing Prantl to describe his faith at all, Wedekind does not run into any of the difficulties that might have ensued had he seemed to be criticizing Prantl or his beliefs.
36. A reference to Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (see *Werke*, ed. Weidl, II, 799). Apart from this, there are few explicit references to Kant in Wedekind's works, though Wilhelm Emrich notes an occasion when Wedekind was reported to have said: 'Es gibt und gab überhaupt nur einen einzigen wirklichen Kenner der Frauen [...] Immanuel Kant'. ('Immanuel Kant und Frank Wedekind', in *Polemik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum Verlag, 1968), pp. 56-61 (p. 56).)
37. 'Der Begriff Gott ist eine "Idee", das "Ideal" der Vernunft. [...] Die Idee Gottes dient zum Abschluß der Ethik und [...] ist das höchste in uns lebendige Ideal für unsere Streben.' (Rudolf Eisler, 'Gott', in *Kant-Lexikon: Nachschlagewerk zu Kants sämtlichen Schriften*, ed. by the author (Berlin: Mittler, 1929; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), pp. 216-24 (pp. 216-17).)

establish ‘die Wiedervereinigung von Heiligkeit und Schönheit als göttliches Idol gläubiger Andacht’ (V, 131), an objective that there is no sign of him achieving. Similarly, the only place where he can establish a union of his reason and religion is inside his own imagination. There is a vast gulf between idea and reality, between what can be glimpsed with the human spirit and what reality actually involves.<sup>38</sup> As such, Wedekind once again, as with Karl Hetmann, depicts a well-intentioned protagonist’s unfulfillable aspirations, and at the end the despair that succeeds his sudden, crushing realization that he is doomed to failure.

The confused cathedral-metaphor is a signal to Prantl that Buridan’s thinking is somewhat unstable, and Prantl tries to capitalize on this possible weakness by summing up all his objections to Buridan’s metaphysics in one question, that of whether or not Buridan believes in the immortality of the soul. Buridan’s response, ‘ich sehe sie bewiesen durch jedes Lied, das gesungen wird’ (V, 128), seems to be an attempt to perceive an eternal value in the beauty of music, which draws on Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean notions of musical transcendence. Nietzsche, in his *Geburt der Tragödie*, cites Schopenhauer: ‘Alle möglichen Bestrebungen, Erregungen und Äußerungen des Willens, alle jene Vorgänge im Innern des Menschen, welche die Vernunft in den weiten negativen Begriff Gefühl wirft, sind durch die unendlich vielen möglichen Melodien auszudrücken’.<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche then continues the argument:

Erst aus dem Geiste der Musik heraus verstehen wir eine Freude an der Vernichtung des Individuums. Denn an den einzelnen Beispielen einer solchen Vernichtung wird uns nur das ewige Phänomen der dionysischen Kunst deutlich gemacht, die den Willen in seiner Allmacht gleichsam hinter dem principio individuationis, das ewige Leben jenseit aller Erscheinung und trotz aller Vernichtung zum Ausdruck bringt. [...] ‘Wir glauben an das ewige Leben’, so ruft die Tragödie; während die Musik die unmittelbare Idee dieses Lebens ist.<sup>40</sup>

38. In his letter to Georg Brandes, Wedekind wrote that his aim in writing *Die Zensur* had been ‘die Wiedervereinigung von Kirche und Freudenhaus im sozialistischen Zukunftsstaat’ (Bohnen, p. 113). Nothing in the play, however, suggests that he came anywhere near actually carrying out this intention.

39. Nietzsche, *Werke*, section 3, vol I, p. 101.

40. *ibid.*, p. 104.

Though this might provide the theoretical background for Buridan's answer to the question, it relies on a reverence for the transcendence of music that is not evinced elsewhere in Buridan's life. He is, for instance, no longer particularly moved by or even interested in Kadidja's performance of his songs (V, 111-13). Thus although it could feasibly fit into his world-view, it is rather an incongruous element in Buridan's argument, for it depends on an idealization of music which is not a feature of the rest of his defence. That this line seems out of place may be explained by the fact that it was a late addition by Wedekind: the first edition of the play implied that Buridan was answering in the negative, because the line was omitted altogether.<sup>41</sup> Wedekind's original draft offers another alternative:

ER Sie wollen Christ sein? Können Sie denn bei Ihren Ansichten an eine Unsterblichkeit der Seele glauben?  
 ICH Ganz bestimmt weiß ich es nicht, daß die Seele unsterblich ist, aber ich will es Ihnen glauben.<sup>42</sup>

What emerges from Buridan's unwillingness to commit himself here is a reluctance to speak specifically about his personal beliefs. His discourses are concerned with theories, systems and institutions, rather than the individual response to them. He uses religious terminology and speaks of sacrifice and reconciliation in his attempts to appease Prantl, which identifies him as a *fin de siècle* artist, but it emerges that his own systems are insufficient, because he ultimately reveals what he claims is his real reason for summoning Prantl, which is his desire to share in the spiritual world to which Prantl and his Church have access. He concludes with an apparent statement of commitment to his cause: 'Ich wüßte auch nichts, was mir in dieser Welt so lieb wäre, daß ich es nicht kalten Blutes opferte, wenn mich das Opfer mit dem, was ich als Höchstes, als Ewiges anbete, aussöhnen könnte' (V, 130).<sup>43</sup> The picture of what exactly it is with which he wants to be reconciled is unclear, for

41. Prantl asks: 'Glauben Sie an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele?' Buridan replies: 'Ich kann Ihnen aus tiefstem Herzen versprechen, daß ich Sie solcher Meinungsverschiedenheiten wegen niemals anfeinden werde.' (Frank Wedekind, *Die Zensur: Theodizee in einem Akt* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1908), p. 47. cf. V, 128.)

42. *Nb* 44, 33<sup>v</sup>-33<sup>v</sup>.

43. A similar sentiment is voiced by Elias in his opening monologue in *Elins Erweckung* (IX, 4).

he wishes to retain his independent thinking, and yet share in Prantl's spiritual realm which demands submission of that independence. It is as if he is deliberately using the language of religion to draw attention away from his lack of focus and trying to persuade Prantl of his religious seriousness whilst not actually confessing any kind of religious belief. His stress on institutional rather than individual belief is shared by Prantl's Roman Catholicism, for Catholic teaching, in contrast with that of the Protestant churches, demands external authority, rather than self-regulation. Dr Anton Koch described the crucial difference in his *Lehrbuch der Moraltheologie*:

Da die katholische Moral auf dem Dogma aufgebaut ist, so wirkt jede Änderung der Glaubenslehre auch auf die Sittenlehre ein. Darum stellt sich die katholische Moral in Gegensatz zu der protestantischen Ethik, und zwar ist der Unterschied zwischen beiden ein prinzipieller. Denn nach katholischer Lehre gilt einmal wie für das Gebiet des Glaubens so auch für das der Moral die Kirche als unfehlbare Lehrautorität, während der Protestantismus für beide einer objektiven Regel entbehrt und deshalb dem Subjektivismus und dem Irrtum preisgegeben ist. Sodann ist nach katholischer Anschauung die Heilige Schrift auch für die Sittenlehre nicht die einzige Erkenntnisquelle, die Willensfreiheit weder durch die Sünde noch durch die Gnade aufgehoben, vielmehr als wesentlicher Faktor der Sittlichkeit gefordert und die Mitwirkung der freien Willens-tätigkeit als absolut notwendig erklärt.<sup>44</sup>

Thus according to Roman Catholic teaching, moral decisions involve questions of obedience to what the Church teaches rather than personal discernment, and the emphasis is on working towards perfection by submitting to the dictates of the Church. It is subjection to this formal control over every aspect of his life that Prantl demands of Buridan in telling him he must don the 'Hochzeitsgewand', and within this framework there will no longer be any room for his own freedom of movement. As Schröder-Zebralla argues, there is a parallel with Prantl's role as a censor:

Prantls Stellung als 'Sekretär des Beichtvaters seiner Mäjestät' läßt darauf schließen, daß Wedekind einen möglichen Zusammenhang von kirchlichem und staatlichem Interesse aufdecken will. Darüberhinaus wird die lustfeindliche Haltung der Kirche noch hervorgehoben; Zensur und Geistlichkeit treten in einer

44. Koch, p. 4.

Person gegen die Sinnlichkeit auf. [...] Wedekind verbindet mit der Darstellung eines geistlichen Zensors religiösen und öffentlichen Aspekt der Zensur.<sup>45</sup>

Just as the Church will restrict Buridan's behaviour, so the censor will restrict what he presents on the stage. In both cases, however, it will go against what his own personal ethic tells him he should do. This is what drives him to write about what he describes as 'die unvermeidlichen Folgen menschlicher Handlungen' (V, 130). Prantl questions his motivation in choosing unsavoury subjects for his plays, and Buridan's response is to argue that his writing actually affirms life and is therefore good:

Wenn mir die Schilderung des Unglücks Genugtuung bereitet, so habe ich dafür auch ebensoviel getan, um die *Freuden* unseres irdischen Daseins in all ihrer ursprünglichen Pracht und Herrlichkeit wieder aufleben zu lassen! Das ist mein höchster Stolz, daß mich auch die erdenklichsten Widerwärtigkeiten nicht in die Reihen der Verneiner, der Pessimisten zu drängen vermöchten! (V, 131)

This is the opposite to the world as restricted within the boundaries of Church and censor – one in which it will be possible to depict the heights of joy as well as the depths of despair. His self-justification is therefore based on an apparent life-affirming tendency in his work, which he goes on to explain: 'An der Schönheit der Weltgesetze haben wir keine Freude. Vor den Gesetzen weltlicher Schönheit hegen wir keine Achtung. Die Wiedervereinigung von Heiligkeit und Schönheit als göttliches Idol gläubiger Andacht, das ist das Ziel, dem ich mein Leben opfere' (V, 131). It is, however, difficult here to ascertain what exactly he means by this. Even if he were able to discern what the beautiful, natural laws he mentions were, the action of identifying them and placing a human framework around them would remove any of the mysticism that might otherwise surround them and make them praiseworthy. This all also presupposes that it might be possible to identify the essence of beauty, to categorize it in such a way as to be able to bring it into line with the laws that supposedly govern it. Like his imaginary cathedral of reason, Buridan's religion is too insubstantial to be any more than an impressive-sounding conceit, especially as his transposition of the parts of the words 'Schönheit der Weltgesetze' and 'Gesetze weltlicher

45. Schröder-Zebralla, pp. 28-29.

Schönheit' makes his argument sound more like a well-rehearsed, extravagant and ultimately empty piece of rhetoric than a plausible philosophical aim.

To add to the overall process of mystification, he then says that he can acknowledge no higher god than 'die höchste Entfaltung der uns offenbarten Vernunft, [...] weil das höchste, das edelste Ergebnis der uns offenbarten Vernunft die *menschliche Güte* ist' (V, 131-32). In arguing that the highest aim for the striving of human reason is this 'menschliche Güte', it seems that he is appropriating a Kantian ideal.<sup>46</sup> Buridan is arguing, however, that reason itself is the product of revelation and, in effect, that the object of his striving is capable of revealing itself in rational terms, which contradicts the idea of Kant's unknowable God. Buridan's God of reason is both the deification of the ideal for which he has been striving, and what gives him the ability to strive in the first place, inasmuch as it is the divine 'revelation' of reason that he requires to keep going. This faith in reason is, like the pseudo-Christianity of Keith, a religious idea he uses to prop up his own world-view; but unlike Keith, he has not allied his religion with an unshakeable self-belief. Ultimately, it is this self-belief which Buridan will lack, when the values on which he bases his life are demolished. Like Elias's Christianity in *Elins Erweckung*, Karl Hetmann's philosophies or Casti-Piani's smug self-assurance concerning the rightness of prostitution in *Tod und Teufel*, Buridan's 'Religion' is merely an ill thought-out method for dealing with the world. It is evident that Prantl's Roman Catholicism, though it could be accused of being just another such system, serves him very well. He, however, possesses a stability that is not shared by Buridan. So it would seem that what Wedekind is portraying is not so much that the systems themselves are necessarily at fault, but what the individual's response will be to the collapse of such a system. For his protagonists, it usually results in their total collapse too.<sup>47</sup> If it is assumed that these systems are all illusions which separate the characters from real life, the

46. 'Der "Endzweck der reinen praktischen Vernunft" ist "das höchste Gut, sofern es in der Welt möglich ist".' ('Gut, höchstes', in *Kant-Lexikon*, pp. 237-39 (p. 238).)

47. The ability to cope with a crushing blow to one's world-view and bounce back is a characteristic described by Wedekind in his essays 'Zirkusgedanken' and 'Der Witz und seine Sippe'. He refers to it as 'Elastizität' and it is a theme of his early play *Fritz Schwigerling (Der Liebestrank)*. (See: Höger, *Der Konstruktivismus*, pp. 63-66; *Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, IV, 463).



removal of such illusion is not the opportunity to embrace a deeper experience of life, but the cause of a character's complete breakdown.

Buridan's collapse is initiated by the coincidence of Kadidja's arrival, which is seemingly at precisely the moment where Prantl has given her what he subsequently takes to be the cue to arrive in her own 'wedding-gown' – the costume intended for her performance in the 'Hochzeitsballett' of Buridan's play the following evening. Prantl's words point towards the significance of this moment: 'Da ist er schon – der Feind! der Versucher! – die Schlange des Paradieses!' (V, 133). His belief that her innocent arrival has been pre-arranged leads to his hurried departure, and with that the departure of Buridan's chance of proving the seriousness of his intentions and having the ban on his work removed. Prantl's comparison of Kadidja with the serpent and Eve draws on the imagery of the biblical Fall to explain the present situation. Prantl sees a literal application of the line ascribed to Buridan of 'die Wiedervereinigung von Kirche und Freudenhaus' (V, 133). Worse still, he explains that Buridan has taken the extraordinary risk of not merely literally tempting Prantl through Kadidja, but of offending against his fellow human beings and, ultimately, of testing God:

Sie spotten eines jeden, der Sie ernst nimmt. Und dem ersten, der Ihrer spottet, zerschmettern Sie wenn möglich die Schläfen. Vielleicht ist Ihnen aber doch das Gebot bekannt: 'Du sollst Gott nicht versuchen!' Sie werden sich wohl noch einmal davon überzeugen, daß kein Sterblicher, und stehe er noch so selbstherrlich in der Welt, ungestraft die ewige Allmacht versucht. (V, 134)

The commandment he cites is also Christ's response to the second of Satan's temptations, where Satan tempts Christ to throw himself off the temple roof.<sup>48</sup> The play takes place three stories up, and ultimately, Kadidja throws herself off the building; but no angel comes to rescue her. Indeed, the play opens with Kadidja putting Buridan to the test by pretending to have thrown herself from the balcony to see how he might respond to her death (V, 109). According to Prantl's perception, Buridan

48. Da führte ihn der Teufel mit sich in die heilige Stadt und stellte ihn auf die Zinne des Tempels und sprach zu ihm: 'Bist du Gottes Sohn, so wirf dich hinab; denn es steht geschrieben: "Er wird seinen Engeln deinetwegen Befehl geben; und sie werden dich auf den Händen tragen, damit du deinen Fuß nicht an einen Stein stößt."' Da sprach Jesus zu ihm: 'Wiederum steht auch geschrieben: "Du sollst den Herrn, deinen Gott, nicht versuchen."' (Matthew 4. 5-7).

has been putting him to the test, culminating in the temptation of Kadidja. But Prantl has also been tempting Buridan to reject his personal persuasions and come under the authority of the Church. From his warning, it is possible to identify Prantl's perception of himself in the role of the innocent Adam and Eve in Eden, overcoming the serpent's temptation; he then proceeds to imply that, in trying to tempt a priest – God's representative – Buridan has effectively tried to tempt God himself and warns Buridan against what Buridan then proceeds to do – to put his own notion of God to the test.

With Prantl's departure, the varied and complicated forms of temptation crystallize into just one: Kadidja's tempting Buridan away from his authorial path. The final scene depicts Buridan's own attempts to play the part of God. Kadidja is dressed in the costume that she wears to speak his lines in his play and is as much under his authority as it is possible for her to be. All the same, as he perceives himself to be 'ein Tier', she looks in the mirror and sees 'ein Engel' (V, 136-37), so his increasingly earthly divinity is contrasted with the process of apotheosis she undergoes. He then acts as her censor, pronouncing what it is acceptable for her to do and to wear, in order to reduce her power over him. Finally, he cries out: 'ich habe dich nach meinem Belieben geschaffen, ich werde dich nach meinem Belieben umschaffen!' (V, 138). He has made himself a self-proclaimed god, creating and passing judgement on Kadidja and claiming to have authority over her. It is at this moment, however, that she breaks away. She literally undergoes a fall which brings freedom and death for her, whilst simultaneously being the sacrifice he was demanding to reunite him with the spiritual world he had lost.

To appreciate the significance of the Fall-imagery here, it is helpful to recall the essay Wedekind wrote on 'Der Sündenfall', which was published as part of his *Nachlaß* in the project entitled 'Die Jungfrau'. In it, he describes the biblical Fall-narrative as 'eine Theodizee, eine Antwort auf die Frage: wie kommt das Unglück in diese Welt?' (IX, 198). He argues that the serpent represents reason, and tempts the man and the woman to become '*gleichwertig* mit Gott' (*ibid.*). Various critics have identified a connection between the fragment and *Die Zensur*.<sup>49</sup>

49. See: Hibberd, 'Die Wiedervereinigung', p. 59; Schröder-Zebralla, pp. 12-16; Shaw, pp. 31-32; Sattel, p. 183.

While the two theodicies are clearly related, there is one presupposition Wedekind makes in this essay which renders its application to the play problematic. He writes:

*Gott, das Gesetz verleugnet und verdammt seinen eigenen Ursprung, die Erkenntnis. – Warum? – Weil Glaube an Gott und Gehorsam gegenüber dem Gesetz zu Vertrauen, zur Behaglichkeit und zum Lebensgenuß führen. Die fortgesetzt freie Erkenntnis, die Herrschaft der Klugheit, das Urteil von Fall zu Fall sind gleichbedeutend mit Mißtrauen, Unsicherheit und Ruhelosigkeit. (IX, 199)*

The man and woman become like God because they also partake of that reason which he writes is the origin of God. Wedekind argues that the life they have rejected would involve ‘Vertrauen, Behaglichkeit und Lebensgenuß’ which, in the circumstances, are supposed to have a negative association, in lacking the excitement and possibilities available on the alternative path. He argues that it is worth experiencing the discomfort because of the challenge and opportunities for development that become available to humankind. On the one hand, the Church can offer the security rejected by the man and woman; on the other, reason – effectively liberation – is set up against it and will provide ‘Mißtrauen, Unsicherheit und Ruhelosigkeit’.

The problem with its application to *Die Zensur* is that it requires an entirely different understanding of what ‘Vernunft’ involves. In the ‘Jungfrau’-fragment, it is reason that is set up in opposition to God, and represents liberation and individualism, ‘das Urteil von Fall zu Fall’ (IX, 199). The reason Buridan proclaims, which has ‘die menschliche Güte’ as its aim, would presumably lead to a world more like the prelapsarian one left behind in ‘Die Jungfrau’. Thus on the one hand, Buridan desires the goodness inherent in Kantian rationalism; on the other, it is reason that, according to the fragment, led to the loss of this world.

The apparent inconsistencies involved in the application of the ‘Jungfrau’-passage can be resolved when it is seen that the theodicy of *Die Zensur* is not based on that of ‘Die Jungfrau’, but it is in fact the other way round.<sup>50</sup> In the essay, he writes that the ‘Ursprung’ of God is

50. *Die Zensur* was completed in December 1907 (Kutscher, III, 38), and Wedekind worked on ‘Die Jungfrau’ in the summer of 1908 (*ibid.*, III, 163). Schröder-Zebralla erroneously interprets this fragment of ‘Die Jungfrau’ as the fundamental exposition of Wedekind’s thinking on matters of religion and then brings it to bear

‘die Erkenntnis’, which makes the same presupposition – that reason is God – that Buridan has made; but the essay is not concerned with the conflict between reason and God. The fragment concerned with the ‘Sündenfall’ is part of a much larger discussion of the origins of human ‘Schamgefühl’ (IX, 194-204). The realization of the man and woman that they are naked is related to the overall discussion of shame. Immediately before Wedekind’s discussion of the Fall, three biblical verses are quoted which relate to the shame of Adam and Eve: ‘Bibelzitate I. Moses 2, 25; 3, 7; 3, 10’ (IX, 198).<sup>51</sup> The second part of his exposition of the Fall in the fragment is his argument that nakedness was deemed sinful because, although it was not sinful in itself, this could not exactly be proved: the evil of nakedness simply had to be believed, which made it ‘das absolut Böse, das unerklärlich Böse, das Böse an sich’ (IX, 199). He is trying to find a way to correlate the shame of nakedness with the notion of its sinfulness, as part of a discussion of whether shame is the product of nature or nurture. As with his interpretations of the Gospels, he concentrates on specific aspects of the Fall narrative and ignores others, to illustrate a point he is trying to make: that shame is a human construct. He does not mention Adam and Eve by name, nor their actual disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit; instead, he focuses on one of the consequences of their disobedience: the realization of their nakedness and their subsequent experience of shame.

The significance of the essay has therefore been somewhat overstated in relation to what Wedekind actually seems to have meant it to discuss, but nevertheless, it is clear that in it, he returns to some of the principles that have emerged in the play. The last scene of *Die Zensur*, for instance, itself contains a discussion of nakedness: Buridan tells Kadidja that from now on, he will censor her, to cover her up. When she is standing before him in her flimsy ‘Hochzeitsgewand’, he tells her: ‘du kannst deinen Körper vor meinen Augen so bezaubernd zur Schau stellen, wie es dir irgendwie möglich ist. Aber der Schaustellung müssen

retrospectively on what he had written before. She argues, for example: ‘in Wedekinds Auslegung des Sündenfalls liegt der Schlüssel zu seiner Religionsauffassung’ (p. 14).

51. In the notebooks from which these extracts are taken, Wedekind writes out the verses in full. (*Nb* 53, 46<sup>r</sup>-47<sup>v</sup>).

ebenso viele höchste menschliche Werte das Gleichgewicht halten!’ (V, 137). What these ‘höchste menschliche Werte’ are, however, is difficult to ascertain. In setting himself up as her ‘censor’, he says he will allow her to be uncovered only in a context that places her in a position of vulnerability in relation to him:<sup>52</sup>

Kadidja! Wenn du über die Straße gehst, dann besteht der Zensor darauf, daß du ein langes Kleid trägst. Dir droht keine Lebensgefahr; deshalb hindert er dich, das Leben anderer zu gefährden. Wenn du aber im Zirkus als Kunstreiterin reitest und nicht vom Pferde stürzest, ohne deine Glieder zu brechen, dann gestattet dir der Zensor gern, mit allen Reizen deines Körpers zu wirken. (V, 137)

To illustrate this point, he then tells the story of a woman in Palermo who performed a striptease on an elastic high-wire suspended over knives and, at the end of her act, donned a long coat and disappeared behind a curtain. He argues that sensuality, if it is not itself threatened, is a danger to others and must be concealed. Kadidja’s own sensuality is torturing him and must suffer the same fate: ‘Kadidja, deine Eitelkeit ist mir eine Folterqual. Zieh ein Reformkleid an, Kadidja! Zieh ein Reformkleid an! Ich verdurste nach Geschmacklosigkeit, nach unergründlicher Seelentiefe, in der ich mich vor allem, was Sinnlichkeit ist, verkriechen kann!’ (V, 138). Nakedness, or unmasked sensuality, is a danger to his well-being. This is the sense in which it is defined in ‘Die Jungfrau’, for it becomes the danger which threatens the ordered life that follows obedience to God. It is a significant step from Wedekind’s initial premise, that the gaining of reason made humans like God, to defining nakedness as an evil, but in Buridan’s case it can be seen that his pursuit of reason makes him yearn for greater order and spirituality, whilst Kadidja’s sensuality prevents him from being able to do so.

It is in this sense that *Die Zensur* is, as Wedekind wrote, a theodicy: it is a reworking on several levels of the Fall-narrative, complete, ultimately, with an equivalent to Christ’s salvation. The constellation in *Die Zensur* is complicated and shifting, but can roughly be summarized as Prantl the censor having authority over – and thus playing God to – Buridan’s Adam, and Buridan playing at being Kadidja’s God. Buridan’s rebellion is against the censor-God. Kadidja’s

52. In the last scene of *Schloß Wetterstein*, Tschamper refuses to allow Effie to undress, because he knows that she will then wield too much power over him.

apparent temptation of Prantl breaks the commandment not to tempt 'God', and the consequence of this is that he leaves the two 'sinners', like God abandoning Adam and Eve. His departure also represents the departure of Buridan's hope of seeing his plays performed, which leaves him in isolation: 'Isolation stellt eine tödliche Bedrohung der physischen und psychischen Existenz des Kunstproduzenten dar, dessen Arbeit doch völlig auf geistigen und ökonomischen Austausch ausgerichtet ist; Isolation ist die "Hölle"'.<sup>53</sup> Shortly after this, however, Kadidja provides his salvation – his opportunity to be united with his spiritual world – through her sacrificial death, which is itself literally another fall. So her death redeems him from his artistic and creative death, whilst itself being a rebellion against his authority in the same way Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Rather as Molly's death in *Der Marquis von Keith* releases Keith from his responsibility to her bourgeois values, so Kadidja leaves Buridan to his spiritual pursuits.

It is, however, only a half-salvation: she provides no answers to the questions raised by Prantl's visit, for censorship prevails over Buridan's plays just as much as it did before. But Buridan has had removed the sensual distraction that Kadidja turned out to be. As she herself puts it: 'ich habe dich mit deiner Gedankenwelt verfeindet; ich werde dich deiner Gedankenwelt zurückgeben!' (V, 139). He may not be able to have his works performed, but he will, at least, be able to write them, because the embodiment of *Leben* kills herself to enable the writer of plays evoking *Leben* to continue his work.

Buridan's subsequent feeble attempts to prevent her throwing herself over the balcony reflect his sudden realization of his powerlessness in the face of her desire for liberation. As part of her own freedom, she also says she will be returning Buridan's to him: 'Ich gebe dir deine Freiheit zurück! – Komm nicht näher, glücklicher Buridan! Sonst bist du Mörder!' (V, 139). But the liberation she offers seems to throw him back to what is a very traditional notion of God, a being to whom humans turn when they are pushed to the edge of what they can bear, for he cries out:

Herr! Herr! Vater des Himmels und der Erde! Hilf uns! Hilf mir! Hilf! Wenn sie hinabfährt, ist ein Menschenleben hin! Welch ein Menschenleben! Ich habe

53. Sattel, pp. 174-75.

gespottet! Herr im Himmel, ist das die Rache?! Sei barmherzig, Vater im Himmel! Du allein kannst helfen! Ich will dir dienen und deine Macht verkünden, solange ich lebe! – Hilf meiner armen Kadidja! Sie ist das herrlichste Geschöpf, die größte Seele, die in deiner Schöpfung lebt... (V, 140)

Kadidja has left him in a situation where he cannot approach her, or she will let go, but nor can he turn away from her. Like his namesake's donkey, he does not know which way he should go. But rather than dying as the result of his indecision as the donkey did, he prays in desperation to that same God feared by Elias, Geschwitz and Scholz: not out of any real conviction, but because all else has failed him. He is reduced to making feeble, desperate promises, such as, 'ich will dir dienen und deine Macht verkünden, solange ich lebe!'

Despite how it might appear, however, this does not mean that Buridan has experienced any kind of conversion, or that he would do anything to keep the promise were Kadidja miraculously to be returned to him; it merely shows that, at the failure of all his rational structures to assist him, he tries to make a quick bargain with the God who might be there.<sup>54</sup> The ability of 'Religion' to comfort and console becomes evident in his own life. But it does not only provide him with an emotional support: his conclusion once Kadidja has let go is, 'er läßt sich nicht versuchen! O Gott! – O Gott – wie unergründlich bist du...' (V, 140). Though this might suggest a recall of Kant's unknowable God, Buridan's actual achievement in switching his focus to the *deus absconditus* in this way, is to divert the responsibility for Kadidja's suicide from himself to God. Though as she was hanging from the railings he was willing to produce any kind of excuse or confession to persuade her to return, the moment she dies, he conveniently lays the blame for her suicide on God's failure to respond to his prayers. The vindication of that unknowable God involved in this theodicy thus conveniently involves a vindication of Buridan. He begins to justify himself, by arguing that Kadidja's death is God's punishment for his former mockery.

54. With regard to the ending of *Die Zensur*, Paul Fechter comments: 'Zur Zeit der Romantik wäre Wedekind nach diesem Drama zum Katholizismus gegangen: in der Zeit des Kapitalismus nahm er die Rückwendung zu sich selbst und schrieb neue Dramen' (Fechter, p. 111). Given the nature of the actual religious argument in the play, this seems an unlikely conclusion.

His sudden, apparent 'conversion' is effectively a confirmation of what he has previously argued, which is that there are points where reason breaks down and religion slips into the gap. Religion becomes the 'Trösterin im Unglück' because it helps him to justify to himself what has happened. He understands in this instant a use of the traditional, superstitious religion that he hated his parents and teachers for passing on to him. It requires no thought and no commitment, it is merely a handy method of seeing a purpose where none is immediately apparent, and enables him to avoid the responsibility for his own actions. In this argument, he takes the first step on the path trodden by the Marquis von Keith, in seeing religion merely as a means of self-assertion. But Wedekind leaves him at a crossroads: his very last words – 'wie *unergründlich* bist du...' – illustrate his dilemma, for they are, in effect, a prayer to a God who remains unknowable. This results in an ambiguity that means he may remain where he is, with the superstitious half-belief that he inherited, or he might feel vindicated in his notion of a religion that fills in any tricky gaps in life. Thus, for all its religious posturing, *Die Zensur* ends without committing itself to any decisive theological conclusions.

What remains, however, is a picture of a serious artist, whose reputation as a scandalmonger is undeserved because, despite what people might think of him, he is really deeply concerned with matters of philosophy and theology. In addition to this, he is so in thrall to his creative desire that he cannot sustain normal relationships and by the end of the play he has lost everything in the name of his artistic calling. It is not so much the theological argument that is central to *Die Zensur*, but this overall picture of the artist that Wedekind has been working towards. Buridan *is* a version of Wedekind himself, and his relationship with Kadidja and his philosophical and religious pursuits undoubtedly contain genuine elements of Wedekind's life and thinking. But at the same time, *Die Zensur* has two contradictory functions: it reminds the world (audiences and censors in particular) of Wedekind's own claim to be a serious artist, and at the same time undermines those religious ideas which are themselves the basis of the claim to seriousness. This leaves Buridan in a limbo between ridicule and tragedy, in the same way that the ambiguity of the ending of *Karl Hetmann* enables the audience partly to identify with Hetmann's suffering and partly to feel that the failure of an alternative morality vindicates the *bürgerlich* status quo by default.



If, from this, it seems that Wedekind deliberately obscured his aims in *Die Zensur* under a disguise of religiosity, what remains is the version of himself as Buridan that did not exist in real life, and yet did exist in the theatre. The idea that most of the audience will take away from a performance is that Wedekind is more-or-less Buridan, despite any protestations he might have made to the contrary. For Wedekind's part, this must have been intentional, for it is precisely the relationship between the real Wedekind and the imagined, dramatic Wedekind of the audience's perception that interested him. He wanted there to be this ambiguity, because it illustrated the concern that had always existed in his works, but which was now to come to the fore. In his plays, he had frequently tried to push at the edges of what was morally acceptable, to explore where the boundaries lay in *bürgerlich* society. *Die Zensur* marks an important stage in his work, for his primary concern shifted towards an exploration of the boundary between life and art, because the search for a transcendent within the parameters of *Bürgerlichkeit* was not only doomed, but pointless. Though it is only possible to understand this as the result of the way in which he systematically undermined everything else, the crucial issue that emerges from the play is not the question of how far what Buridan says represents Wedekind's own thoughts; it is the way in which Wedekind *deliberately* blurred the edges of the picture, so that it became impossible to tell where the 'true' Wedekind ended and the 'dramatic' Wedekind began. *Die Zensur* shows him beginning to ask questions about the relationship between the artist, the theatre and the real world, and how far it is possible to achieve in one realm what is impossible in the other. The questions that arise have a religious significance because, although the plays might be concerned with the artist's relationship with the world, this relationship is seen in the context of what clues it might reveal in the search for a transcendent value. Though he had considered these questions in terms of the artist-world relationship before, the problems particular to it began to be addressed more fully in the latter part of his career, and it is possible to see its significance gradually increasing in his later works until, in his last plays, it becomes the single, most important element.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Heaven, Hell and All Points In Between: Wedekind's Last Plays

*Die Zensur* ended with the apparent vindication of the status quo, as Buridan's attempts to combine reason and religion ended in failure and capitulation to the God whose non-existence could not be proved. It was as if, for all their exploration of the bounds of philosophy and theology, Wedekind's protagonists had progressed collectively no further than the point Elias had reached in his sermon in *Elins Erweckung*. Lulu, Keith, Hetmann and Buridan issued a challenge to prevailing standards, but found themselves ultimately having to surrender to them. Wedekind's later plays, rather than presenting confrontations in the same way, share a sense of resignation to life within the confines of *Bürgerlichkeit*. The plays also begin to show a sense of self-awareness, for there is a realization that the search for meaning, or the challenge to the limitations of what is acceptable, will always be restricted to the boundaries of the theatre. Rather than fighting against *Bürgerlichkeit*, or trying to destroy it, or turn it against itself as Keith tried to do, Wedekind's protagonists now work within the limitations that they have been given, for whatever they might be able to achieve within the boundaries that have been set before them. Though the natures of these limitations differ between the characters in the various plays, what matters is their desire to strive within the bounds of their *Überzeugung* and their humanity.

What emerges from the plays is a dual sense of confinement: one element is the sense of an individual's inability to transcend his or her own nature, the other is the way in which the plays themselves can never cease to be stagebound. Wedekind developed various methods that seem to show the plays themselves attempting to break free from their confinement, but these only highlight the limitations of his theatrical world. His attempts at blurring the edges of life and art are also reflected in the way his characters settle within the boundaries they themselves have been set: the problem of being human leads to a sense of resignation that

is ultimately life-affirming, but only in view of the lack of any serious alternatives.

*Der Stein der Weisen* serves as a model for the plays that were to come, while at the same time it also bears some striking similarities to *Die Zensur*.<sup>1</sup> Like Buridan, Basil has devoted himself to his studies. Both of them are on-stage throughout and are shown dealing with different people, Buridan in his third-floor flat, Basil in his castle on a hill. Both of them are visited by Catholic priests who urge them to change their way of thinking, and both are challenged by sensual women who can perform the balancing-feat of rolling around the room on a large round object: for Kadidja in *Die Zensur*, it is Buridan's *Lauftrommel*; for Lamia in *Der Stein der Weisen*, it is Basil's celestial globe. Basil has to deal with a larger number of interlocutors, but the artist-Church conflict remains central.

An aspect of *Der Stein der Weisen* that was missing in *Die Zensur* is the obvious influence of Goethe's *Faust*. It holds in tension, however, the thirst for knowledge and the desire for ordinariness. Basil has an obsession with gaining experience, but this insatiable desire is contrasted with the attitude of his servant, Leonhard, whose opening speech describes the tedium of his master's magical pursuits. He cries out to be released from the prison of the castle:

Man lernt und lernt, und kein Genuß davon,  
kein Fest, kein Lachen und kein Liebeslohn!  
Der Strolch in Lumpen ohne Stock und Ranzen,  
des Nachts kann er doch unterm Galgen tanzen!  
Der Knecht hat seinen Feiertag,  
und sein Kirchweih hat der Bauer.  
Doch was war meiner Weisheit Glücksertrag?  
Ich kenne nichts als ihre grausen Schauer! (I, 142)

1. *Oaha* was the first play that Wedekind wrote after *Die Zensur*, but it was never properly completed. It depicts the same *Simplicissimus*-affair that he had already dealt with in *Karl Hetmann*. Even as late as 1916, he produced a new version of it, entitled *Till Eulenspiegel*. Some critics have seen it as more than a mere *Schlüsselstück* (see Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, p. 227), but its bitter rehashing of familiar material means it is hard to disagree with Kutscher, who concludes: 'im ganzen gehört Oaha zu den schwächsten Stücken Wedekinds' (Kutscher, II, 263).

For Basil, though, it is precisely the search for experience that makes life worthwhile:

Bei wem sich Ruhm, bei wem sich Reichtum häuft?  
Einzig bei dem, der nie nach ihnen greift,  
der immer lieber sich der Last entwindet,  
sein Glück wo anders sucht, vielleicht auch findet.<sup>2</sup> (I, 144)

From the beginning, then, there is a contrast of views between those who desire satisfaction in activity and those who are happily sedentary. It recalls the conclusion of *Der Marquis von Keith*, with its contrast between Keith's hunger for experience and Scholz's desire to be incarcerated in the *bürgerlich* institution. Basil's individual pursuit of wisdom leads him, however, to be increasingly distant from the world outside his castle, as his whole universe comes to be represented by the globe he has in his room.

This is the universe of which he has set himself up as God, just as Buridan played at being God in *Die Zensur*. The relationship between Basil and Porphyron – a representative of the Pope who calls on Basil to repent – mirrors that of Buridan and Prantl, with the crucial difference being that although Porphyron requires repentance of Basil, he has nothing he can offer Basil in return.<sup>3</sup> When it is revealed that they are two childhood friends who took completely different paths, it is reminiscent of the alternative careers pursued by Keith and Scholz before their meeting in *Der Marquis von Keith*. As with that model, Wedekind leaves open the question of how the two have developed into the two friendly opponents who appear in the play. Porphyron's relationship

2. This is a black magic equivalent to Max Weber's Protestant work ethic, the principle that when self-denial and hard work are combined with a religious piety, riches should accrue. Basil is engaged on an unceasing quest for necromantic knowledge, whilst never really putting it to any use once gained, and hence storing up enormous treasures for himself.
3. As in *Die Zensur*, their names are also significant. Though Wedekind dedicated the play to Friedrich Basil, who gave him acting lessons, the name Basilius Valentinus also has religious connotations, for it is, according to Kutscher, the name of a fifteenth-century black magician (Kutscher, III, 71). Basil also shares his name with two early critics of Christianity: Basilides and Valentinus were second-century Gnostics. Porphyron's name may well be an allusion to Porphyry, who was a Neoplatonist opponent of Christianity in the third century.

with the Church is clearly ambivalent, as Irmer comments: ‘Jetzt ist dieser, im Grunde seines Herzens ein Ungläubiger, ein Kirchenmann geworden und hat den Christenglauben zum Beruf gemacht’.<sup>4</sup> He is a worldly priest: Basil wastes no time in trying to remind him of the amorous adventures they had shared in their youth. Like Prantl in his argument with Buridan, Porphyryion does not use reason to try to persuade Basil to repent; his one tactic is to threaten the perdition that awaits Basil if he continues on his reckless course. But Basil has long since disregarded any sense of Christian humility: ‘Lang genug / kroch ich vor Götzen, bis ich sie erschlug!’ (I, 145). He has destroyed the false gods of established religion and now extols his god of wisdom, just as Buridan claimed to worship reason:

Das ist der Weisheit erhabenstes Zeichen,  
daß sie die Angst vor den Flammen nicht kennt, [...]  
Was wir der Weisheit an Künsten verdanken,  
ist nur das Werk einer hurtigen Magd.  
Ihre Gewaltherrschaft ragt ohne Schranken,  
nicht vom Geschick, nicht von Gott überragt! (I, 147)

Porphyryion’s response to Basil’s pride at the power he can wield through his wisdom is to argue that, ultimately, Basil’s most heinous sin will be his responsibility for the corruption of others:

Doch deine Schüler und Bewunderer, deine  
Anbeter, die so schuldig nicht wie du,  
und die zu Hunderten du mit hinunter  
zum Abgrund reißt! Oh, Gott erbarm’ sich ihrer!  
Gott schütze jeden, der noch an Jahren  
dir in den Weg tritt! (I, 150)

The argument between them is like that of Buridan and Prantl, with Porphyryion voicing the same objection that it is out of concern for innocents who might be led astray by Basil’s example that Prantl argued with Buridan. This time, however, Basil does not attempt to justify himself by arguing that he is compelled by anything like his ‘Überzeugung’ to act in the way he does. Because he is not motivated by a desire to gain something from Porphyryion, he can afford to ridicule him – and does so:

4. Irmer, p. 205.

Was du gedonnert jetzt hast und gestammelt,  
was den Verstand dir, den teuren, getrübt,  
hat sich in deiner Zisterne gesammelt,  
weil dich seit Jahren kein Mädchen geliebt! (I, 151)

This recalls *Elins Erweckung*, and Oskar's suggestion to Elias that the strange ideas he has developed are the result of his refusal to indulge in sensual pleasures. In that situation, however, there was still room for Elias to change. Here, Porphyrion is fixed in his purpose and is determined to see Basil either converted, or condemned.

Kunz von Blutenburg is a test-case for the argument that has been raised between Basil and Porphyrion, for he has been attracted to the castle by Basil's writings, and wants to use Basil's power to indulge in every conceivable sensual delight:

PORPHYRION	Liegt es zu Bergen aufgestapelt nun, was denkst du mit dem Golde dann zu tun?
KUNZ	Das kannst du mich noch fragen? – Orgien feiern mit Nixen, Elfen, Drachen, Ungeheuern! Durch Liebe jede Stunde mir versüßen! (I, 155)

He wishes to use Basil's wisdom only to assist him in his search for greater sensual delights and finds the debate more of a hindrance than a benefit: 'Warum vergeud' ich denn die Zeit mit Spielen / statt immer fröhlich mein Gefühl zu fühlen?!' (I, 158-59). Basil's own denial of the sensual, for which he criticized Porphyrion, but which, following the discussion with Kunz, it seems he also shares, recurs when Basil summons up the sensual spirit Lamia. Instead of being his servant, she makes demands of him. The power-struggle that goes on between them is like that between Buridan and Kadidja in *Die Zensur*. She demands that Basil wear a chastity-belt of her design, which is a literal application of the sense of imprisonment experienced by Buridan in his relationship with Kadidja. Kadidja wants Buridan to abandon his studies to follow her: Lamia is willing to exchange the fruits of Basil's learning for sexual favours, but Basil will never accept such an enslavement, so Lamia leaves him. To replace her, Basil summons Guendolin – a mischievous spirit whom he wishes to do battle with Porphyrion who, trapped by Basil's magic within the castle, has returned to exorcize him. But Guendolin turns against Basil and finally shoots him with a magic

crossbow, his own weapon. This enables Porphyrion to offer Basil his final opportunity to repent. As he lies dying, Basil recalls the childhood he shared with Porphyrion. His rueful reminiscence in the face of impending death is very far from the panic-stricken outburst of Buridan when faced with Kadidja's death in *Die Zensur*. Porphyrion continues frantically to try to persuade Basil to feel some remorse for his miscreant life, but Basil cannot do so because he has already defined the kind of judgement he expects to receive after his death:

Wer Gott ist, wissen wir. Und weil wir's wissen,  
verschließen wir's in uns. Wer Aug' in Auge  
ihm sah, verrät es nicht dem eignen Kinde,  
wen er gesehen. Was nützt es denn dem Kind,  
wenn es ihn nicht auf eigene Kosten findet!  
Wer von ihm spricht, der tut's vom Hörensagen  
und glaubt an ihn, weil er ihn nicht erkannt. (I, 190)

It is not readily apparent from this who he believes this God to be; but his argument that an experience of God can only ever be particular to one person seems to suggest that he is seeing himself as God. Hence the argument that one cannot divulge it, even to one's own child: Basil is arguing that everyone must encounter the God in themselves, not in a pantheistic sense, but in a Nietzschean sense of individualistic self-assertion. This is then exemplified by the reversal of the expected roles, as the priest kneels over the dying man. The plea for salvation that might be expected to come from Basil is actually voiced by Porphyrion, who cries out: 'Hilf mir! Befreie mich! Rette mich doch!' (I, 190) as he fears that Basil's death will leave him trapped in the castle for the rest of his life. It is Basil who offers him comforting words, which will come as little consolation if not allied with action: 'Halte dich an den Weltlenker, / der liebend über dem Geringsten wacht' (I, 191). This role-reversal, where the dying black-magician offers platitudes to the priest, comes across as a restoring of balance after *Die Zensur*, in which Buridan had to plead with the priest to set his plays free from the imprisonment of censorship.<sup>5</sup>

5. In this respect, the artist is more accommodating than the priest in agreeing to set him free, whereas the plays remain banned.

What are almost Basil's last words are the spell that releases Porphyry from his captivity – a parody of the last rites that Porphyry vainly attempted to administer to Basil. Porphyry is then thrown into a dilemma by the fact that Basil dies before he has been able to drink the wine that was poured out for him:

Zu spät bring' ich dir nun deinen letzten Trunk. –  
Soll nun der Wein, durch diese winzige Spanne  
gehindert, sich mit dir noch zu verschmelzen,  
verschüttet sein? Mit eklem Staub sich mischen? –  
Ich trink' ihn selbst! (*Er setzt den Becher an.*)  
    Weh mir! Die Ordensregel  
verbieht angesichts der heiligen Nähe  
des Todes den berausenden Genuß. (*Schauernd*):  
Ich trink' ihn nicht! – – Du aber starbst als Ketzer!  
Dein Los ist die Verdammnis! Deine Sünden  
schrein nach Bestrafung bis zum Jüngsten Tag!  
Ich trink ihn doch! (*Er leert den Becher*)  
    Jetzt scheint's mir fast ein Trost,  
daß du zur Hölle fährst, sonst wär der Wein,  
zum Abschied dir kredenzt, verschüttet worden. (I, 191-92)

His confusion here comes as the result of a conflict in his faith. He is unwilling to pour the wine away because, according to Catholic belief, it is wrong for wine that has been consecrated to be poured away and thus mixed with baser materials, and yet this conflicts with the rule he cites that prevents him from drinking intoxicating liquid in the presence of a corpse.<sup>6</sup> Though he does not appear to have blessed the wine, its significance in the last moments of Basil's life means that Porphyry is reluctant to drink it and he only manages to do so by engaging in sophistry, by arguing that Basil's death as a heretic somehow means that his corpse is exempt from the rules. The stipulations of Porphyry's religion, and his concern with petty legalisms, therefore preclude him

6. 'The Church has from the earliest times treated the Blessed Sacrament with the most anxious reverence. "We are full of anxiety", says Tertullian, "lest anything of our chalice and bread should fall to the ground." Severe penalties were imposed, both in East and West, upon the ministers of the altar, if through their negligence an accident happened to the Blessed Sacrament.' ('Eucharist', in *A Catholic Dictionary*, ed. by William Addis and Thomas Arnold, rev. by T.B. Scannell, P.E. Hallett and G. Albion, 17th edn (London: Routledge, 1960) pp. 315-324 (p. 324).)



from having any sympathy for his old friend. Like Pastor Kahlbauch in *Frühlings Erwachen*, he heaps the blame and responsibility wholly on the person who has died and who cannot therefore answer back, and will presumably continue his life largely unaffected by what he has witnessed.

The play ends as it began, with a monologue from Basil's servant Leonhard, who realizes that he is now in control. His closing words, in which he describes the use to which he will put his new-found freedom, are quite surprising:

Hätt' ich, von Mühsal und Ketten zerschunden,  
je nur im Traum es als möglich empfunden,  
Freiheit, durch dich so beseligt zu sein. –  
Jetzt such' ich, mich der Freiheit recht zu freuen,  
ein Eh'weib mir! Schon hör' ich Kinder schreien!  
Großkinder schreien! – Himmelsakrament,  
jetzt hat der ganze Geisterspuk ein End'! (I, 193)

It is a complete rejection of Basil's solitary, wisdom-seeking lifestyle, and involves an escape to a very *bürgerlich* idyll of family and children. The freedom he extols here is quite the reverse of Basil's notion of freedom, which is merely the opportunity to gain ever greater wisdom. The result of Basil's death is that Leonhard is free to pursue his bourgeois pursuits, having reaped the benefits of Basil's struggle. If interpreted in terms of the relationship between artist and society, it means that the solitary suffering of the artist is a necessary sacrifice, for it enables the public to go about its bourgeois pursuits. Basil is a martyr in the cause of art, who dies, like so many others of Wedekind's protagonists, so that the ritual of antisocial transgression and resultant punishment might be completed, and so that life outside the theatre can go on untroubled.

Wedekind drew out this aspect in the third act of his next play, the controversial *Schloß Wetterstein*. In his own description of the play, he explains that it 'enthält meine Anschauungen über die inneren Notwendigkeiten, auf denen Ehe und Familie beruhen' (VI, 5). It was originally conceived as three separate, one-act plays, but Wedekind combined them to create one play. In the first play, *In allen Sätteln gerecht*, Rüdiger von Wetterstein persuades Leonore, whose husband he recently killed in a duel, to marry him. The middle play, *Mit allen Hunden*

*gehetzt*, involves Leonore's seduction of a creditor, Luckner, who enjoys boasting about his sexual prowess. He says he will cancel their debt if Leonore sleeps with him. Acting on her daughter's advice, Leonore feigns such enthusiasm in throwing herself at him that he experiences impotence and shoots himself out of shame. The focus in the third play, *In allen Wassern gewaschen*, is on the daughter, Effie. She lives in a castle as a prostitute-queen with her court of admirers. A rich American, Tschamper, pretends he wishes to commit suicide in her presence and offers a huge amount of money for the privilege, but ultimately persuades Effie to kill herself instead, because it is the only way he can gain sexual excitement. When the three plays were combined to form the three-act drama *Schloß Wetterstein*, it was banned, mainly because of the last act. In the closing scene, Tschamper persuades Effie to drink prussic acid, which causes her body to contort as though she is having an orgasm, leading to Tschamper's own sexual enjoyment.

By contrast, Effie's parents lapse in the last act into an idyll of *Bürgerlichkeit*, in which their conversation contains such phrases as 'in dem Maulbeerbaum / Vor unserm Fenster zwitschern uns die Amseln / Das Schlummerlied' (VI, 68). However, it is only possible for them to maintain this lifestyle because of Effie's willingness to work as a prostitute in the same castle where they are living, and ultimately to accept Tschamper's offer. Effie's death is a martyrdom in the cause of *Leben*: she, like the other prostitutes Tschamper has persuaded to kill themselves, are the only means he can use to overcome his impotence. In Act Two, the shame Luckner experiences leads him to turn his sense of violence on himself. Tschamper instead carries out the revenge of the impotent man on women.<sup>7</sup> Equally significant is the notion that Effie's death is a martyrdom in the cause of *Bürgerlichkeit*. Where Rüdiger and Leonore had themselves been pushed to extremes of behaviour, they finally retreat into ordinary life. This ordinariness has, though, an unusual basis – Effie's prostitution. Ultimately, however, Effie's role, like that of Basil, is to be a martyr who dies so that others might enjoy a continued *bürgerlich* existence. Like Basil's death at the end of *Der Stein der Weisen*, Effie's death is equivalent to that of the artist undergo-

7. Wedekind's short story *Der Brand von Egliswyl* also explores this subject: it describes a worker who, when he is unable to have sex with a girl, burns down the castle in which she lives.

ing the gradual process of martyrdom in the cause of uncaring bourgeois society.

Though there was nothing particularly novel about the idea of the parallels between art, prostitution and martyrdom,<sup>8</sup> Wedekind's picture of the artist changed after *Schloß Wetterstein*. It retained the same basis, but began to accommodate a far wider range of ideas. The relationship between the *Leben*-pursuing artist and *Bürgerlichkeit* lies at the heart of his next play, *Franziska*, but its realm of exploration is considerably wider. Like *Schloß Wetterstein*, it depicts some of what Wedekind took to be the unpleasant characteristics of bourgeois marriage, but it also presents Franziska's attempts to break free completely from the conventions of *Bürgerlichkeit*. Like *Der Stein der Weisen*, *Franziska* embraces elements of Goethe's *Faust*. Here, Franziska makes a pact with the Mephistopheles-figure Veit Kunz to fulfil her desire for 'Genußfähigkeit, Bewegungsfreiheit' (VI, 119) which, the two of them decide, is only possible if she lives as a man. It is as if this is the best available method for completely transgressing the boundaries of the acceptable. As a man, 'Franz', Franziska experiences the revels of the 'Weinstube Clara', where Laurus Bein shoots Mausi because of his jealousy of her friendship with Franziska. Then, in what Wedekind describes as 'die Karikatur einer unglücklichen Ehe' (VI, 135), 'Franz' actually has a wife, Sophie, but at the same time has an affair as Franziska with Veit Kunz and becomes pregnant. When Sophie's brother appears and reveals the truth of Franziska's identity, Sophie shoots herself. The tragic consequences of Franziska's experiment for other women are glossed over, though what remains clear is that the structures and values of the society around her remain unchanged. Her bid to escape convention is thus purely individualistic, an attempt at self-justification, rather than an attempt to alter the status quo.

*Franziska* suspends certain rules of credibility to enable Franziska to pursue her career, because the world is one in which the miraculous is possible in the realm of art: the law of nature that applies is defined by Veit Kunz, who, when he first proposes his scheme to Franziska, says: 'Die Kunst, wissen Sie, überspringt jeden Abgrund. Dazu ist sie Kunst. Sonst wäre sie Blödsinn' (VI, 119). The play becomes an experiment

8. Wedekind had dramatized an argument involving these parallels in *Der Kammer Sänger* in 1897.

with this principle in different realms. In the third act, for example, it encounters politics, for the Herzog von Rotenburg believes that the unrest among his people will be quelled if they are confronted by art. Veit Kunz quotes a letter from him:

‘Hier wächst beständig  
Die Gärung im Volk. Du allein kannst helfen.  
Bring deinen Franz Ehrhardt, deinen Elfen.  
Seine Kunststücke lullen die Bestien ein. [...]  
Mein Festspiel, das ich dir sandte, führen  
Wir öffentlich auf. Sie sollen was spüren  
Von unserem Geiste.’ (VI, 153)

When the play in question is performed, it begins as an idyll, in which Franziska speaks to the almost-naked Gislind, but they are threatened by a monster with two heads – those of a pig and a dog. The Duke, dressed as Saint George, then appears and argues with the monster about whether it is permissible to show naked women in the theatre. Their argument is interrupted by the Rotenburg *Polizeipräsident*, who demands that the performance be abandoned for reasons of decency. The Duke is initially unable to tell the difference between art and life, for he complains that the *Polizeipräsident* should appear in costume and speak in verse. Indeed, it is difficult for the audience to know whether the interruption is intended by the Duke or not, as if Wedekind were deliberately blurring the distinction between the play and real life. It is a comic depiction of the author’s battle against censorship, with the policeman here representing the intervention of the censor in Wedekind’s own work, such that it becomes difficult to ascertain whether what is being seen is what the author intended or what the meddling of the censor has left behind. The discussion that ensues is a continuation of that which took place in the play-within-a-play between the Duke as Saint George and the monster, for the *Polizeipräsident* is adamant that nakedness is unacceptable. It draws together some of the arguments found in Wedekind’s notebooks regarding the origins of feelings of shame. Where the Duke argues that in an artistic context nakedness is acceptable, and the *Polizeipräsident* disagrees and says that art has to come under the same regulation as the rest of society, Veit Kunz introduces a religious element to the debate:

POLIZEIPRÄSIDENT Auch die höchste Kunst kann die Nacktheit nicht rechtefertigen.

VEIT KUNZ Die Kunst nicht, aber die Religion. Es handelt sich gar nicht mehr um die Frage, ob Nacktheit künstlerisch ist oder unkünstlerisch. Es handelt sich jetzt um die Tatsache, daß Nacktheit sittlich ist und nicht unsittlich.

POLIZEIPRÄSIDENT Von Kunst halten also auch Sie nicht viel?

VEIT KUNZ Sie ist unsere treueste Dienerin. Wann endlich wird die Kirche wieder so klug sein, die Nacktheit heilig zu sprechen! (VI, 184)

To understand Veit Kunz's point here, it is necessary to appreciate Wedekind's belief that the shame of nakedness had a religious basis that was arbitrary and could therefore be reversed (IX, 199). In the following act, Wedekind depicts the possibilities of altering some of these religious presuppositions and overturning religious concepts. This involves not merely the meeting of Greek mythology with the Christian religion, but also the revelation of the *Bürgerlichkeit* of hell. This scene might have been what persuaded Wedekind to give *Franziska* the subtitle 'ein modernes Mysterium' (VI, 101), but, as Tilly Wedekind recalls, its meaning even at the time was somewhat confused:

Im Jahre 1911 wurde ein neues Stück von Frank fertig, *Franziska*. In Anlehnung an die mittelalterlichen Mysterienspiele nannte er es *ein modernes Mysterium*. 'Verstehen werden es die Leute nicht', meinte er, 'aber sie werden sich dabei amüsieren'. [...] Die männliche Hauptfigur ist ein Abenteurer namens Veit Kunz, der mit seiner Geliebten, Franziska, seine eigenen Stücke spielt. Szenen aus diesen Stücken werden auch gezeigt. Einmal erscheint Veit Kunz als Jesus Christus im Reich der Toten, wo er der trojanischen Helena begegnet.<sup>9</sup>

Kutscher records that Wedekind listed various parallels between Helen of Troy and Christ.<sup>10</sup> Hartmut Vinçon cites Kadidja Wedekind with regard to the 'Christi Höllenfahrt' scene:

'Im 7. Bild des Stückes tritt Veit Kunz als Jesus Christus auf. Es existierte ein Verbot, Jesus Christus auf einer weltlichen Bühne darzustellen. – Wedekind hatte eine Erneuerung und Erweiterung des Christentums im Sinn, eine Versöhnung mit der Sinnenfreudigkeit und Naturnähe des klassischen Altertums'.<sup>11</sup>

9. Tilly Wedekind, pp. 136-37.

10. Kutscher, I, 203. (See also: Höger, *Hetärismus und bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, p. 142; Schröder-Zebralla, p. 141.)

11. Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, p. 231n.

Though this may have been the intention, it is more than just an attempt to unite the two halves of a *lebensfreundlich* and a *lebensfeindlich* equation: Wedekind's picture of Christ meant that the reconciliation in question would not merely have been a synthesis of two dialectical opposites. He already assumed that Christ and Helen had a lot in common: the point was to bring the *lebensfeindlich* elements of Christianity into line with the *lebensfreundlich* ones embodied by Christ, and combine them with Greek *Lebensfreundlichkeit* as personified by Helen.<sup>12</sup> The *Höllenfahrt* is set in another play-within-a-play format like the Duke's performance in Act Three. Any lines of dialogue from the 'Höllenfahrt'-play only emerge as those spoken by actors rehearsing backstage during the interval. Here, too, there is some ambiguity over whether the actors are playing the roles dictated to them by the play, or whether they are themselves.

Veit Kunz is distant and preoccupied – he forgets what he was going to say and mixes up his words (VI, 191-92). The Christ-figure he is playing is depressed and distracted, whilst his Helen leaves him for someone who is physically more attractive. As he becomes alienated from Franziska, he revises the definition of the power of art that he gave her when he first met her. Rather than transcending life, art is an element that reflects people's ordinary existences:

Kunst ist der Spiegel, in dem der Mensch seine Lebensfreude betrachtet. Denn solange ihm das Leben nur Unannehmlichkeiten bringt, hat er keine Zeit und keine Lust, in den Spiegel zu sehen. [...] Nun wirkt aber der Spiegel belebend und anregend auf den zurück, der sich darin spiegelt, da der Glückliche nicht nur die Freude, die er selber empfindet, sondern obendrein auch den Anblick des Spiegelbildes seiner Freude genießt. Dadurch wird nun aber auch das Spiegelbild wieder um ebensoviel belebter und angeregter. Und so feuern und spornen sich die beiden, Mensch und Spiegelbild, gegenseitig zu immer wilderem Genießen an, bis... (VI, 194-95)

Franziska, Breitenbach (her new lover) and Fahrstuhl, the newspaper reporter, all provide their own conclusion to Veit Kunz's sentence. But he himself does not. Where previously he saw the role of art as somehow transcending the ordinary, he now sees it as merely a tool for

12. Helen is the embodiment of female perfection (cf. Goethe's *Faust II*). Thus for Wedekind, a meeting between Helen and Christ represents the coming together of the ideals of the Greek and the Christian worlds.

ordinary people to reflect on their own lives. Stimulating and beneficial though this notion of art may be, it means it is no longer the power he once believed in. That is why he cannot finish his sentence. This loss of faith in the power of art also coincides with his loss of Franziska. She rejects him and the unlimited pleasures he has promised for the straightforward physical pleasures offered by Breitenbach. The theoretical union of Christ and Helen therefore does not take place in their lives, as Helen prefers the attractions of the strongman. The Christ-Helen dialogue which Veit Kunz practises with Franziska involves his describing the distance between them and the hope that in two thousand years another might come to lead Helen to heaven. Schröder-Zebralla concludes from this:

Es ist offensichtlich, daß Wedekind mit diesem Befreier sich selbst gemeint hat. Seine Botschaft ist die Vereinigung von Eros und Religion. Und so heißt es dann auch in der *Franziska* weiter: Erst dann, wenn 'die Kirche wieder so klug sein (wird), die Nacktheit heilig zu sprechen', erst dann wird sich der Christ mit dem Heiden aussöhnen dürfen, wird sich Sinnlichkeit und Geist vereinen können.<sup>13</sup>

Though this might appear to be the case in principle, and it is likely that the 'Befreier' in question is indeed Wedekind himself, the context of the scene shows the failure of the attempt to unite Helen with Christ. When Veit Kunz describes his play to Breitenbach, he claims that his aim had been to depict the *Bürgerlichkeit* of life in hell: 'Mir kam es natürlich nur darauf an, bevor die Gottheit über Satan triumphiert, das stumpfsinnig spießbürgerliche Alltagstreiben zu schildern, in dem sich die Bewohner der Hölle seit Jahrhunderten mit ihren Qualen zurechtgefunden haben' (VI, 191). This hell is a place where it seems people stand around debating with one another about philosophy. The implication is not only that hell is *bürgerlich*, but also that *Bürgerlichkeit* is hellish. Then again, those who are to be led away to heaven are not described as giving any impression that they are actually going to a better place. Breitenbach describes the plot to Fahrstuhl from the point where he initially refuses to leave hell without Helena:

Dann legt sich Sokrates ins Mittel und beweist mir, Simson, daß sich mir die Gelegenheit, von all meiner Sündenstrafe loszukommen, nicht so leicht wieder

13. Schröder-Zebralla, p. 142.

bietet. Ich gebe Helena den Abschiedskuß, ich empfehle sie der freundlichen Obhut meines Höllenfreundes Perseus und dann folgen wir einträchtiglich, Adam, Noah, die drei Erzväter, ich im Verein mit Sokrates, Platon und Aristoteles unserm Befreier in ein schöneres Dasein. (VI, 199)

Given the rather unimpressive depiction of hell, it is difficult to see how heaven is going to be much different. There is nothing to suggest that they will not simply move to heaven and continue their eternal philosophizing there instead. In addition, the redemption offered by Christ seems to be somewhat capricious, for he refuses to take Helena with him:

FRANZISKA	[...] Laß mich des Heils teilhaftig sein Daß ich bei euch mich zu verleugnen lerne!
VEIT KUNZ	Leg' der Verführung gleißnerischen Schein Erst ab! Begnüg dich ruhmlos mit Gebären! Du bist der Hölle Helferin allein! (VI, 198)

Bearing in mind Wedekind's notion of a *lebensfreundlich* Christ, it seems somewhat unfair that Helen should be excluded from the salvation offered to the men of ancient Greece and Israel.<sup>14</sup> As it stands, Simson the strongman is persuaded by the power of Socrates' reason to accept his deliverance, whilst Helena requests that she might be allowed to pursue Christ's path of self-denial, but he rejects her request because of her lack of faith: 'Mir fehlt der Wunsch, dir fehlt für mich der Glaube. / Ich kann die Heidin nicht zum Licht geleiten' (VI, 197).

There is no possibility of a reconciliation here, and that which is hinted at by the reference to a new saviour two thousand years later – whether Wedekind or not – has to be a joke, for what emerges from this scene is not the triumph of art in uniting the two, but its failure: it has a moderate success in terms of placing them on the stage together, but all they are then able to do is realize their incompatibility. Art is capable of many things, but it cannot reconcile Helen and Christ. Once Veit Kunz comes to realize that art is limited, it means it is neither miraculous nor transcendent, nor can it overcome any boundary: instead it becomes, as he had put it, mere 'Blödsinn' (VI, 119). His own realization of the failure of art is contrasted with the frenzy of dancing that breaks out

14. Christ's rejection of her suggests that she lacks the *anima candida* – but even so, there is no explanation of why the men should have it and she should not.



amongst the chorus: where minutes before they were grey shades in Hades, under the control of the director's choreography, now they break into an orgiastic tumult, which the director is powerless to control. This breaking of the banks for the dancers is, rather like the intervention of the *Polizeipräsident* in the previous act, a blurring of the distinction between art and life, for the dancers take on a life of their own. Franziska and Breitenbach are swept away with the others, and Veit Kunz is left behind, abandoned with his overwhelming sense of failure. He acknowledges that his mistake was to assume he had control over Franziska, and that nothing in life or art can make up for his loss of her:

Ich versteh'  
 Mein Einmaleins genau. Ich schreie laut:  
 Zwei sind's, nur ist ein Stärkerer jetzt dabei!  
 Da steckt der Rechenfehler. Und man baut  
 Mir ein Theater noch dafür! Tragödien,  
 Komödien, endlos wiederholt, entschädigen  
 Mich Jammerhelden nie. O grimmer Fluch! (VI, 202)

Like Geschwitz in *Die Büchse der Pandora*, he makes a feeble suicide attempt, by tying the string that was around his waist around his neck. Unlike Geschwitz, however, his failed attempt to kill himself is not quickly succeeded by his murder; rather, he finds his own saviour: the Freiherr von Hohenkamnath – who in the beginning insured Franziska against becoming pregnant – arrives just in time to come to his rescue. This is an ironic twist, as it turns out that art can have the last laugh, for the *deus ex machina* steps in to save him. Thus at the moment where he experiences the collapse of his ideals, there is a reminder that it is, after all, merely a play and that art, though it may not be transcendent, retains the power of life and death over its own creations.

Within the realm of the theatre, it is therefore possible for Veit Kunz to be saved. But his rescue merely enables him to be rejected by Franziska once and for all in Act Five, as she retreats, like Effie's parents in *Schloß Wetterstein*, to an idyll of *Bürgerlichkeit*. The complex relationship between art, life in the theatre and real life is given a further complication in the way in which Franziska rejects the lives offered by both Veit Kunz and Breitenbach, in favour of that offered by the sentimental portrait-painter Karl Almer. Most of the critical discussion related to *Franziska* has been concentrated on this act, and in particular

the issue of why Wedekind should have chosen to give the play such an overwhelmingly kitschy ending.<sup>15</sup> It seems it must either be a bitter parody, or an affirmation of *Bürgerlichkeit*. Though Wedekind might be expected to have intended the former, there is nothing in the text to suggest that this was the case: the play ends with Almer praising Franziska's son Veitralf as a new, bourgeois saviour. Alan Best explains the difference between the two apparently contradictory conclusions:

Franziska's idyll [...] may be seen either as a pastiche emphasising the hollowness of her asylum when compared to the reality known to the audience, or as a haven where refuge is found after the exertions of a misguided life. Either interpretation is valid and both are tenable concurrently; in the end, the relevance to the 'real world' which Wedekind portrays in his other plays is inescapable.<sup>16</sup>

It is precisely this notion of a 'real world' that is the key to understanding this act. In most of his other plays, Wedekind depicted the miserable ends of his protagonists. By now it might be assumed that his heroine, having transgressed the boundaries of the acceptable, will suffer and die, as a martyr to *Leben*, art or *Bürgerlichkeit*. In such a context, it is almost more shocking to see Franziska instead consciously deciding to lead a mundane, bourgeois existence. Günter Seehaus cites a review of Wedekind's own production of the play which confirms that its ending was not obviously ironic: "Frank Wedekind, der Regisseur, läutet das Stück ganz sanft aus, mit voller Lebensbejahung, ohne gegen die Umkehr Franziskas in die Familienhürde eine Spur von Ironie zu bekunden" (Berliner Tageblatt, 2. Juni 1914).<sup>17</sup> Where even his contemporaries expected him, therefore, to produce another attack on *Bürgerlichkeit*, he suddenly seems to have gone to the other extreme. The mock-*Mysterienspiel* ends, as Vinçon observes, with a 'Schlußbild einer neuen "heiligen Familie"'.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the future saviour prophesied in the 'Höllenfahrt' is not Wedekind himself, but Veitralf, the saviour of *Bürgerlichkeit*. Franziska rejects both Veit Kunz and Breitenbach, who,

15. Kutscher records a plan Wedekind had for a tragic ending, in which Franziska stays with Breitenbach, but, in a fight with him, is shot by mistake. He dismisses it, however, as 'eine ganz schwache Form, die, genährt an bestimmten Erlebnissen, einer Laune entsprang und kein festeres Stadium erreichte' (Kutscher, III, 133).

16. Best, *Frank Wedekind*, p. 63.

17. Seehaus, p. 667.

18. Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, p. 233.

though both are cited as the father of her son Veitralf, refuse to take responsibility for him. In preference to these two, Franziska chooses Karl Almer, who is very popular with Veitralf and paints pictures, one of which is a portrait of Franziska and Veitralf that he describes as a ‘Madonnenbild’ (VI, 215). He admits that the border of roses he has added to the portrait is ‘ein kleines Zugeständnis an den Geschmack des Publikums’ (*ibid.*). It is in this small example that it is possible to see how the play is able to end as it does, and how *Bürgerlichkeit* can emerge so triumphant: art is not, ultimately, transcendent, it is a business (Almer intends to sell the painting) in which public taste is the most important factor. Thus Wedekind unmasks the notion of art-as-religion as a pretence that has no more validity than the Christianity of *Elins Erweckung* and *Frühlings Erwachen*. *Franziska* might present many themes and variations on the question of art’s capabilities to transcend the possible and to challenge taboos and established practices; but what Almer understands naturally and Veit Kunz is forced to admit is that, for all the opportunities it provides, what people really want is chocolate-box paintings and happy endings. Wedekind’s equivalent to the rose-border is this conclusion to the play, with a bourgeois saviour for a bourgeois world. He did not need to act it cynically, because what it comes down to is that *Franziska* has exactly the same conclusion as the rest of Wedekind’s work: pushing at the boundaries of the possible or the acceptable is no more likely to give a justification for existence than merely sitting back and accepting the status quo. The only difference is that, in *Franziska*, the protagonist is able to realize this and live. The fact that Franziska could arrive at this point out of a happy choice, rather than be forced into it by circumstances, showed her voluntarily giving up the search for *Leben*. In effect, she decided to allow her *Wille* to be satisfied with a *bürgerlich* existence.

*Franziska* was really the last of Wedekind’s works to be set in what could be recognized as his own era, though the plays he wrote after it tend to highlight the *Bürgerlichkeit* of other periods. First of all, he wrote *Simson*, an interpretation of the Old Testament narrative, to which he gave the subtitle *Scham und Eifersucht*. In his version, the plot loosely follows that found in Judges 13-16, but he invents the roles of the Philistine princes and introduces King Og – an Amorite king from an earlier period of Jewish history – as the third person in the love-triangle

that also includes Simson and Delila.<sup>19</sup> Simson is seduced by Delila into revealing the secret of his strength, has his hair cut, is blinded and humiliated, and is powerless to prevent Delila seducing King Og. Finally, Simson is forced to dance before the Philistines, but prays to God and is given enough strength to push over the pillars that hold up the roof of the Philistine temple. This causes the entire building to collapse, killing everyone in it. This ending is related, in a strange way, to that of *Franziska*, as Friedrich Rothe observes:

Endete Franziska im Idyll, das ihr Freiheits- und Glücksstreben eher negierte als aufhob, so erscheint Simsons Tat, obwohl sie sich auf ein Allgemeines, die Philister in ihrer Gesamtheit bezieht, nicht weniger fragwürdig: Sie überwindet die erbärmliche Welt der Philister nur um den Preis völliger Zerstörung. Die radikale Tat des Helden, die früher durch das Neue, das aus ihr entsprang, legitimiert war, vermag sich nicht mehr als sinnvoller auszuweisen als die Welt, gegen die sie gerichtet ist.<sup>20</sup>

The world of the Philistines as depicted by Wedekind involves the squabbling of their princes as they jostle for position. They argue over whether they would be better off worshipping Delila or their god Dagon (VI, 246-49) – and within this argument, present a very contemporary-sounding discussion: Jetur argues for traditional religion: ‘die Dirne / Verblüht und tausend jüngere Dirnen blühen / Längst, ehe sie stirbt. Doch ewig schirmt uns Dagon’ (VI, 246). Nebrod’s response takes the opposite theological standpoint: ‘Längst hat / Sich Dagon überlebt. [...] Ein Hirngespinnst / Ist Dagon. Stürzt ihn um!’ (*ibid.*). Og presents a more pantheistic view, when he says ‘treu halten wir zu Dagon, denn wir selbst / Sind Dagon. Einen anderen Dagon gibt / Es nicht als wir’ (VI, 247). These represent three responses to the religious beliefs that the Philistines have inherited, and they can decide neither fully to reject Dagon in favour of the tangible Delila, nor to retain him as their god:<sup>21</sup> the six princes vote and are split down the middle. Like the people in the mock-*bürgerlich* world that Wedekind frequently depicts, the princes,

19. Kutscher refers to an account in Wedekind’s diary of Tilly reading him Josephus’s account of the life of Samson (Kutscher, III, 141), but Josephus’s version does not add a great deal to what is in the Old Testament narrative.

20. Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen*, p. 137.

21. cf. Elias’s dilemma in *Elins Erweckung* after his encounter with Ella (IX, 57-60).

although largely unbelieving, are unwilling wholly to discard the religion they have inherited.

Simson himself is another version of Wedekind depicted on the stage. He, the artist, is forced to perform for the entertainment of the Philistine princes, and has no alternative but to comply. At one stage, Og is on the brink of having Simson executed, but Delila argues that if he hears Simson sing, he will change his mind. As Simson is performing his song, Delila seduces Og; but Simson, being blind, is oblivious to this. Paul Fechter explains the significance of this incident: 'die Kluft zwischen Dichtung und Leben, die Abgetrenntheit des Dichters vom realen Dasein hat in dieser Szene ein grausam groteskes Sinnbild gefunden.'<sup>22</sup> Simson's powerlessness is the result of his having to conform to the wishes of his audience, but when he is next commanded to perform in the play, it is clear that they are equally dependent on him. *Simson* is not merely a self-indulgent plea for the audience to sympathize with the plight of the artist: it is a reminder that the relationship is ultimately symbiotic.

As if to illustrate Veit Kunz's argument in *Franziska* that 'Kunst ist der Spiegel, in dem der Mensch seine Lebensfreude betrachtet' (VI, 194), in Act Three, Simson is brought out to dance to remind the Philistines of their superiority: by looking down on him, it will make them feel much better about their own status. In this, Simson's fate is like that of the protagonists of Wedekind's plays who transgress the boundaries of the acceptable and are, in effect, punished for so doing. It is the reverse of a notion of aesthetic transcendence, for it reduces the role of art to that of a means of affirming the status quo for the audience. Simson's plight is presented in such a way as to stabilize the Philistine society. Og himself says that Simson reminds them all how much worse life will be if they, like Simson, do not toe the line:

Aus Simsons Widerwärtigkeit bemesse  
Das Volk die hehre Größe seines Herrschers.  
Dazu gab Dagon ihn in unsre Hand.  
Dazu hat ihn Delila uns erhalten,  
Daß auch das jüngste Kind im Volk erkennt,  
Was groß, was klein, was gut, was schlecht. Wenn Simson

22. Fechter, p. 127.

Blind vor euch tanzt, dann zeigt er euch, wohin  
Halsstarriger, frecher Ungehorsam führt. (VI, 301)

Og is supported in this opinion by the *Schriftgelehrter*, who goes even further and warns the people that such improper behaviour as demonstrated by Simson is acceptable only in a very particular context, and will not be tolerated outside the established boundaries:

Schaudernd nehmt  
Ein Schreckbild euch an Simson. Weihevoll  
Sei der Philister! Immer feierlich!  
Es wäre denn der Spaß dem Volk wie heute  
Voraus verkündet. Sagt ihr guten Morgen,  
Dann sagt's, als spräche Dagon mit sich selbst!  
Denn Klugheit rät zur Würde. Simson wagte,  
Unbändiges Gelächter zu entfesseln.  
Nun tanzt er, weil er's nicht mehr bändigen konnte. (VI, 303)

The parallel with the artist suggests that, like Simson, Wedekind goes beyond these boundaries and himself becomes a bogeyman-figure, required by the audience for its own sense of self-assertion. The audience does not care about art, it merely seeks an entertainment that will pander to it or just act as a background to its own activities. Simson's dance, for instance, provides the prompt for two of the princes to attempt to kill Og, but Og kills them first and then cuts Delila's throat as an encore. The response of the people on the roof to this bloodbath is to ignore it completely and cry out: 'Wir sehn ihn nicht! / Wir wollen Simson tanzen sehn! Wir haben / Soviel Vergnügungsrecht wie ihr dort unten!' (VI, 312). Og's threat to them – 'kommt mir nicht zu nah, das rat' ich euch!' (*ibid.*) – is the cue for Simson to collapse the pillars and, in bringing down the roof, to reduce everyone – king, audience and performer – to a dusty pile of rubble.

There is a paradoxical conclusion to be drawn here. Jürgen Friedmann observes that 'der dritte Akt [...] gestaltet konsequent die Perspektive des totalen Nihilismus.'<sup>23</sup> At the same time, however, Simson is, according to the biblical version, doing the will of God.<sup>24</sup> Thus his

23. Jürgen Friedmann, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen nach 1900: Eine Untersuchung zur Erkenntnisfunktion seiner Dramen* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1975), p. 117.

24. cf. Judges 14. 4.

existence is justified by the very act of destruction that renders the end of the play nihilistic, as Rothe argues:

Daß Simson leiden muß, nur um Rache an den Philistern zu nehmen, läßt seinen Untergang, der sich eng an den Text der Lutherschen Bibelübersetzung anlehnt, um so furchtbarer erscheinen. Als Opfer Gottes, 'zu Größerem geweiht', soll er seine Erhebung darin finden, in höherem Auftrag zu töten. Simson erfüllt sich in einem Heldentum der Vernichtung.<sup>25</sup>

The biblical background provides an example of the same notion of the curse that influences so many of Wedekind's protagonists, according to which individuals are predestined to behave in the way they do: at one point, Simson desperately exclaims his desire for *Nicht-Sein*: 'Warum, Welt, / Bliest du nicht ungeschaffen, blieb mein Leben / Nicht ungelebt, mein Weh nicht ungefüht?' (VI, 291). But according to the curse that is upon him, he is compelled to follow the course that has been set before him, just as the artist must obey his own calling to entertain his audience. The destruction wrought by Simson is the attainment of the extinction he desired, and the fulfilment of his purpose. Translated into the realm of the artist, it represents a point where the artist and his audience meet: the curse of the artist is that he is forced to create, but the audience does not want transcendence or ideals; rather, it wants his creations to confirm its own expectations and values, and thus to remain within predetermined boundaries, so that even any apparent transgression of these boundaries will ultimately only reveal them to be right. There is no breaking away from this symbiotic relationship, other than by mutual destruction. Following on from Veit Kunz's realization of the failure of art as a religion, what emerges from *Simson* is that the desire of the artist himself to create, even if it might be the consequence of some higher calling, merely results in his and his audience's co-dependence.

Simson's self-sacrificial defeat of the Philistines is thus both nihilistic, because through him everything is destroyed, and affirmative, because he finally carries out the divinely-ordained plan that it was his role to fulfil. From the artist's point of view, Simson also demolishes the whole theatrical world. Where in *Franziska* Wedekind used the devices of a play-within-a-play and the actors backstage in the interval of

25. Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen*, pp. 136-37.

another play to try to blur the boundaries between art and life, the end of *Simson* involves the complete annihilation of the world established within the theatre, as all the characters are killed and the set is destroyed.<sup>26</sup>

This destructive dramatic conclusion was subsequently overshadowed by history, with the outbreak of the First World War. Wedekind's response to the hostilities was to produce the historical drama *Bismarck*,<sup>27</sup> which depicted the period between 1863 and 1866, during which Prussia and Austria fought for supremacy over one another. Like *Simson* and *Herakles*, it was based on other people's writings (in particular extracts from the diaries of the statesmen involved) and, where *Simson* had used the Bible as the source of its picture of the world as presented in the theatre, recent history was the source for *Bismarck*. Its mixture of words that had been spoken at the time with fictionalized dialogue suggests a further blurring of the boundaries of life and art (the autobiographical elements in his earlier dramas had a similar effect) but they led to an incongruous and somewhat tedious play.

Wedekind returned to more familiar territory in his last play, *Herakles*. In a letter dated 24 February 1916, he refers to '*Herakles* von Euripides als Drama der Kriegspsychose des heimgekehrten Kämpfers'.<sup>28</sup> In this light, it is as if the ubiquitous suffering-artist figure has been assimilated into the portrait of the returning soldier; for Herakles displays the same desire to serve his fellow humans that is shared by many of Wedekind's characters, but he is plagued by a volcanic temper which renders catastrophic any attempt he makes to have a normal human relationship. In vindication of all Wedekind's protagonists who claim to have been labouring under curses, Herakles' inability to live with the people around him is finally revealed to be the result of a genuine curse from the gods, which prevents him from behaving any differently.

In the introduction, Hermes describes what is to be presented in the play as 'ein Menschenschicksal' (VII, 188). It is, therefore, merely to be

26. Wedekind had used the play-within-a-play format before, in *Kinder und Narren*, but there it was clear where the boundaries lay between the play itself and the one that was being performed as part of the play.

27. It was one of many publications in 1915 that marked the centenary of Bismarck's birth. (See Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, pp. 236-37.)

28. *Gesammelte Briefe*, II, 329.



the story of an ordinary human; on the other hand, this ‘Menschenschicksal’ is to end in Herakles’ apotheosis. This positive conclusion makes *Herakles* stand out from the other plays in which Wedekind depicted a version of himself on the stage.<sup>29</sup> This version is no more or less the ‘real’ Wedekind than any of the other characters that resemble him. Herakles says, for instance, ‘Wohl kämpf’ ich rastlos um der Menschheit Glück / Und kann der Menschheit Liebe nicht erkämpfen’ (VII, 196) – which is a phrase that could just as easily have been spoken by Scholz, Hetmann or Buridan.

As with *Simson*, the notion of the suffering artist who bears similarities to the author is blended with a classical model, to give a new reading. Vinçon comments on Wedekind’s appropriation of classical subjects:

Antiker und christlicher Mythos beschäftigen ihn bekanntlich lebenslänglich – von seinen ersten bis zu seinen letzten Dramen. Jedesmal handelt es sich dabei um Hinweise auf Ursprüngliches, aber die Mythen werden nicht glorifiziert, sondern aktualisiert und – die klassizistische Form des Versdramas parodierend – modernisiert.<sup>30</sup>

Just as his earlier plays call into question the nature and use of religious imagery, now he examines the use of mythology. Where the Christian hell had become *bürgerlich* in *Franziska*, and *Simson* had depicted the *Bürgerlichkeit* of the Philistines, now the gods of Greek mythology are subjected to a similar treatment.<sup>31</sup> Herakles’ great deeds are the back-

29. Herakles bears some resemblance to Wedekind, in a way that is by now familiar in all his troubled protagonists. Kutscher remarks, for example: ‘Muß noch besonders festgestellt werden, wie sich Wedekind zu seinem Herakles verhält? Die Spiegelungen sind so zahlreich, daß man sagen kann: Er gibt hier einen Schlüssel seiner selbst, eine Enträtselung’ (Kutscher, III, 219).

30. Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, p. 235.

31. The original on which Wedekind based his play, Euripides’ *Heracles*, also introduces a process of demythologization. A.W. Verwall describes it in these terms: If, as we commonly suppose, the action of the play in its central part depends upon the superhuman quality and history of Heracles, [...] there is irrelevance, and worse than irrelevance, in an enormous prefatory act or scene, in which that superhuman quality is debated, and not merely debated but, to any common apprehension, discredited and disproved. In these circumstances it would seem imperative, as the next step, at least to attempt the interpretation of the play upon the hypothesis that the hero is *not* a superhuman personage, nor his story supernatural, but he a man,

ground to his personal trials. He cannot express his love for anyone except through acts of violence and is cursed by the gods who inhabit a world not greatly dissimilar from his own. Herakles himself shares the desire of Scholz and Hetmann to justify his own existence in the face of the curse that has been laid upon him; in his case, however, it is not a theoretical curse, but comes from the gods themselves. His curse leads to the disastrous relationships and deaths that plague his life. From his own viewpoint, the superhuman tasks he has performed are all insignificant in comparison with his desire to justify his own life by rescuing Prometheus from his imprisonment on a rock in the Caucasus mountains. His achievement of this aim marks the culminating point of his life, but it is, as Rothe observes, an act he wishes to carry out primarily for his own benefit: 'Daß Prometheus unmittelbar vor dem Bogenschuß, der ihn von seinen Qualen erlöst, den Schmerz mit dem Anruf: "Du gewaltiger Förderer, wie stärkst du die Seele" preist, relativiert die Tat des Herakles zum eudämonistischen Akt.'<sup>32</sup>

If this reduces the significance of Herakles' deed to a mere act of self-justification, it is nevertheless the completion of this task that enables him to feel he has fulfilled his purpose in life. It is at this point that he dons the robe that has been woven by his wife Deianeira, which she has soaked in the blood of the centaur, Nessos, in the mistaken belief that it will act as a potion to make Herakles love only her. Instead, because Herakles had shot Nessos with an arrow that had been dipped in the deadly blood of the hydra, it begins to kill him slowly. He finally dies on a funeral pyre and enters Olympus where he meets Hera, the goddess who confesses to having cursed him. What becomes clear in this conversation, and in that with Hebe which follows it, is that the apotheosis of *Herakles* is not so much in Herakles' being able to rise to the heights of Olympus, but that Olympus's inhabitants have similar

however great, like other men, and the scene of his action, however remote in time and different in circumstances from the age of Euripides or from our own, nevertheless no other in its physical laws than that same world which the Athenians knew and we know. Not only is this the truth, but upon the perception of it depends all the coherence of the play, all its meaning to the intelligence, and the better part of its appeal to the emotions.

(A.W. Verwall, 'A Soul's Tragedy: *Heracles*', in *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), pp. 134-198 (p. 137).)

32. Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen*, p. 141.

preoccupations to those of the people who dwell on the earth below them and are, in effect, brought down to their level. Where in *Die Zensur* Buridan cried out to a God who was ‘unergründlich’, Herakles’ gods are decidedly human in character. Hermes’ introduction promises that the play will not involve spectacular effects and that there is no glorification involved (VII, 187-88); Apollo and Herakles fight like two children and have to be separated by Zeus’s intervention (VII, 202). Finally, when Herakles takes up his place on Olympus, Hera tells him of the attempts she made to kill him, which were so feeble that he barely noticed them (VII, 271-72). When she introduces him to Hebe, he is immediately distrustful and she has to try to persuade him that he will find peace:

HEBE	[...] Von Dürsterkeit kein Wort! Kein Wort von Mißmut! Jetzt heißt es, mit den Himmlischen sich freu’n!
HERAKLES	<i>(sie küssend)</i> Wirst du denn auch inmitten höchster Lust Mich nicht mit Eifersucht zu Tode martern?
HEBE	Im Gegenteil! Viel Tausend stehn mir froh Zur Seite, Lust und Liebe dir zu weihn.
HERAKLES	Viel Tausende gleich dir? Selbst Herakles Kann solch verliebter Andrang stutzig machen.
HEBE	Laß dich’s nicht schrecken! Freu’ dich ihrer Glut, Wie sie entbrennen, göttlich dich zu ehren.
HERAKLES	Mich, dem es kaum gelungen, Mensch zu sein? (VII, 273-74)

It seems, then, that Herakles’ godlike self is little changed from the version he left behind; he already knows that the gods can be cruel and vindictive. It is not clear how they are going to remove his violent temper, except that his reward for all his travails is to be united with Hebe, who is, in Hera’s words, ‘die Geliebte, / Der du im Herzen waltest’ (VII, 272); in other words, the relationship he was incapable of sustaining in life will be given to him in death: so he has the promise of a happy relationship – a prerequisite of bourgeois happiness – and yet, on top of that, Hebe promises a multitude of lovers to keep him satisfied. This sounds like a tailor-made, individualistic paradise for Herakles. It is not a transcendent heaven, but the fruition of his personal endeavours, earned because of his refusal to give up. His apotheosis is the result not of anything that he actually achieved, but because of his striving to do

his best, as confirmed by the choir of children that sings the song that concludes the play:

So hebt die Menschheit  
Über die Menschheit sich.  
Helden erklimmen  
Kämpfend die Höhn. (VII, 274)

It is this song which gives away the nature of the transcendence Herakles has achieved: existence is justified by striving. The heaven into which Veit Kunz as Christ led the inhabitants of Hades in *Franziska* did not promise much more than they had already; the one into which Herakles is invited here has gods that are no more than the people around him: but the choir of children extol the ultimate purpose of life, that humanity should strive, though it may never finally achieve the transcendence it seeks. This recalls the theodicy of ‘Die Jungfrau’ – that the constant search is what justifies life.<sup>33</sup> It also suggests that the insatiable Schopenhauerian *Wille* still lay at the heart of Wedekind’s thinking, only the acknowledgement of what would have to be the ultimate failure of the quest was not the reason for resignation, but it meant that the quest had to be seen as the end in itself.

Herakles’ apotheosis is, as Apollo described it, a ‘Menschenschicksal’. Thus the actual achievements or failures in his life are secondary to his never-ending struggle against insurmountable circumstances. The fact that he never gives up is the cause of his eternal reward. It is at this point that Wedekind’s understanding of the role of the returning soldier seems to apply: ‘Wohin sollten die Soldaten als angebliche Helden der Moderne aus dem Krieg zurückkehren? – sie, die den modernen Prometheus entfesselten! Die “Apotheose” verrät es. Menschen, nicht Helden braucht die Erde.’<sup>34</sup> Having identified the unending quest as the meaning of life, it now seems that the quest for transcendence, or meaning, is actually merely one factor in human

33. Wedekind’s explanation of the existence of evil had the same basis, as Kutscher records: ‘Wedekind war sich bewußt, daß das Böse ein Übergewicht habe. Er rechtfertigte es als wichtiges Element im Sein der Menschheit: Das Übel ist dazu da, überwunden zu werden und so der Menschen Kraft und Entwicklung zu steigern, damit sie in Zukunft dagegen gefeit sind’ (Kutscher, III, 150).

34. Vinçon, *Frank Wedekind*, p. 239.

existence. This seems to be a rejection of the idea of the pursuit of *Leben*, for it involves the conclusion that the true meaning of life is simply a matter of getting by. But really it is a world-view that depends on the individual response to circumstances: Herakles' heaven is equivalent to the haven of *Bürgerlichkeit* into which Franziska retreats, or even the pub to which Schigolch escapes at the end of *Die Büchse der Pandora*. What is ultimately of significance is mere existence, and being faithful to one's *Überzeugung*. In *Herakles*, the promise of a better world, one for which it is worthwhile struggling, is a myth, for the new world is the same as the old world. Nevertheless, for Herakles it is still better to fight on in the cause of this myth than to capitulate to resignation. Franziska's fate is precisely the opposite, but no less valid: after all her adventures, she, like Leonhard at the end of *Der Stein der Weisen*, is quite happy to submit to the same resignation that Herakles rejects. Likewise Simson achieves his purpose, even though this purpose is the demolition of his world. That all can achieve success in their own realm is because all are living according to their *Überzeugung*. In Wedekind's terms, it is as if all are wearing the *anima candida*, which gives them the right to deliverance from his world, for they pursue the path that they believe to be right. The fact that each of them has an entirely different understanding of what the right path is, merely indicates that it is up to every individual to seek the way which seems right to them.

In *Herakles*, as with *Franziska* and *Simson*, Wedekind once again seems to be trying to open the play out, to stretch it beyond the confines of the theatre: Herakles shoots arrows off the side of the stage; an eagle he wounded falls from the sky (VII, 191); when prisoners come on attached to a chain, its end disappears off-stage (VII, 236); during the sports day which Herakles organizes to celebrate the completion of his tasks, the stage-directions describe how the characters on the stage follow the runners with their eyes as they seem to run around the auditorium (VII, 247); finally, Herakles, when he realizes he has been poisoned, throws Lichas from a mountain into the sea (VII, 254). It is as if the play itself is trying to break free from the constraints around it, for the small, enclosed space in the theatre is too small to accommodate the epic struggle; but this self-awareness at the same time is a reminder that the play is held within the confines of art. It is a world that has entirely lost the sense of a transcendent, for even its gods are *bürgerlich*. Though the play itself might become part of the quest for a transcendent value or

ideal, it will ultimately remain bound both to the stage and to the earth. Within the drama itself, the boundaries of what is socially acceptable or taboo can be challenged, heaven, hell and all points in between can be visited, yet ultimately they remain imprisoned in the confines of the theatre. Like Prometheus, who comes to accept his confinement because he knows that his people are all thriving even though he cannot see them, Wedekind's plays affirm the world outside the theatre even as they acknowledge the fact that they cannot be a part of it.

Wedekind's plays issue a challenge to their audiences by trying to break free from their stage-bound character. And yet it is precisely this restriction to the stage that makes them acceptable for what they are; his occasional use of circus-imagery in his earlier works is a reminder that part of the excitement of the circus is the *frisson* of danger at the thought that the wild animals on display could run amok. So it is with his plays: those that shock their audiences do so because there is the fear that they might corrupt the impressionable, and in doing so have a far deeper effect than being mere entertainment. His last plays seem to admit their own resignation at being unable to break out, but strain at the boundaries as if they, too, want to take a grip on the world and shake it up, to provoke the audiences into some kind of a response, whilst at the same time, the content of the plays itself leads to an affirmation of the audience's world. By always punishing those who embark on a search for a transcendent meaning, Wedekind's plays both posit an ideal and confirm the world-view of those who choose, rather than pursuing *Leben* themselves, to watch it being played out in the theatre. Instead of themselves sinning against the unwritten laws of *Bürgerlichkeit*, Wedekind's audiences can allow him to do it for them. It is as if Wedekind was admitting that what his society really wanted from him was a person who would play the part of its bad conscience. Where traditional religious concepts were being jettisoned, the world needed a new scapegoat for its evils. Wedekind was its new devil, the bogeyman who would come for those who did not conform to the acceptable codes of *Bürgerlichkeit*. But he was a safe devil, and he knew his place. Like Simson, his role was to show how bad things might be for those who did not conform whilst, like the wild animals that have been tamed, offering the hint of danger that makes a circus exciting. Simson's destruction at the end is equivalent to a beast suddenly, and very rarely, getting away and going on the rampage. Thus Wedekind's ability to encourage the pursuit

of *Leben* at all costs on the one hand and, on the other, to suggest that even plain old *Bürgerlichkeit* had its virtues, shows that he was prepared to accept and conform to the role that he seems to have created for himself: that of an *enfant terrible* whose outbursts could be indulged, because the danger he posed would never extend beyond the confines of the theatre, the boundary set out for him. He could don his devil-mask and rattle the bars of his cage as loudly as he liked, and audiences would be shocked and horrified in all the right places, but at the end of the performance they could go home and sleep more easily, safe in the knowledge that if Frank Wedekind was the worst thing the world could come up with, it might not be such a bad place after all.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusion: Wedekind the Irredeemer

In the first part of his career, Wedekind wrote plays which issued a challenge to their *bürgerlich* audiences. He was determined to show that their religious beliefs were hollow and that their morality had no objective basis. Consequently, he confronted the taboos and the limitations of the acceptable within their terms. At the same time, he was finding out for himself what the possibilities were for religion in a world in which Nietzsche had declared God to be dead. The plays he wrote in the earlier part of his career were explicitly anti-Christian, as he tried to persuade his audiences to shake off the conventional beliefs they had inherited. At the same time as he was rejecting the possibility of finding a transcendence, however, he was engaged on the search for one. The difficulty he experienced in reconciling the two halves of this equation led to the ambivalent relationship with morality that is evident in his works. Publicly, he was able to use the ambiguity to support his claim to be a moralist, whilst producing works that *bürgerlich* society deemed immoral.

He found the possibility of a partial reconciliation within the Christian imagery that was so prevalent in the art of his era, by presenting a version of himself on the stage taking on the reconciling, sacrificial role of Christ. This had two important consequences: his plays involved the dramatic presentation of someone who pushed at the boundaries of society's taboos, and who received retribution for this at the end of the play, which resulted in a *de facto* affirmation of those very boundaries. In those plays where the sacrifice was made by the spokesman of a new moral idea, it was the spokesman whose passion and death were necessary for life to continue. But because there was a strong indication that Wedekind himself was that spokesman and also the scapegoat held responsible for his ultimate failure, he was therefore offering himself up for public sacrifice. This meant that, by being both the opponent of society's values and the transgressor whose sacrifice was necessary for them to continue, he never needed to confirm or deny his agreement or



disagreement with the alternative moralities. Instead, the artist-martyr was seen to pay the ultimate penalty so that life for the audience might continue safely within their established taboos.

In his last plays, he took the same process of transgression and sacrificial atonement and set it within the world of the theatre itself. His plays had portrayed a microcosm of the world, placed within the theatre; now, the theatre itself became the world, in which art provided the religious basis of value. The plays became concerned with the notion of transcendence within the realms of art itself. In *Franziska*, *Simson* and *Herakles* he stretched the limitations of the drama as far as he could, to see if it was possible to find in the world of art the answers that had been so elusive in the world at large. But the further he investigated, the more the all-pervasive atmosphere of *Bürgerlichkeit* came to dominate every attempt he might make to redefine the boundaries of existence. It was as if, having spent the first part of his career pushing at the limitations of the possible within *bürgerlich* society, his later plays show *Bürgerlichkeit* pushing back at the transcendent existences he was attempting to create. He found himself hemmed in on every side: his work repeatedly shows that he was incapable of finding the transcendent for which he had been searching, and he found himself recycling in the theatre his own failure to establish the reconciliation of morality and transcendence. With this background, it is little wonder that Wedekind portrayed versions of himself on the stage as a failure, a clown and a flawed, misunderstood, abused hero.

His increased resignation in the face of his inability to find an answer to his fundamental questions coincided with what seems to have been his acceptance of the role that he had created for himself, as the misunderstood bogeyman of *Bürgerlichkeit*. It was also an acceptance of the fact that, for all the discussions of philosophy and theology that went on in his plays, what audiences really came to see was something entertaining, exciting and hopefully even scandalous. For, while it is clear that there was a serious element to his works, it is highly improbable that an audience would really choose to go to a Wedekind play because, for example, they were interested in the way it expressed his opinions on marriage. He was a clown whose popularity rested on his reminding people how good their own lives were in comparison to his own. As the purveyor of bad taste, a figure who would disappoint if he did not shock and disturb, Wedekind became the sacrifice that could save an uncaring

*Bürgerlichkeit*. He invited people to look to him and think that, whatever their violations of the unwritten codes of *Bürgerlichkeit* might have been, his were far worse. It was largely immaterial what he had to say, for what was important was that his audiences could leave the theatre with a satisfying sense of horror that something so outrageous could be allowed on the stage.

What this meant was that, ultimately, Wedekind's sacrificial role was not that of an artistic martyr who died once in the cause of that in which he believed, but that of one whose life among the people encouraged them to feel better about themselves. It was as if he invited his audiences to come and seek refuge in him because, as long as he was around, there was someone in the world who was worse than they. Whatever his pretensions to philosophy might have involved, Wedekind finally came to realize that what people found attractive in his plays was the combination of melodramatic titillation and the opportunity it gave them to find justification for their own lives. The artist was willing to embrace the roles of both sinner and sacrifice for his audience, and ready to face the danger of humiliation and failure during his doomed, but noble quest for a transcendent.

His plays replaced hollow, religious ceremonies like those of Elias in *Elins Erweckung* with secular ones which celebrated the artistic quest. He repeatedly depicted his own self-sacrifice in the theatre so that, in effect, his own passion and death could be reproduced nightly for a different type of paying audience. The plays argued that, whether or not a transcendent existed, his audiences would definitely be more comfortable and secure if they left the quest for it in the hands of experts like him, and did not bother trying to look for it themselves. This suggestion, that such searching would only lead to pain and anguish, meant he was able to affirm the way they lived, both as a society and as individuals. Corporately, his plays were a reminder that the world in which everyone was living might be imperfect, but it could be a lot worse; more significant, however, was the opportunity he provided for his audiences to feel superior about the way they themselves lived: the spectacular and extreme transgressions of his characters against the unwritten codes of *Bürgerlichkeit* meant that the smaller transgressions of the members of his audience could, by comparison, be washed clean away on a purifying and satisfying tide of complacent self-righteousness.

Ultimately, then, it did not matter that the transcendent was inaccessible via the world or art. The artist himself offered salvation through his sacrifice, but what was dying with him was not the sins of the world, but the possibilities of transcendence that appeared along the path of each particular play. Wedekind's protagonists were part of an endless cycle of quest and defeat, in which a character would strive to find transcendence and fail, and in this failure would, by default, affirm the status quo for an audience that only wanted to see its own values upheld. The cycle of quest, failure and sacrifice demanded that the artist go through his passion and death over and over again. This same motif recurs in almost all of Wedekind's plays. It is such a strong feature that, as he demonstrated by identifying it in the ancient world in *Simson* and *Herakles*, he could find it in any realm in which he set his work. In his admission that the quest for the transcendent was doomed, he had unwittingly discovered that the quest itself was timeless. As long as there were artists to create, audiences to entertain and a transcendent to seek, the cycle would continue. This means he could have widened the scope of his plays, so as to accommodate all human life. Had he done so, and had human mortality not intervened, he could theoretically have carried on depicting the cycle, as it repeated itself again and again, *ad infinitum*.

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Viennese Theatre in its Political and Intellectual Context

*Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt/M., New York, Wien, 2001. 290 pp.*

*British and Irish Studies in German Language and Literature. Vol. 28*

*General Editors: H.S. Reiss and W.E. Yates*

*ISBN 3-906766-80-2 / US-ISBN 0-8204-5338-2 pb.*

*sFr. 72.00 / €1\* 46.00 / €2\*\* 43.00 / £ 30.00 / US-\$ 47.95*

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*Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt/M., New York, Oxford, Wien. 2002. 412 S.  
Wechselwirkungen. Österreichische Literatur im internationalen Kontext. Bd. 4  
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ISBN 3-906768-20-1 / US-ISBN 0-8204-5645-4 br.

sFr. 85.00 / €1\* 58.60 / €2\*\* 54.80 / £ 36.00 / US-\$ 51.95

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